Romantic, Pre-Raphaelite, Decadent, Glam: each of these terms names a version of the strain of British aestheticism that runs from the poetry of Percy Shelley and John Keats through the writings of Oscar Wilde and well into the 20th century. This course will be a close and sustained examination of the poetry, prose, painting and even music we have come to associate with the term “aestheticism.” From the Grecian Urn to the Blessed Damozel, from the Goblin Market through Dorian Gray to David Bowie, we will examine this strain of British Aestheticism and the cluster of issues that it attends to with all the obsession of a lover: beauty, desire, and death. In addition to the poetry of Percy Shelley and John Keats and the writings of Wilde, we will read poems by Christina Rossetti, Dante Rossetti, and Gerard Manley Hopkins, essays by Walter Pater; and we will look at the paintings of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood (DG Rossetti, Hunt, Millais, and Burne-Jones). I’m also interested in examining how this 19th century fascination with aesthetic experience -- how this aestheticism -- continues to engage and agitate contemporary theory and culture. To this end, we’ll read from a range of important theoretical texts and view and discuss three recent films that address these texts and issues explicitly or implicitly.

Readings and Viewings  Readings and paintings will be made available on Blackboard. Films will be made available in the Media Center.

Assignments, Assessments, and Attendance  Three 2-page close readings (30%), a critical project of 6-8 pages (30%), a comprehensive final exam (30%), and class participation (10%). Attendance is mandatory. This is a rare opportunity for a seminar format and as such it requires active and consistent prepared participation. After five absences, for whatever reason, students will lose one full letter grade for the course.
Syllabus

5 Jan: Introduction: Oscar Wilde Preface to *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, “Phrases and Philosophies for the Use of the Young”


9 Jan: Percy Shelley “Hymn to Intellectual Beauty,” “Ode to the West Wind,” “Mont Blanc”

12 Jan: Percy Shelley *A Defence of Poetry*, Walter Benjamin “Theses on the Concept of History”


16 Jan: Todd Haynes *Velvet Goldmine*, Michel Foucault “What is Enlightenment”

19 Jan: Martin Luther King, Jr. Holiday

21 Jan: Oscar Wilde “The Decay of Lying,” “The Critic as Artist”


26 Jan: Percy Shelley “Ozymandias,” “The Cloud,” “To a Sky-Lark”


30 Jan: John Keats selected letters, Oscar Wilde “The Tomb of Keats”

2 Feb: John Keats “La Belle Dame Sans Merci,” “Ode on Indolence,” “Ode to Psyche”

4 Feb: John Keats “Ode on Melancholy,” “Ode on a Grecian Urn,” “Ode to a Nightingale”

6 Feb: Percy Shelley *Adonais*

9 Feb: Roland Barthes “The Third Meaning,” “On Leaving the Movie Theatre” Peter de Bolla “Aesthetic Experience”


13 Feb: Dante Gabriel Rossetti “The Blessed Damozel,” “The Portrait” Walter Pater, “Aesthetic Poetry” and “D.G. Rossetti,” Christina Rossetti “In an Artist’s Studio” Pre-Raphaelite Painting, Elisabeth Bronfen from *Over Her Dead Body*


18 Feb: Guest Lecture, Heidi Kaufman, from *The Yellow Book*

20 Feb: Guest Lecture, Heidi Kaufman, from *The Yellow Book*

25 Feb: Christina Rossetti Goblin Market

27 Feb: Christina Rossetti from Monna Innominata

2 Mar: Oscar Wilde The Picture of Dorian Gray

4 Mar: Oscar Wilde The Picture of Dorian Gray

6 Mar: Oscar Wilde Salome

9 Mar: Oscar Wilde Salome

11 Mar: Oscar Wilde De Profundis

13 Mar: Wong Kar-Wai In the Mood for Love

17 Mar: 10:15-12:15 Final Exam