

Syllabus

English 603.01: Oscar Wilde
Spring 2012, W 7:15-9:45 pm, UH 1226

Professor: Molly Youngkin
Office: University Hall 3852
Office Hours: Mondays and Wednesdays, 2:00-2:45pm and 4:30-6:45pm

E-mail: Molly.Youngkin@lmu.edu
Phone: 310-568-6226

Course Description and Objectives

Using Oscar Wilde as our focus, we will examine the literary and cultural aesthetics of the 1890s, a decade in which both excitement and anxiety about the upcoming turn of the century fuelled debates over the increasing “decadence” of *fin de siècle* England and what constituted art in this atmosphere. While we will do much to historicize Wilde’s work within this context, we’ll also look at his work from contemporary critical approaches, especially those concerned with gender and sexuality issues.

We will begin with the most paradoxical moment of Wilde’s career—the spring of 1895—when the “witty” Wilde’s success with *The Importance of Being Earnest*, still his most acclaimed play, was eclipsed by the “decadent” Wilde’s sodomy trial, in which *The Picture of Dorian Gray* was used as evidence against Wilde. In using *Dorian Gray* as evidence in a legal setting, prosecutors suggested that there was an intricate link between literary aesthetics and cultural issues, but not all English citizens agreed on what that link was. The reactions to Wilde’s trial were numerous and diverse, and we will examine how those reactions pointed to the larger issues of *fin de siècle* culture.

In addition, we will read a variety of other works by Wilde that point to the paradoxes in this period, but also paradox as a method for responding to a society that wanted uncomplicated answers to ease its anxiety. We will consider the broader network of writers who contributed to *fin de siècle* aesthetics, including the works of Wilde’s immediate circle (Pater, Whistler, Douglas); writers with so-called “opposing” literary styles (Émile Zola, the main proponent of French naturalism); and the women aesthetes (“Ouida,” Amy Levy, “Michael Field”), who made unique contributions to aestheticism that are not always fully acknowledged. By reading writers from a broader range of literary styles, we can better assess Wilde’s own aestheticism and why it was so controversial at the *fin de siècle*.

In keeping with the goals of the graduate program in English, we will take as our objectives: studying the works of a single author in depth in relation to the broader historical/ cultural context of the period but also through current theoretical perspectives; improving your articulation of issues of literary interpretation, both through writing and oral presentation; examining both primary and secondary sources, with emphasis on the importance of both in the discipline; and using literary research tools, with emphasis on how these tools can assist you in the production of high-quality papers and oral presentations. In achieving these goals, I will assume basic knowledge of the nineteenth century (what you learned in your undergraduate courses on this period), but I also will fill in the gaps when needed. Don’t hesitate to ask questions in class—we all have more to learn about this period and how it serves as one context for understanding Wilde’s work.

Required Texts

Gibaldi, Joseph. *The MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers*. 7th edition. New York: Modern Language Association, 2009. ISBN 9781603290241.

Levy, Amy. *The Romance of a Shop*. Ed. Susan David Bernstein. Peterborough, ON: Broadview P, 2006. ISBN 1551115662.

Schaffer, Talia. *Literature and Culture at the Fin de Siècle*. New York: Pearson/Longman, 2007. ISBN 0321132173.

Wilde, Oscar. *De Profundis*. Mineola, NY: Dover, 1996. ISBN 0486293084.

- . *The Happy Prince and Other Fairy Tales*. Mineola, NY: Dover, 2001. ISBN 0486417239.
- . *Lady Windermere's Fan*. Ed. Ian Small. London/New York: A & C Black/W.W. Norton, 1999. ISBN 071365189X.
- . *The Picture of Dorian Gray*. Ed. Michael Patrick Gillespie. New York: W. W. Norton, 2007. ISBN 9780393927542.
- . *Salome*. Mineola, NY: Dover, 1967. ISBN 0486218309.

You will also need to copy a number of articles through ERes, the electronic reserves service in our library. See separate instructions for how to access the articles. You are responsible for printing out all the items. It is not enough to read the articles before you come to class and work from memory while in class. It is not enough to access the articles in class on your laptop. You need to have the hard copy articles, marked with your ideas about what is important and what needs to be questioned, with you in class.

Grade Breakdown

Participation	20%
Oral Presentation	10%
Short Paper (4-6 pages)	15%
Archival Assignment	10%
Annotated Bibliography and Literature Review	20%
Long Paper (15-20 pages)	25%

Assignments and Expectations

Participation: In graduate courses, participation is an absolute must. I expect you to come ready to discuss the readings for the day with enthusiasm, and I expect everyone to contribute to the discussion. Attendance is also a must. Because this course meets only once a week, you are allowed only one absence. I do not distinguish between excused and unexcused absences, so you should save your absence for a dire emergency (death in family, severe illness, other professional commitments). If you miss more than one class (or you come to class late or leave early more than twice), there will be a significant reduction in your participation grade. You may not miss a day on which an assignment is due. Part of the assignment is being in class to present your findings to your classmates.

