

**English 3369F:**  
Dandies, Decadents &  
New Women



Department of English & Writing Studies  
Western University  
Fall 2023

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## Course Description

“All art is quite useless,” claimed Oscar Wilde in the preface to his notoriously decadent novel, *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1891). Read today, in the age of late-capital, when value is dependent almost entirely on its perceived usefulness, Wilde’s unapologetic defense of “art for art’s sake” grows not only increasingly radical but necessary—a bold reminder that there remains, always, the possibility of thinking otherwise, outside of or contrary to societal conventions and ideological norms.

The *fin de siècle*, the period in which Wilde was writing, was a cultural moment in which it was possible to imagine new ways of being and expect that they might endure. The Dandy, the Decadent, and the New Women were three such disruptive ontological modes. The Dandy, a figure dating back to the eighteenth-century, came to embody the values of “Aestheticism,” the belief in the priority of beauty and the absolute autonomy of the self. For the Dandy, life was brief and ought to be spent in the contemplation of only that which gave to our moments their greatest intensity, the foremost of which was art itself. The Decadent, by contrast, pursued darker and more radical pleasures, the arcane delights of the opium den, the occult society lodge, and the east end brothel, openly embracing the intellectual possibilities of the grotesque and the profane, no less than the queer and the dissident. But it was perhaps the New Woman who was the most ground-breaking of all. The New Woman not only demanded the right to vote and enter the professions (to say nothing of going to university), she contemplated new ways of earning her livelihood, controlling her body, and expressing her sexual desires. Taken together, these three figures show what it means not only to think but to live otherwise.

English 3369F is, firstly, an introduction to the literature of this period of remarkable change and innovation. We will read major works by well-known writers such as Wilde, Walter Pater, Arthur Machen, and Vernon Lee. But we will also study works by lesser-known but equally compelling writers, including “Michael Field” (the pen name for the collaborative writing team of Katherine Bradley and Edith Cooper), Ella Hepworth Dixon, and Amy Levy. Beyond introducing students to the literature of the period, we will be concerned, too, with its popular culture, its furniture, fashion, music, and art, including discussions of the paintings and drawings of James McNeill Whistler and Aubrey Beardsley. Another notable feature of the course will be its focus on book history and periodical culture. Drawing on the remarkable holdings of Western Libraries’ Special Collections, we will look at examples of “beautiful books” and two of the period’s most important Aesthetic magazines, *The Yellow Book* and *The Savoy*. The course will conclude with an in-class reading and discussion of what is arguably the period’s greatest achievement, Wilde’s *The Importance of Being Ernest*.

## Required Texts

*Available at the Campus Book Store*

Dixon, Ella Hepworth. *The Story of a Modern Woman* (Broadview)  
Machen, Arthur. *The Great God Pan and Other Stories* (Oxford)  
Wilde, *The Importance of Being Earnest* (Broadview)  
---. *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (Broadview)

