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### The Importance of Art

In Oscar Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, Wilde prefaces the novel by saying that "All art is quite useless" (Wilde 4). He claims that art serves no real purpose. Wilde declares that "No artist desires to prove anything" (Wilde 3). This assertion, however, is quite incorrect. Art is valuable well beyond its beauty, granting the observers new perspectives or physical and emotional responses.

Throughout *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, art is displayed with the ideals of the Aesthetic Movement. The main portrayals of art in *Dorian Gray* include Dorian himself, the painting, Dorian's piano playing, and the book that Henry gifts to Dorian. These are all examples of real-world forms of art, and all have significant effects. Real-world forms of art include literary, animate, visual, and musical. Each of these forms can be used in a variety of methods, invoking a series of mental, emotional, and physical responses through the release of chemicals in the brain ("News").

Art has an inexplicable effect over people. Art can make a person joyous, or melancholy; it can invoke anger, cause laughter, encourage love, or fuel despise. Literary works of art educate, inspire, or provoke. Numerous plays and novels can be used to convey messages of peace, or establish morals. Books such as *The Grapes of Wrath* were not written for mere entertainment, but rather for their emotional impact. They convey some message to the readers, causing the

reader to attempt changes for the betterment of lives. *The Grapes of Wrath* portrays the faults of human nature and big business. By the end of the novel, the reader is compelled to stand against the big businesses. Henry's book is an example of literary art in *Dorian Gray*. Dorian obsessed over the book, buying several versions (Wilde 111). He felt that the book reflected his own existence. If art existed solely for beauty, then Dorian would not have been so deeply affected by Henry's book. This deep affliction is true, also, for animate, visual, and musical forms of art.

Music, such as Beethoven's, has been used by cartoon and film makers for many years to incite emotional feelings in the viewers. Well known pieces, like his Ninth Symphony, have been heard repeatedly, yet they still maintain their emotional potency. Similarly, countless musicians throughout history have used anthems to stoke the fires of pride and honor. Human society is immensely reliant on musical art. In *Dorian Gray*, Henry uses Dorian playing of Chopin to reminisce about someone he very much cared about (Wilde 183). This reminiscing shows one of the effects of musical art. The effects of musical art affect people nearly every day, in movies, games, entertainment, memories, and religion. The sheer dynamic of civilization would shift if music did not exist. Something that powerful must exist for more than mere beauty, similar to animate and visual art.

Animate art is a form centered around the artistic values and qualities of living objects. Animate art is often viewed through a visual medium, such as physical appearance. However, animate art can include the artistic value of an animate object's mind or soul. Humans, consciously or not, view each other as art. Often animate art is viewed as physical or mental traits, such as beauty or intellect. Animate art can move people to murder, hatred, love, passion, and lust. Examples of animate art can be seen in *Dorian Gray*. Dorian falls in love with Sibyl Vane. Her act-

ing enamors Dorian Gray (Wilde 48-49). Because her appearance is directly reliant on her being alive, it can be classified as animate art. Dorian is convinced of his love for Sybil, causing him to propose to her (Wilde 54). However, their engagement is cut short when Sibyl stops her art, acting. Dorian is so disgusted at Sibyl, that he breaks off the relationship, realizing that he loved the art instead of the person (Wilde 76-78). Later, Sybil's art overpowers her life when she commits suicide (Wilde 95). This power of art could not be caused by beauty alone. Similarly, visual art has more power than mere beauty.

Visual art, such as the portrait of Dorian Gray by Basil, have nearly the same results on people as the other three forms of art. In *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, the painting is so powerful that it compels Dorian to murder Basil (Wilde 137-138). Dorian feels that he must kill Basil because the painting "is the face of [his] soul" (Wilde 136). Visual art in the real, non-fiction world can have the same outcomes. Vincent Van Gogh's dark-colored, dreary paintings may depress some viewers, while Picasso's brighter colors may cause more positive emotions. If art was truly useless, visual works would have no real effect on people.

Art is every form, affects people of all backgrounds, lifestyles, and cultures. Art is all around human civilization, whether visual, animate, musical, or literary. Therefore, contrary to Oscar Wilde's beliefs, art does not exist for the sole purpose of beauty. Aristotle said "The aim of art is to represent not the outward appearance of things, but their inward significance" ("Aristotle"). Art does, and forever shall, cause mental, emotional, and physical reactions far beyond the uselessness of art portrayed by the Aesthetic Movement.

## Works Cited

“Aristotle.” BrainyQuote.com, Xplore Inc., 2015. 20 December 2015. <<http://www.brainyquote.com/quotes/a/aristotle104151.html>>

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