Oral Presentation: We will use 10-minute oral presentations to get the conversation going each week. You will be expected to present the historical and theoretical contexts needed for us to understand the text assigned for the day. I also expect you to pose several questions for us to consider in our discussion for the day. Please bring a 1-2 page handout with a brief outline of the historical and theoretical contexts you plan to discuss and the questions you would like us to consider.

Short Paper: You will write one short paper (4-6 pages, double-spaced), about one of the literary texts we are reading in this class. The paper will be on the same text you choose to do your oral presentation on, and it will be due the week following your presentation, so you can write your paper with the benefit of class discussion. The paper should focus on one of the themes or issues you found most interesting in the text, and it should incorporate at least one outside critical or theoretical source not assigned by me. You also are welcome to use sources I have assigned, if they are helpful to your argument.

Archival Assignment: UCLA's Clark Library boasts one of the most comprehensive Wilde archives in the world, and our library's Special Collections has a good number of rare editions of works by Wilde and his circle. I'd like you to get some exposure to working with archival

materials, so on Wed., Feb. 15, we will visit our Special Collections department for a discussion with Cynthia Becht, Head of Special Collections/Archives. After our discussion with Cynthia, I will expect you to return to either our Special Collections or the Clark Library collection and spend several hours looking at and analyzing an archival item. Based on your analysis, you will write a 3-4 page paper, articulating the archival value of your particular item. The paper is due Wed., Mar. 14, at the beginning of class.

Annotated Bibliography and Literature Review: The annotated bibliography is a list of 10 secondary sources, with brief summaries and analyses of the contents of those sources, on any topic related to this course. The literature review is a 2-3 page essay, summing up the materials in the annotated bibliography and analyzing how these materials can provide a framework for the seminar paper. I recommend that you choose the topic you plan to develop in your seminar paper, since annotating the sources will take significant time and effort. I'll give you more details about this assignment in class and provide samples of good annotated bibliographies and literature reviews closer to the due date. Due date: Wed., Apr. 11, at the beginning of class.

Seminar Paper: The seminar paper is the major writing assignment for this class and acts as a capstone to the rest of the work you will do this term. Your paper should articulate a clear but complex argument about one of the texts we've read in this class, in relationship to historical and theoretical contexts of the 1890s. You should demonstrate a critical awareness of the topic you choose by incorporating a range of secondary (and possibly primary) sources; the short paper may serve as the initial inspiration for your seminar paper, and archival assignment and the annotated bibliography should help you gather the research materials for your paper. You will be expected to meet with me to discuss your progress on the paper during the last week of classes, and you will need to submit an abstract with the final draft of your paper, which will be due on Wed., May 2, at 7:15 pm.

Grading Scale:

I will assign a numerical grade for all assignments. The numerical/letter grade correlation is as follows: 94-100=A, 90-93=A-, 87-89=B+, 84-86=B, 80-83=B-, 77-79=C+, 74-76=C, 70-73=C-, 60-69=D, 0-59=F. You must maintain a 3.0 GPA (B average) to maintain good standing in the graduate program.

Late Assignments:

Expect deductions for late assignments. Typically, I deduct one-third of a letter grade (3.3333 points) per 24 hours; for example, a paper that earns a 92 (A-) but is a day late will drop to an 88 (B+). No papers or assignments submitted via email and no double submissions (same assignment for another class).

Plagiarism:

Plagiarism is a serious academic offense and may result in a failing grade for the assignment, a failing grade for the course, and/or university disciplinary action. For more details about the university's policy on this issue and other forms of academic dishonesty, see the Graduate Bulletin.

Drop policy:

If you do not want a "W" on your record and want a full tuition refund, you must drop the course before the end of the first week of classes. From week 2-10, you may drop, but you will receive a "W" and will not receive a full tuition refund.

Disabled Support Services:

Persons with disabilities are welcome in this classroom. If you have a disability and need specific accommodations, please register with DSS as soon as possible and then come talk to me. DSS is located in the Learning Resource Center, Room 224 in Daum Hall. The phone number is 338-4535.