*Available in the Resources Section of the Course Owl Site*

- Beardsley, Aubrey. "Under the Hill." *The Savoy*, vol. 1, January 1896, pp. 151-170.
- Beerbohm, Max. "A Defence of Cosmetics." *The Yellow Book*, vol. 1, April 1894, pp. 65-82.
- Egerton, George. "A Cross Line." *A New Woman Reader: Fiction Articles, and Drama of the 1890s*. Edited by Carolyn Christensen Nelson, Broadview, 2001, pp. 7-22.
- Field, Michael. "A Girl." *The Broadview Anthology of British Literature, Volume 5: The Victorian Era*. Edited by Joseph Black et al., Broadview, 2006, p. 652.
- . "La Gioconda." *The Broadview Anthology of British Literature, Volume 5: The Victorian Era*. Edited by Joseph Black et al., Broadview, 2006, p. 652.
- Grand, Sarah. "The New Aspect of the Woman Question." *A New Woman Reader: Fiction Articles, and Drama of the 1890s*. Edited by Carolyn Christensen Nelson, Broadview, 2001, pp. 141-46.
- . "The Undefinable: A Story of an Artist's Model." *A New Woman Reader: Fiction Articles, and Drama of the 1890s*. Edited by Carolyn Christensen Nelson, Broadview, 2001, pp. 35-51.
- Levy, Amy. "Ballade of an Omnibus." *Decadent Verse: An Anthology of Late Victorian Poetry, 1872-1900*. Edited by Caroline Blyth, Anthem, 2009, p. 735-36.
- . "The Recent Telepathic Occurrence at the British Library." *Woman's World*, vol. 1, 1888, pp. 31-32.
- Lane, John and Elkin Mathews. "Prospectus for *The Yellow Book*." Mathews and Lane, 1894.
- Morris, William. "The Ideal Book." *Transactions of the Bibliographical Society*, vol. 1, 1893, pp. 179-86.
- Ouida, "The New Woman." *A New Woman Reader: Fiction Articles, and Drama of the 1890s*. Edited by Carolyn Christensen Nelson, Broadview, 2001, pp. 153-60.
- Pater, Walter. "Studies in the History of the Renaissance." *The Norton Anthology of English Literature, Volume 2*. Edited by Stephen Greenblatt et al., Norton, 2006, pp. 1507-13.
- Symons, Arthur. "Editorial Note." *The Savoy*, vol. 1, January 1896, p. 5.
- . "Pastel." *Silhouettes*, Smithers, 1896, p. 11.
- . "The Decadent Movement in Literature." *Harper's New Monthly Magazine*, vol. 87, Nov. 1893, pp. 858-67.
- . "White Heliotrope." *London Nights*, Smithers, 1896, p. 49.
- Wilde, Oscar. "The Decay of Lying." *The Artist as Critic: Critical Writings of Oscar Wilde* by Richard Ellman, Random House, 1969, np.

### **Assignments and Grade Distribution**

Participation: 10%

Library Assignment 1 (750-1000 words, 3-4 pages): 10%

Library Assignment 2 (750-1000 words, 3-4 pages): 10%

Research Essay (3500-4000 words, 10-12 pages): 35%

Final Exam: 35%

### **Participation**

English 3369F is conceived as a learning space in which the students share with the instructor the responsibility for the production of knowledge, that is to say, for how we will approach the assigned texts and the nature of the conclusions that we will draw from them. Participation is a vital part of the course; each student should feel enfranchised to make their views known, while, at the same

time, respecting the importance of the views and opinions of the other members of the class. Participation will count for ten percent of your final grade. In order to achieve a “B” grade for participation, students must attend class regularly, arrive in class having read the assigned material, and make occasional contributions to the discussion. To achieve an “A” grade, students must attend class regularly, arrive in class having not only read the assigned material, but having clearly thought carefully about it, and contribute comments and questions that demonstrate a superior grasp of the texts and critical issues of the course.

### **Library Assignments**

One of the central concerns of our course is the revival of interest in the art of book design and publication. While the doctrine of “art for art’s sake” sought to distance itself from the marketplace for commodity goods, many artists and writers were interested in how they might inculcate an appreciation for well-made and well-designed goods in the emergent middle-class consumer, including printed matter. Could a book or magazine be “beautiful”?

The class will meet during our regularly scheduled time in the Teaching and Learning Centre in Weldon Library on Sept 27 and Oct 25. With the assistance of the archivists in Special Collections, we will have the opportunity to examine some remarkable (and remarkably rare) examples of late-Victorian book and magazine design. Following our meetings, these titles will then be kept on carts in the [Special Collections Reading Room](#).

For these assignments, there is no requirement that you employ secondary sources or provide a works cited list, though you may do so if you wish. The focus should be on your own informed and affective responses to the materials we studied during our visits to Special Collections. Are books and magazines simply empty containers housing letterpress, or are they active participants in the text’s meanings? Was your own understanding of the text changed by reading it in its original mode of publication?

