**London Program 2012**

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**Oscar Wilde’s London**

“…the dim roar of London was like the bourdon note of a distant organ.”

--Oscar Wilde, *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1890)

This course explores late-Victorian London (1880-1900) through the lens of Oscar Wilde’s life and writing. We will proceed in three modules. In the first, we learn about what it was like to live in London at the end of the nineteenth century, reading theorists, poets, and historians who portray urban experience at the fin de siècle. In the second module, we turn our attention to the figure of the city in Wilde’s writing. Is the city mainly a public or a private space? Is the crowd an audience or a place to hide? As we discuss the construction of the self within urban spaces, we will focus especially on gender and sexuality. The final module examines Wilde’s London as an international city. We look at documents from Wilde’s travels to America and Paris to think about how his work embodies a sensibility that is cosmopolitan rather than nationalist, and reveals London as a city that is as worldly as it is British.

This is a course on Wilde, but it is also a course about the wider relationships between persons and cities: What resources does the city offer for self-construction and self-presentation? How does an urban environment complicate or redefine the relation between authenticity and artificiality? How is the self changed by its movement through urban spaces (the club, parliament, the East End, the bedroom)? How does an international city offer opportunities for taking up a relation to one’s own national identity? What is the relationship between economic consumption, aesthetic appreciation, and subjectivity? Alongside these conceptual questions, we will discuss problems of historiography and literary method. Partly due to his status as a gay icon, Wilde has been the object of unusually intense identifications since his death. Reconstructing Wilde’s London has been an attractive and challenging project for playwrights, authors, and historians in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. We will examine how writers in various fields draw on a range of techniques to imagine what it was like to live in Wilde’s world or even to be Wilde himself. These imaginative and historical writings raise questions about the relationship between evidence and speculation as resources for constructing narratives about the past.

**Required Texts:**

Oscar Wilde, *The Complete Works of Oscar Wilde*, HarperCollins, ISBN 0007144369

Moisés Kaufmann, *Gross Indecency: The Three Trials of Oscar Wilde*, ISBN 0822216493

AUDIO RECORDING of Moisés Kaufmann, *Gross Indecency: The Three Trials of Oscar Wilde*, L.A. Theatre Works. Download from [Amazon.com](http://Amazon.com) or [Audible.com](http://Audible.com)

**Recommended**:

Richard Ellmann, *Oscar Wilde*, Vintage, ISBN 0394759842

All texts by Wilde are in *Complete Works*.

All other texts are on Chalk.

I have listed some “optional” texts for each session. I don’t expect you to look at them prior to our meeting. If you find yourself especially interested in a given day’s discussion, these are good starting points for further reading.

Requirements:

10% Short paper on a bridge or a door (in Simmel’s sense)

10% Collaborative description of Pre-Raphaelite painting

20% Performance of a scene from *Importance* and short paper

40% Final paper (Due Thursday 12/6)

20% Participation

Reading Schedule

**Week 1: Late-Victorian London**

**11/19: Poetry of the City**

Simmel, “Bridge and Door”

William Wordsworth, “Composed Upon Westminster Bridge” (1802)

William Blake, “London”

Arthur Symons, “London Nights”(1895): “Prologue”; “To a Dancer”;

Amy Levy, “Ballade of an Omnibus”(1889)

Oscar Wilde, “Helas,” “Impression du Matin,” “The Harlot’s House,” “Symphony in Yellow” (1885)

For future reading:

John Davidson, “Fleet Street”

Walt Whitman, “Broadway” (1855)

Poe, “The Man of the Crowd”

Joanna Baillie, “London”

Symons, “Lilian” series (pp. 9-20)

Baudelaire, “The Painter of Modern Life”

**11/20 Historical London**

Raymond Williams, “Cities of Darkness and of Light”

Charles Booth poverty map (1898-1899) online: <http://booth.lse.ac.uk/>

Henley, “London Voluntaries” (1890-92)

DUE: Bridge/Door assignment

OPTIONAL

Asa Briggs, “London, the World City” (esp. pp.311-319) in *Victorian Cities*

Future Reading:

Thompson, “The City of Dreadful Night”

Tennyson, “In Memoriam” section 7

Wordsworth, book 7 from the *Prelude* (“Residence in London”)

Dickens, *Bleak House* chapter 17 (“Tom-All-Alone’s”) and chapter 46 (“Stop Him!”)

