



# *Oscar Wilde, Decadence Culture, and the British Fin de Siècle*

**Dozent:** PD Dr. Stefan L. Brandt, Gastprofessor

## **Angaben**

Proseminar, 2 SWS, ECTS-Studium, ECTS-Credits: 7  
Unterrichtssprache: Englisch; anmeldepflichtig  
Zeit und Ort: Die 12:00 - 14:00, H-C-5324/25  
ab 03.04. 2007

## **Studienfächer / Studienrichtungen:**

LCMS-BA-M3.2 (Epochen der Literaturgeschichte) (ab 2); LCM-MA-M2.1 (Epochen der Literatur-, Kultur- und Mediengeschichte) (ab 2); EL-3 (Epochen und übergreifende Traditionsstränge) (ab 3); ENG-GYM-M2.2 (Literatur und Kultur - Text im Kontext) (ab 3); AL-3 (Organisationsformen literarischer Texte und ihre Geschichte/Textanalyse und -interpretation) (ab 3).

## **Inhalt:**

Probably no other era in British history has sparked as much controversy among critics as the period of ›decadence‹ that lasted roughly from 1880 to 1900. Used by Victorian conservatives as a pejorative label to denote everything that seemed unnatural (from Art Nouveau to homosexuality), ›decadence‹ has also been deployed as a category of experiential boundary-crossing and self-empowerment. Oscar Wilde, Aubrey Beardsley, and Walter Pater stand at the center of the late-Victorian movement of ›decadence,‹ which was informed by the opposing notions of degeneration and rejuvenation, decay and change, decline and beginning. In the seminar, we will discuss the literary and visual challenge of aestheticism as well as factors based in the social fabric of British society, e.g., the emergence of the New Woman and Gay Culture. The texts to be examined include Wilde's only novel *The Picture of Dorian Gray* as well as selected stories, poems, plays, and essays. Most of these documents will be made available online. The course will be held in English.

## **Credit requirements:**

For 5 or 7 credit points: regular attendance and thoughtful participation in class (1/3), an oral presentation as part of an expert group (1/3), and a final paper (8-10 pgs. / 13-15 pgs.) (1/3). There might be a few surprise quizzes on the readings to ensure that you keep up with the assignments. For 2 credit points: attendance & participation in class discussions (50%), oral presentation as part of an expert group (50%).

**DEADLINE FOR FINAL PAPERS: FRIDAY, JULY 27, 2007  
THERE IS NO (!) EXTENSION OF THIS DEADLINE.**

**Syllabus:**

- 03 April Introduction**
- 10 April Easter Holiday**  
Enjoy and relax!
- 17 April Oscar Wilde – Aesthete, *Bon Vivant*, and ›the First Modern Man‹**  
O. Wilde »The Selfish Giant« (1888)  
*Wilde* (Dir. Brian Gilbert, 1997)
- 24 April The Aesthetic Background – Walter Pater, Aestheticism, and the Pre-Raphaelites**  
W. Pater, »Aesthetic Poetry« (1889 [1868])  
»The Pre-Raphaelites« (general information)
- 01 May Labor Day**  
No class!
- 08 May Wilde’s Poems – Desire, Despair, and Decadence**  
»Amor Intellectualis«, »Santa Decca«, »Panthea«, »My Voice«, »Taedium Vitae« (all from 1881)
- 15 May Wilde’s Theory of Criticism and Art**  
»The Critic as Artist. With some remarks on the importance of doing nothing. A Dialogue« (1890)
- 22 May Wilde’s Only Novel - Part I: Aesthetics and the Pursuit of Beauty**  
*The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1891)
- 29 May Pentecost Holiday**  
Enjoy!
- 05 June Wilde’s Only Novel - Part II: The Faustian Pact**  
*The Picture of Dorian Gray* (Dir. Albert Lewin, 1945)
- 12 June Wilde’s First Play – A Biting Satire on Victorian Morals**  
*Lady Windermere’s Fan* (1892)
- 19 June Wilde’s Scandal – Femme fatales, Symbolism, and the Decadent Imagination**  
*Salomé* (1893)
- 26 June Wilde’s Eccentric Illustrator – Aubrey Beardsley and Decadent Imagery**  
Charles Bernheimer, »Visions of Salomé« (from: *Decadent Subjects*, 2002)
- 03 July Wilde’s Greatest Success – Dramatizing Identity**  
*The Importance of Being Earnest* (1895)
- 10 July Wilde’s Heritage – His Prison Writings**  
*De Profundis* (1897)

All texts can be found online on <http://bscw.avmz.uni-siegen.de/> (click on PUBLIC, then look for course title). The DVDs can be checked out at the Sekretariat Anglistik, Room AR-H 213