Class Schedule

- W, 1/11: Introduction to Course and Reading of *The Importance of Being Earnest*
- W, 1/18: The Paradox of Spring 1895: Witty Wilde and the Tragedy of the Trials
 Finish reading *Earnest*, pp. 149-90 in Schaffer
 Sedgwick, "Tales of the Avunculate," ERes
 Ellmann, "I Am the Prosecutor in This Case," ERes
- W, 1/25: The Paradox of Spring 1895 continued
 Wilde, *Picture of Dorian Gray*, the 1891 version, pp. 5-184 in Norton edition
 Gillespie, "Reviews and Reactions," pp. 345-68 in Norton edition of *Dorian Gray*
 Joyce, "Sexual Politics and the Aesthetics of Crime: Oscar Wilde in the Nineties," pp. 403-23 in Norton edition of *Dorian Gray*
 (These page numbers may vary slightly, depending on whether you have the corrected edition or not. Check with me if you have questions about this.)
- W, 2/1: Arguing for Art: Aestheticism and Decadence in Wilde's Circle
 Poems by Wilde and his circle, in Schaffer pp. 74-75 (Johnson), 75-77 (Symons), 77-79 (Douglas), 83-89 (Wilde)
 Pater, "From *Studies in the History of the Renaissance*," pp. 9-12 in Schaffer
 Whistler, "From 'Mr. Whistler's Ten O'Clock,'" pp. 13-18 in Schaffer
 Wilde, "Decay of Lying," pp. 19-41 in Schaffer
 Wilde, Excerpt from "Critic as Artist," pp. 329-36 in Norton edition of *Dorian Gray* (again, page numbers might be slightly different)
- W, 2/8: Objects of Our Desire: Art Objects, Home Decoration, and Theatrical Costume
 Wilde, "The Truth of Masks," ERes
 Wilde, "House Beautiful," ERes
 Wilde, *Lady Windermere's Fan* (please read the introduction in the edition after you have read the play)
 Raby, "Wilde's Comedies of Society," ERes

- W, 2/15: Objects of Our Desire II: Special Collections Visit
 Chapters 4, 13, 14, and 30 in *Interpreting Objects and Collections*, ed. Susan Pearce, ERes
 Frankel, "Picturing *Dorian Gray*: Wilde's Novel as Work of Graphic Design," ERes
 We will meet in Special Collections, which is in the basement of the library, to discuss these readings, view rare books from Wilde's circle with Cynthia Becht, Head of Special Collections, and to discuss the Archival Assignment.
- W, 2/22: People We Desire: Spectacle and Performance
 Wilde, *Salomé*, Dover edition
 Nunokawa, "Oscar Wilde and the Passion of the Eye," ERes
 Powell, "*Salomé*, the Censor, and the Divine Sarah," ERes
- W, 2/29: No class—Spring Break—but work on reading for 3/7 and archival assignment
- W, 3/7: The Right Realism: Photography as Material not Method
 Letter from Wilde to Vezin, handout from Dr. Youngkin
 Zola, "The Experimental Novel," ERes
 Wilde, "Balzac in English," ERes
 Wilde, Reviews from *Woman's World*, ERes
 Levy, *Romance of the Shop*, pp. 51-194, 11-41, 203-27, 263-67
- W, 3/14: Flights of Fancy?: Wilde's Fairy Tales
 Wilde, "The Happy Prince," "The Remarkable Rocket," "The Devoted Friend," "The Selfish Giant," and "The Nightingale and the Rose," pp. 1-40 and 56-62
Archival Assignment due at the beginning of class. We'll spend the first half of class sharing the results of the archival assignment and discussing how to do the Annotated Bibliography/Literature Review assignment. We'll spend the second half discussing the readings.
- W, 3/21: Self-Determination in the 1890s: The New Woman and the Dandy
 New Woman Literature, in Schaffer pp. 203-17 (Grand and Ouida), 236-39 (Meynell), 241-43 (Naden), 264-82 (D'Arcy)
 Wilde, "The Portrait of Mr. W. H.," ERes
 Heilmann, "Wilde's New Women," ERes
- W, 3/28: Women Aesthetes, Ancient Greek Ideals, and Art Poems
 Women poets, in Schaffer pp. 107-10 (Field), 110-17 (Levy), 117-19 (Meynell), 119-23 (Tomson), 123-24 (Custance)
 Lee, "From *Baldwin*," in Schaffer, pp. 43-54
 Meynell, "The Colour of Life," in Schaffer, pp. 54-56
- W, 4/4: No class—Easter Break—but work on reading for 4/11 and annotated bibliography/literature review

W, 4/11: Wilde's Greek Ideal, Melancholy, and Murder

Wilde, "Helas!," www.victorianweb.org/authors/wilde/helas.html

Wilde, "The Garden of Eros," <http://www.bartleby.com/143/10.html>

Wilde, "The Burden of Itys," <http://www.bartleby.com/143/25.html>

Wilde, "Ballad of Reading Gaol," pp. 90-106 in Schaffer

Alkalay-Gut, "The Thing He Loves: Murder as Aesthetic Experience . . .," ERes

Annotated Bibliography/Literature Review is due at the beginning of class.

We will spend the first half of class sharing our research findings and discussing how to proceed with the seminar paper. We'll spend the second half discussing the readings.

W, 4/18: Against Aestheticism?: Wilde's Prison Writings and Sincerity

Wilde's Letters on Prison Conditions, handout from Dr. Youngkin

Wilde, *De Profundis*, pp. 1-92

Arata, "Oscar Wilde and Jesus Christ," ERes

W, 4/25: Individual Conferences

W, 5/2: **Seminar Papers (with Abstract) due in my mailbox by 7:15pm.**