Raymond Williams, *The Country and the City*

Briggs, “London, the World City” in *Victorian Cities*

Morretti, “Maps” in *Graphs, Maps, Trees*

Stead, “The Maiden Tribute of Modern Babylon”

Walkowitz, “Urban Spectatorship”; “‘The Maiden Tribute of Modern Babylon’” in *City of Dreadful Delight*

Greenwood, “A Night in a Workhouse”

Koven, “Workhouse Nights: Homelessness, Homosexuality, and Cross-Class Masquerades” in *Slumming*

**\*\*\*11/21: VISIT TO TATE PRE-RAPHAELITE SHOW\*\*\***

**11/22 Dorian’s London**

Pater, “Conclusion,” from *The Renaissance*

Wilde, *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, first half

ASSIGNMENT DUE: Collaborative description of a Pre-Raphaelite painting

OPTIONAL:

Benjamin, **selections** from “Paris of the Second Empire in Baudelaire” (“The Flaneur,” 18-39; “Taste,” 64-66

Future Reading:

Reviews of Dorian Gray, *Oscar Wilde: the Critical Heritage*

Ellmann, “The Age of Dorian,” in *Oscar Wilde* (288-316)

Wilde, “A Few Maxims for the Instruction of the Over-Educated”

Wilde, “Phrases and Philosophies for the Use of the Young”

**Week 2: Urban Self-Invention**

**11/26: Same-Sex Desire and the Underground City**

Wilde, *Dorian Gray*, second half

Goffman, “Performances”

Future Reading:

Uranian Poetry:

Nicholson, “Your City Cousins”

Symonds, “The Song of Love and Death”

Douglas, “Two Loves”

Housman, “To an Athlete Dying Young”

Ellmann, “‘I Am the Prosecutor in This Case,’” in *Oscar Wilde*

Matt Cook, “London and the Cities of the Plain” *London and the Culture of Homosexuality, 1885-1914*

Holland, *The Real Trial of Oscar Wilde* (complete trial transcripts)

**\*\*\*11/26 WILTON’S MUSIC HALL\*\*\***

**11/27: Performing Identity in Public and Private**

Wilde, *The Importance of Being Earnest* (1895)

Butler, “Performative Acts and Gender Constitution”

Future Reading:

Beerbohm, “A Defense of Cosmetics”

Sedgwick, “Tales of the Avunculate: Queer Tutelage in *The Importance of Being Earnest*”

**\*\*\*11/28 TRANNYSHACK AT MADME JO JO’S\*\*\***

**11/29: Public and Private Selves, cont.**

*NB: This day may be used instead for catch-up, depending on our progress.*

Wilde, *An Ideal Husband* (1895)

Future Reading:

Simmel, “The Metropolis and Mental Life”

ASSIGNMENT: Literary Mapping (2 pp.)

**Week 3: America, France, and Wilde’s Futures**

**12/3: Wilde and America**

Wilde, “The Canterville Ghost”

Wilde, “Personal Impressions of America”

Assignment: presentation on one newspaper account of American visit, using [chroniclingamerica.loc.gov](http://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov) website

(recommended newspaper accounts:)

“The Apostle of Art,” *Chicago Inter-Ocean* (11 February 1882, 4)

“Truly Aesthetic,” *Chicago Inter-Ocean* (13 February 1882, 2)

“Philosophical Oscar,” *Chicago Times* (1 March 1882, 7),

“Oscar Arrives,” *Sacramento Record-Union* (27 March 1882)

Bierce, untitled column on Wilde, *Wasp* (31 March 1882)

RECOMMENDED:

Wilde, “The English Renaissance”

Future Reading:

Ellmann, “Indoctrinating America”

Wilde, “The House Beautiful”

**12/4: Wilde and France**

Wilde, *Salome*

Beardsley, illustrations for *Salome*

Wilde “The Harlot’s House” (reread)

Future Reading:

Huysmans, *A Rebours*, Chapter 6

Gustave Moreau, images of Salome

Le Gallienne, “The Decadent to his Soul”

Ellmann, “Hellenizing Paris” in *Oscar Wilde*

**\*\*\*12/4: FREDERICK LEIGHTON HOUSE AND V&A\*\*\***

**12/6**: **Wilde’s Afterlife**

Kaufman, *Gross Indecency: The Three Trials of Oscar Wilde* (1997) (text **and** audio)

Sontag, “Notes on Camp”

Future Reading:

Ellmann on Wilde’s trial

Wilde, selections from *De Profundis*

Wilde, “The Portrait of Mr. W.H.”

Mckenna, “The Love that Dares to Speak its Name,” in *The Secret Life of Oscar Wilde*

Ackroyd, *The Last Testament of Oscar Wilde*

Bartlett, *Who was That Man?*

12/6: Final Paper Due