The Library Assignments are due on the Friday of the week following the in-class meetings at the Teaching and Learning Centre. They should be submitted through the Assignments section of the course owl site. A more detailed description of each assignment follows.

#### *First Library Assignment*

Following our first meeting at the Teaching and Learning Centre on Sept. 27, you will visit the Special Collections Reading Room on your own time, and select one book from those we looked at during our class meeting. In a short (3-4 page), essay-style analysis, describe the most notable physical features of the item you have chosen, including its size, cover design, binding, paper, ink, typeface, use of white space, etc. How do these elements reflect a concern for Aesthetic principles and theories? Walter Pater’s “The Renaissance” and William Morris’s “The Ideal Book” may help you identify such principles and theories. You wish, too, to consider, the connections between these formal properties and the book’s contexts. Are there ways in which the reader’s appreciation of the text is shaped or informed by the way it was made?

#### *Second Library Assignment*

Following our second meeting at the Teaching and Learning Centre on Oct. 25, you will visit the

Special Collections Reading Room on your own time and select one poem, short story, essay or work of art from a volume of either *The Yellow Book* or *The Savoy*. As with the books you examined in your first Library assignment, these volumes will be on the carts we looked at during our class meeting. In a short (3-4 page), essay-style analysis, situate the text in relation to the editorial direction of the magazine in which it was published and / or in relation to the larger cultural and political issues related to Aestheticism, Decadence, and the New Woman. What makes this text, whether literary or visual, typical of *The Yellow Book* or of *The Savoy*? To what degree does it reflect conventional understandings of Aestheticism, Decadence, or the New Woman? Or does the text offer a critique or alternative to those understandings?

### Research Essay

The research essay is your opportunity to provide a sustained reading of one or more of the texts from the syllabus in the context of the historical and cultural ideologies of late-nineteenth century Britain. One might, for example, choose to read *The Picture of Dorian Gray* in light of the medical discourses on “sexual inversion,” or Vernon Lee’s “Oke of Okehurst” in relation to the scientific study of supernatural phenomena. Alternatively, you may choose to expand the analysis of one of your Library Assignments, and provide a fuller discussion of the material conditions of book publication or an analysis of the letterpress and art in a volume of an Aesthetic magazine. Whatever text or texts you choose to study, you are strongly encouraged to discuss your essay ideas and topics with the instructor early in your research process, a process which, needless to say, cannot begin too early.

You will be expected to use at least three secondary sources, but the essay is not to be a review of such secondary literature. Rather, you should carefully distinguish your argument from that of other critics with an aim to contributing something original to our understanding of the text’s relationship to the issue that you have chosen to study. Please consider using an electronic search tool, such as the MLA International Bibliography, to find peer-reviewed journal articles. Don’t forget to examine the bibliographies of the articles and books you find: they will likely point you in the direction of other useful material. A useful place to begin such research is G.A. Cevasco’s *The 1890s: An Encyclopedia of British Literature, Art, and Culture*. You might also consult Sally Mitchell’s *Victorian Britain: An Encyclopedia*. Both are available in the reference stacks of the D.B. Weldon Library.

All essays will be written according to standard essay style: paper size will be set to 8.5” x 11” and margins will be 1.” Please double-space and use a 12-point font. A title-page is not necessary, but the first page must include the title of the essay, your name, the course number, the professor’s name, teaching assistant’s name, and the date.

All bibliographic notation will employ the MLA method of parenthetical notation and a works cited page. Please consult a standard style guide such as the *MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers* (9<sup>th</sup> ed.), which is available in the reference shelves of the D.B. Weldon Library. A good online guide to the MLA method can be found [here](#).

Originality of argument, the ability to support the argument with reference to the primary text, rhetorical persuasiveness, syntax, grammar, spelling, and accurate bibliographic citation will *all* be factors in the grading of the essay.

