

Annotated Bibliography: When Life Imitates Art: The Importance of Being Earnest

DeOrnellis, Drake (2019), “*When Life Imitates Art: Aestheticism in The Importance of Being Earnest*,” *The Oswald Review: An International Journal of Undergraduate Research and Criticism in the Discipline of English*: vol. 21, Article 6.

The main idea of this article is the process of how Wilde integrates his aesthetic beliefs into the characters of his play. The topics covered in this article are that “art’s purpose is not to tell the truth but to be beautiful” (76), “that life should imitate art the beauty of art” (76), and that “criticism should create a new work of art out of the critic’s impressions” (76). In Wilde’s 1895 play, Jack Worthing uses his Bunbury to promote the idea that he comes from a wealthy aristocratic family. In reality, he was placed in a handbag that was handed to a benefactor by mistake. The author’s point of view is that aestheticism is present in *The Importance of Being Earnest*. He uses examples from Wilde’s play to demonstrate such cases. This academic paper convinces us that aestheticism is present inside Oscar Wilde’s *The Importance of Being Earnest*. The female characters, Gwendolyn and Cecily, are the swayed by Jack and Algernon’s false identity of Ernest. They dream is to be married to a man by the name of Ernest, but when they state their real names, the women do not find them as appealing, and the men must wreak vengeance to regain their status amongst Gwendolyn and Cecily. DeOrnellis argues that Wilde demonstrates the importance of art is ultimate and the truth that the work merits is penultimate. We can see examples of this theory in Jack’s past. He was found by Mr. Thomas Cardew, a wealthy benefactor, who made Jack his son. Because Jack did not know his previous identity, he created a new persona for himself. The character’s new personality, Jack, is regarded as a wealthy young man who often takes advantage of his Bunbury to remove himself from situations that he finds boring. Instead of searching for his parents, Jack prefers to maintain this false persona, perfectly portraying and aesthete. To further explain his aesthetic characteristics, the

child that Mr. Cardew found prefers to live the lavish lifestyle instead of making others aware of the fact that his original parents abandoned him. The beauty is represented by the lavish life and wealthy family that Jack was born into, and the truth is that he came into a life with no money and his parents abandoned him. The female characters in the play created events between them and the male roles that did not happen. For example, Algernon was surprised to learn about Cecily's previous engagement with him and when she broke off said engagement. DeOrnellis highlights this event by describing how "criticism should create a new work of art, out of the critic's impressions" (76).

The author of this piece, Drake DeOrnellis, is extremely credible. Mr. DeOrnellis is a scholar from Liberty University based in Virginia, United States of America. From a reader's point of view, the article is also trustworthy due to the expansive use of pretentious preamble. For example, the article was published in *The Oswald Review*, an international journal of undergraduate research and criticism in the discipline of English. The accurate citations and the appropriate eloquence and diction used in this article suggests to the reader that this article was reviewed in a formal setting. Since this article is mainly objective, there is no essence of pathos, but mainly Logos and Ethos. The presence of rhetoric, chiefly Logos and Ethos indicate to the reader that the points discussed in this article are presented using pity or sadness, but through logic by strong researcher in their field. While the diction of the article would not be considered casual, the language chosen to convey the information does not hinder the comprehension of the points mentioned in the article. DeOrnellis' main mode of argument is exemplification. The author uses textual evidence to demonstrate the idea that he is discussing. Occasionally, he will use an analogy that may not mean something to the average reader, which blocks their

comprehension of the point he was trying to prove. His excessive use of circular reasoning is a logical fallacy that also cripples his argument. In cases where it is used, it does not help the reader understand the argument that DeOrnellis is in the process of describing. His process of discussing the unchanging point introduces the idea that even the author does not really understand the point that he is trying to argue. The author knows a lot about aestheticism and *The Importance of Being Earnest*. The author, Drake DeOrnellis, is a digital content specialist at WebFX in Dallas, Texas, and he previously tutored English and Writing at Liberty University. DeOrnellis also worked at Champions Biotechnology and TPS chapel. As he tutored English and writing, he most likely understands the importance pieces of the play and can compare them to the traits of aestheticism. From this piece, the author wants to convince the audience of the palpable aesthetical theme that Wilde toys in his play *The Importance of Being Earnest*.

This article supports my ideas because it proves the integration of aestheticism in Wilde's 1895 play. In the beginning, *The Importance of Being Earnest* looks like an incredibly simple romantic drama, but if you pay attention, you can view the basis of the play. There are a multitude of connections to aestheticism, which range from Jack's fanciful origins to Algernon's impersonation of Jack's non-existent brother. This article also supports the theory that in some cases, beauty is more valuable than the truth. While I read the academic paper and the play, I was often reminded of the Robert M. Pirsig's quote "“The truth knocks on the door and you say, “Go away, I'm looking for the truth,” and so it goes away. Puzzling”. When we find a truth that is too difficult to accept, we try to find another answer that we consider to be more pleasing. A dismal example of this is the beliefs of the allied forces during the Second World War. The Allies thought the Nazi concentration camps to be too inhumane that they did not believe then

originally. When forces came to liberate the inmates from Auschwitz Birkenau, they were horrified of the real event that they thought were merely propaganda. This idea relates directly to Wilde's beliefs in aestheticism. The truth that the allies originally denied was demonstrated to the rescue forces directly in front of them. This article was helpful to me because it explained the aesthetic characteristics of Oscar Wilde's play to me in great detail. It also taught me that sometimes it is best to answer aesthetically to people. For example, others might become stressed over a topic that does not matter in the long scheme. Instead of becoming concerned, they will be at ease, therefore making them happier. This article added to my knowledge about aestheticism because I now fully understand the characteristics of the idea of aestheticism. The play aided my understanding by wildly satirizing aestheticism in the character's personalities to the point where it was extremely obvious. The academic paper (not to mention my wonderful English teacher delivering excellent lectures), also help me understand the concept by going through the parts of the play and distinctly explaining the reason behind why a certain aspect of the play is considered to be aesthetic.