

## WAGS 31: Third Essay

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Due: April 12 (Monday) 7:00 PM by e-mail  
Length: 1,250-1,500 words

Office hours: Tues. 2:00-4:00  
Fri. 10:00-11:00

Editorial conferences to discuss rough drafts:

April 9-12

(see CMS page for times)

Please send rough drafts in advance of the  
block of appointments in which you are scheduled.

### On the deadline

Good news: I've moved the deadline back from what is on the syllabus (April 10), to give you the whole weekend to work and to allow Sunday conferences. The class on April 13 is cancelled; we'll talk about Pasolini on April 15, along with *Confessions of a Mask*.<sup>1</sup>

Bad news: Enough of you need strong incentives to cut bait on your projects that I'm instituting grade penalties. After 7:00 PM on April 12, you have a 24-hour moratorium without penalty, after which (i.e., 7:00 PM on April 13) grades for late essays drop by one step (e.g., B+ to B) for every 24 hours. If you are working with your class dean on health or personal issues, please have her or him contact me.<sup>2</sup>

### **Intellectual honesty:**

Please consult *Intellectual Honesty* on the course CMS page. Use of secondary sources other than those on the syllabus, including the Internet, is not required or encouraged. All sources used should be cited. The reading questions, material from discussion, and e-mailed questions/comments may be taken as common knowledge and need not be cited. I refer any suspected plagiarism to the Office of the Dean of Students. When in doubt, please contact me. Since it's hard to keep track of influences, it's probably prudent to avoid reading any secondary sources on the texts you're addressing.

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<sup>1</sup>I need to visit a class taught by a member of one of my departments that meets TuTh at 10:00. The class after an essay assignment seems to be the best solution, especially since I will have talked with you individually in the preceding days.

<sup>2</sup>Anguished explanation: There's too much obvious inequity in having some writers pull all-nighters to meet the deadline, or write while sick, while others set their own pace. Yes, I know that lateness may come from wrestling with demons, but in my experience, those demons only gain strength after a missed deadline. The later essays are, the less chance there is that they will ever happen.

## In / Out

In this unit we have read two high-profile works, *The Picture of Dorian Gray* and *The Well of Loneliness*, by “out” authors. Both works are making a statement, however unclear; trials followed in both cases. Both works have been at the center of anything we might call a “queer canon” for almost a century.

We have also read two “not out” novels from the 1920s that speak more elusively, *The Professor's House* and *Passing*. These works were not regularly interpreted as queer until the 1980s, and that interpretation remains controversial.

Please compare one novel from each category with attention to the trade-offs between artistic integrity, on the one hand, and raising public awareness by breaking the “tyranny of silence,” on the other. We’ve already discussed the ways that *The Well* made a bigger splash than *Orlando*, which is easier to appreciate as “art” and easier to overlook as queer. But some of you have argued that Hall’s bold intentions and sprawling narrative have their own claims as representing life in ways. (There is also a seventh topic that allows a *Dorian vs. Well* match-up.)

Please make clear at the outset which topic you are addressing.

### One: The Closet

*Dorian Gray + Professor's House*

Though the term “in the closet” comes only later, *Dorian Gray* popularized the idea of a hiding place for queerness or, perhaps, depravity: the site of truths that need to come out and scores that must be settled. St. Peter can be rescued from his room; Dorian can’t.

**>Compare how Wilde and Cather use these off-limits rooms to organize tales about hidden identity.**

### Two: Paris and Harlem

*Well + Passing*

Hall, like Wilde before her, presents Paris as a site of decadence, exoticism, and sexual otherness. France in the 1920s did not criminalize homosexual activity, as England did. We’ll see a of queer Paris in the 1950s in Baldwin’s *Giovanni's Room*, named after another closet/not-closet. Larsen depicts Harlem as a similar draw for white people, though not particularly for its queerness, and, more intriguingly, for Clare Kendry.

**>Compare Hall’s description of Paris to the vision of Harlem that draws Clare Kendry.**



Una Troubridge and John Hall

### Three: Butch/femme

*Well + Passing*

As we have discussed, Hall often works with what seem to be polarized views of masculinity and femininity and to have a heterosexual-seeming model of how women's relationships might work. We have been tracing m/f, as well as older/younger, as forms of difference that may spark desire. Larsen's interests seem to lie elsewhere.

**>Compare the gender dynamics of Stephen and Mary's relationship with the mutual attraction of Irene Redfield and Clare Kendry. What kind of difference draws Irene and Clare?**

### Four: Inversion

*Well + Professor's House*

**>As examples of "inversion," compare Stephen Gordon (if indeed she is a man's soul trapped in a woman's body) and the tricky case of Godfrey St. Peter (if he is indeed a boy trapped in a man's body). How does St. Peter's sense of boy/man split relate to his sexuality?**

## Five: Beautiful Orphans

*Dorian Gray + Professor's House*

Wilde presents Dorian as the universally desired young man on whom a range of people project their own desires and fears and do so intensely that they are often miss what Dorian's own desires might be. They project on to him; he projects onto the picture. Tom Outland, also an orphan, seems to have played a range of roles for the people in his life, including the St. Peter family, and, like Dorian, seems to have left disruption in his wake (if unintentionally).

**>Compare what the figures of Dorian and Tom suggest about the workings of desire.**

## Six: Deal with the Devil

*Dorian Gray + Passing*

Clare Kendry has a fatal charm, very like Dorian's, and indeed plays consciously on the tendency of people to see what they want to in her, certainly in racial terms. As with Dorian (but not like Tom), her power over other people's desires seems to affect her control over her own desires.

**>Compare what the figures of Dorian and Claire suggest about the workings of desire.**

## Out / Out

The final topic is a celebrity death match between the two big classics:

## Seven: The Picture of Stephen Gordon

*Dorian Gray + Well*

Both *Dorian Gray* and *Well* have elements of the *Bildungsroman*, the narrative of the evolution of a sensibility (from the German Bildung, "education, formation"). Dorian and Stephen both start from a position of innocence, fall under the experience of various mentors, and struggle with the desires that they come to feel and a sense of dividedness.

**>In the denouement of the two novels, compare how Dorian and Stephen seek resolution for their sense of dividedness in a final struggle with their demons and desires. What, if anything, does this concluding struggle say about the redemptive powers of art?**

(With Stephen, the final movement obviously concerns the break with Mary; with Dorian, up to you how far back you want to go, conceivably back to the murder of Basil.)