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Précis

Professor Hale

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Précis “The House Beautiful”

Wilde, Oscar. “The House Beautiful.” *The Complete Works of Oscar Wilde*. Ed. Merlin Holland. Collins, 2003. 913-925. Print.

Oscar Wilde’s “The House Beautiful” conveys aesthetic values upon the decorating of a house. Wilde’s purpose is to educate how to appreciate and bring back the aesthetic idea that art should be seen for art’s sake. He states: “Women have natural art instincts, which men usually acquire only after long special training and study; and it may be the mission of the women in this country to revive decorative art into honest, healthy life” (913). Wilde tries to portray the natural instincts that women have by showing how people should decorate their houses and what will make them the most beautiful. Wilde works his way through the different decorative styles of a house and how to incorporate art and beauty into the home. He puts a strong emphasis on the aesthetic idea that the price of the items do not matter and that one should not try to make sense of the work, but that it is pure pleasure that the viewer will obtain from the work.

One main idea that he emphasizes is that the decorations in the house should be individualized. He states: “In the question of decoration the first necessity is that any system of art should bear the impress of a distinct individuality” (914). He believes that each home should embody decorations that illustrate the personalities of those who live in the house. This does not

mean that they can decorate how they wish but find individuality through Wilde's criteria or basic guidelines for decorating with art.

According to Wilde, no decorations should be machine-made; they should hold thoughts and reflections of man and the mind. Man-made art illustrates pleasure to the observer just as it did to the creator. Wilde incorporates natural art into the home. He says that the walls of a home should not be covered with wall-paper because it is not durable to the weather that will come through the doors whereas wood, a natural work of art, can withstand these harsh conditions and "warm" the house.

Next Wilde starts to describe color and how to represent it within a house. He specifically dedicates the discussion of color to Mr. Whistler's painting *Symphony in White*. He describes this picture as "infinitely more value[able] than horrible pictures of historical scenes" (917). This idea is aesthetic in the sense that this picture is an actual snapshot produced for pleasure and the beauty of the natural colors.

A few times throughout his guidelines for decorating one's house, he turns to different institutions that would teach these basic elements of obtaining these instincts of appreciating art for art's sake. He states reasons why he does not like museums and find them to be invaluable. He states that a good museum would teach more in one year than ten years' worth of studying and lectures.

He mentions many different guidelines throughout the work. He focuses on color, simplicity, and publicly displaying valuable art such as fine china and the painting. Many of the decorative guidelines illustrate nature and natural items which demonstrates many aesthetic concepts that art is beauty and should be seen purely for its beauty.

Wilde concludes that art needs to be refined, so that we teach the newer generation what is beautiful and what is ugly. During the change into industrialism and modernism, there is a lack of viewing art for art's sake and this work was his attempt to put art and the beautiful instinct to find the pleasure in art instead of viewing it scientifically.

Overall, he embodies aesthetic principles and places them upon decorating a house. His principles and guidelines illustrate aestheticism and encourage the reader to view art purely for pleasure without putting judgment and attempting to understand the work.