### **Late Penalties**

Assignments will be submitted electronically through the Owl site, and are due by 4:30 on the due date. Late papers will be penalized 10 per cent for the first 24 hours and then 2% per day thereafter, including weekends. Papers submitted after the assignment is returned will not normally be accepted.

### **Attendance**

Attendance is mandatory in all classes and tutorials. In cases of excessive absenteeism (e.g. more than 9 unexcused hours for a half course, 18 for a full course), which are not accounted for by either academic consideration or accommodation, students may be debarred from taking the final examination, and will receive an official warning to this effect by or before the course drop date (see Senate policy). In classes with or without final exams, students who do not attend class will receive 0% for course participation grades.

### **Intellectual Property/Copyright**

All instructor-written materials (e.g. PowerPoints, lecture notes, oral lectures) for this course are created solely for students' personal use within the course, and remain the instructor's intellectual property. Further reproduction, fixation, distribution, transmission, dissemination, communication, or any other uses, without securing the consent of the copyright owner (the course instructor) may be an infringement of copyright. You may not distribute, email, or otherwise communicate these materials to any other person. These limitations extend to recording, photographing, or sharing lectures (online or in-person) and lecture material without permission. Posting the instructor's content from this course to online course sharing sites like OneClass or Course Hero without permission is both an infringement of intellectual property law and a violation of academic integrity guidelines. The instructor will pass these cases on to the Western University Ombudsperson or their Department Chair as appropriate.

### **Accommodation for Students with Disabilities**

Students with disabilities work with Accessible Education (formerly SSD) which provides recommendations for accommodation based on medical documentation or psychological and cognitive testing. The accommodation policy can be found here: [Academic Accommodation for Students with Disabilities](#).

### **Accommodation for Students on Medical Grounds**

Students seeking academic accommodation on medical grounds for any missed tests, exams, participation components and/or assignments worth (either alone or in combination) 10% or more of their final grade must apply to the Academic Counselling office of their home Faculty and provide documentation. Academic accommodation cannot be granted by the instructor or department.

Documentation shall be submitted, as soon as possible, to the Office of the Dean of the student's

Faculty of registration, together with a request for relief specifying the nature of the accommodation being requested. The Student Medical Certificate (SMC) can be found at [https://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic\\_policies/appeals/medicalform.pdf](https://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/appeals/medicalform.pdf).

The full policy is set out here:

[https://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic\\_policies/appeals/accommodation\\_medical.pdf](https://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/appeals/accommodation_medical.pdf).

### **Religious Accommodation**

Students should consult the University's list of recognized religious holidays, and should give reasonable notice in writing, prior to the holiday, to the Instructor and an Academic Counsellor if their course requirements will be affected by a religious observance. Additional information is given in the [Western Multicultural Calendar](#).

### **Academic Offences**

Scholastic offences are taken seriously and students are directed to read the appropriate policy, specifically, the definition of what constitutes a Scholastic Offence, at [http://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic\\_policies/appeals/scholastic\\_discipline\\_undergrad.pdf](http://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/appeals/scholastic_discipline_undergrad.pdf)

### **Plagiarism**

Students must write their essays and assignments in their own words. Whenever students take an idea or passage from another author, they must acknowledge their debt both by using quotation marks where appropriate and by proper referencing such as footnotes or citations. Plagiarism is a major academic offence.

### **Plagiarism Checking**

All required papers may be subject to submission for textual similarity review to the commercial plagiarism detection software under license to the University for the detection of plagiarism. All papers submitted for such checking will be included as source documents in the reference database for the purpose of detecting plagiarism of papers subsequently submitted to the system. Use of the service is subject to the licensing agreement, currently between The University of Western Ontario and Turnitin.com <http://www.turnitin.com>.

All instances of plagiarism will be reported to the Chair of Undergraduate Studies. Proven cases of plagiarism will result in a grade of zero for the assignment. Subsequent offences will result in failure for the course.

### **Statement on Gender-Based and Sexual Violence**

Western is committed to reducing incidents of gender-based and sexual violence and providing compassionate support to anyone who has gone through these traumatic events. If you have experienced gender-based or sexual violence (either recently or in the past), you will find

information about support services for survivors, including emergency contacts, [here](#). To connect with a case manager or set up an appointment, please contact [support@uwo.ca](mailto:support@uwo.ca).

### Support Services

Registrarial Services <http://www.registrar.uwo.ca>  
 Student Support Services <https://student.uwo.ca/psp/heprdweb/?cmd=login>  
 Services provided by the USC <http://westernusc.ca/services/>  
 Academic Support & Engagement <http://www.sdc.uwo.ca/>

Students who are in emotional/mental distress should refer to MentalHealth@Western: <http://www.uwo.ca/uwocom/mentalhealth/> for a complete list of options about how to obtain help.

### Office Hours

Students are encouraged to speak with the instructor concerning any aspect of the course or its assignments during the office hours noted above. These times are open to anyone; you do not need to make an appointment. If these times are inconvenient, however, feel free to get in touch on email and arrange an alternative date and time.

### Email

If you have a question about any aspect of the course, please do feel free to get in touch. I will try to respond within one business day; email over the weekend will be returned the following Monday. Please note, however, that email is not the most ideal medium for the discussion of difficult conceptual material, such as is often the focus of queries regarding an English course. If you miss a class and would like to catch up, or are having difficulties with an assignment, please do consider seeing me during my office hours, or, if those times are not convenient, making an appointment to meet at some alternative time.

### Lecture and Reading Schedule

|           |    |   |
|-----------|----|---|
| September | 11 | Introduction: The Epicurean Gospel                                  |
|           | 13 | Pater, <i>The Renaissance</i>                                       |
|           | 18 | Pater, <i>The Renaissance</i>                                       |
|           | 20 | Wilde, "Decay of Lying"   |
|           | 25 | Wilde, <i>Picture of Dorian Gray</i>                                |
|           | 27 | Teaching Support Centre, Weldon Library<br>Morris, "The Ideal Book" |

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|          |    |   |
| October  | 2  | Wilde, <i>Picture of Dorian Gray</i>  |
|          | 4  | Wilde, <i>Picture of Dorian Gray</i>  |
|          | 9  | <b>Thanksgiving</b>   |
|          | 11 | Michael Field, "La Gioconda," "A Girl"  |
|          | 16 | Symons, "The Decadent Movement in Literature," "Pastel," "White Heliotrope"   |
|          | 18 | Machen, <i>The Great God Pan</i>  |
|          | 23 | Machen, <i>The Great God Pan</i>  |
|          | 25 | Teaching Support Centre, Weldon Library<br>Lane and Matthews, "Prospectus"; Beerbohm, "A Defence of Cosmetics";<br>Symons, "Editorial Note"; Beardsley, <i>Under the Hill</i> |
|          | 30 | <b>Reading Week</b>   |
| November | 1  | <b>Reading Week</b>   |
|          | 6  | Lee, "Oke of Okehurst"  |
|          | 8  | Lee, "Oke of Okehurst"  |
|          | 13 | Grand, "The New Aspect of the Woman Question,"; Ouida, "The New Woman"  |
|          | 15 | Grand, "The Undefinable"; Egerton, "A Cross Line"   |
|          | 20 | Dixon, <i>Story of a Modern Woman</i>   |
|          | 22 | Dixon, <i>Story of a Modern Woman</i>   |
|          | 27 | Levy, "Ballade of an Omnibus," "A Recent Telepathic Occurrence"   |

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|----------|----|--|
|          | 29 | Wilde, <i>Importance of Being Ernest</i> |
| December | 4  | Wilde, <i>Importance of Being Ernest</i> |
|          | 6  | <b>Review</b>                            |