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Introduction

The Empire at the End of Decadence

The social, scientific and industrial revolutions of the later nineteenth century brought with them a ferment of new artistic visions. An emphasis on scientific determinism and the depiction of reality led to the aesthetic movement known as Naturalism, which allowed the human condition to be presented in detached, objective terms, often with a minimum of moral judgment. This in turn was counterbalanced by more metaphorical modes of expression such as Symbolism, Decadence, and Aestheticism, which flourished in both literature and the visual arts, and tended to exalt subjective individual experience at the expense of straightforward depictions of nature and reality. Dismay at the fast pace of social and technological innovation led many adherents of these less realistic movements to reject faith in the new beginnings proclaimed by the voices of progress, and instead focus in an almost perverse way on the imagery of degeneration, artificiality, and ruin. By the 1890s, the provocative, anti-traditionalist attitudes of those writers and artists who had come to be called Decadents, combined with their often bizarre personal habits, had inspired the name for an age that was fascinated by the contemplation of both sumptuousness and demise: the fin de siècle.

These artistic and social visions of degeneration and death derived from a variety of inspirations. The pessimistic philosophy of Arthur Schopenhauer (1788-1860), who had envisioned human existence as a miserable round of unsatisfied needs and desires that might only be alleviated by the contemplation of works of art or the annihilation of the self, contributed much to fin-de-siècle consciousness.¹ Another significant influence may be found in the numerous writers and artists whose works served to link the themes and imagery of Romanticism
with those of Symbolism and the *fin-de-siècle* evocations of Decadence, such as William Blake, Edgar Allen Poe, Eugène Delacroix, the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood, Charles Baudelaire, and Gustave Flaubert. The greatest single influence on French Symbolist poetry was Baudelaire (1821-1867), whose works revealed a disjointed world that could not be interpreted in rational terms, and which was often pervaded with images of physical beauty prone to dissolution and decay. In his preface to the 1869 edition of Baudelaire's *Les Fleurs du mal*, the poet and cultural critic Théophile Gautier provided an early summation of the precepts of decadence in the arts, which he treated in terms of artistic style:

The poet of *Les Fleurs du mal* was fond of the style that is improperly called "decadence"; this is nothing more than art which has reached the same point of maturity that marks aging civilizations as their suns begin to set. It is an ingenious style, complex, wise, full of nuances and refinements, forever extending the limits of language, borrowing from all technical lexicons, taking colors from every palette and notes from every musical instrument. This style endeavors to express the ineffable nature of thought, the vaguest and most fleeting contours of form, with an ear for translating the subtle whisperings of neurosis, the avowals of a depraved and decrepit passion, and the bizarre hallucinations of an obsession that borders on insanity. This style of decadence is the final utterance of the Word that has already been called upon to express everything, that has already been pushed to the absolute limit. This style brings to mind a language that has become marbled with a greenish tinge of decomposition, like the spoiled hanging meat of the late Roman empire, or the labyrinthine refinements of the Byzantine school, which was the final form of Greek art once it had lapsed into deliquescence.
Such a language is quite necessary, and yet fatal, for those people and civilizations in whom artificial life has replaced natural life, thereby creating unimagined yearnings within men.²

Some years before the flowering of decadent expression in the final decades of the century, Gautier had already taken note of some of its salient themes, as expressed in the poetry of Baudelaire: the imagery of an exhausted civilization in decline, for which artificiality had come to triumph over any life that might be in tune with nature; the link between decadent society and sickness, especially neurosis and mental instability; the need for language to find arcane, unfamiliar modes and terms of expression; the correlation between fading civilization and the imagery of death and dissolution.³ Quite soon after Gautier wrote his preface, the fantasy of empires in a state of collapse became a painful reality, with the humiliating defeat of the French Second Empire at the hands of Prussia in the war of 1870-71. The memory of this event, and the social turmoil that it caused, eventually became subsumed in fin-de-siècle consciousness.⁴

The early Symbolist poets were drawn to beauty, but it was often a cold, miserable beauty that was destined for death and decay. This can be seen in Baudelaire's many poems dealing with decomposition, sometimes that of a woman whom the poet was inclined to mock for her vanity.⁵ Death, as the culmination of the process of degeneration, in time emerged as a central motif of fin-de-siècle Decadence, revealing a peculiar fascination not only for the death of beauty, but also death in beauty, the sublimely aesthetic experience of mourir en beauté. In 1864 the Symbolist poet Stéphane Mallarmé (1842-1898) began the long formation of his iconic figure Hérodiade (Herodias), the self-absorbed biblical princess who rejoices in the sterility of her hard frigid beauty, a beauty that she associates with death.⁶ In time the story of Herodias and
her daughter Salome, who was said to have performed an erotic dance for the head of John the Baptist, came to fascinate the followers of Symbolism, as can be seen in the influential paintings of the subject that Gustave Moreau (1826-1898) presented in Paris in 1876, as well as in the novella *Hérodiade* (1877) by Gustave Flaubert (1821-1880). Moreau's sensual paintings of Salome are also prominently featured in the novel that provided the clarion call of the Decadent movement, as well as the quintessential portrait of the aesthetic decadent hero: *À rebours* (1884), by Joris-Karl Huysmans (1848-1907). When Huysmans' protagonist, the self-indulgent aristocrat Jean Des Esseintes, amuses himself by encrusting a tortoise with so many jewels that it dies, the evocation of beauty that leads to destruction can be said to have reached its most grotesque extreme. For the Symbolist painter Odilon Redon (1840-1916), Death personified was a beautiful goddess, "divin refuge, heureuse fin du mal de vie" (a divine refuge, a happy end to the misery of life). In the *fin-de-siècle* experience, death and beauty go hand in hand, as in the case of the dwarf in Oscar Wilde's tale "The Birthday of the Infanta," who dies of grief when he realizes that he lacks beauty, and thus perforce must be deprived of love.

By the 1880s the French Symbolists had made an open fetish of their pessimism and fondness for the imagery of degeneration, thereby declaring themselves in rebellion against the mores of the bourgeoisie. In 1883 the poet Paul Verlaine (1844-1896) published one of the iconic poems of the movement, "Langueur," which provided a startling and provocative image in its famous opening line "Je suis l'Empire à la fin de la decadence" (I am the Empire at the end of decadence). Here the degeneration of society as a whole becomes conjoined with that of the artistic individual, the poet who is supremely content in his languid role as the tottering Empire, absorbed in creative distractions as the triumphant barbarians approach. In 1884, with an expanded version appearing in 1888, Verlaine published *Les poètes maudits*, a collection of
poems by himself and others, including Arthur Rimbaud (1854-1891) and Mallarmé, which emphasized the antisocial and even self-destructive image of the decadent poet. In 1886 the journalist Anatole Baju (1861-1903) founded a journal, *Le Décadent*, which openly rejoiced in the provocative label of decadence, surviving as the official organ of the movement until 1889. In their defiant revolt against artistic convention, the Decadents and Symbolists provided an exuberant polemic against positivism, rationalism, materialism, faith in progress and the virtues of bourgeois conformity, rejecting descriptions of nature in favor of a kind of aesthetic artificiality, of an indulgence in the realms of the senses, imagination and individual experience. If cults of beauty and the self were one result of this, another was the expression of profound pessimism, a tendency to focus on the imagery of doom, decay, and a society in decline.

The *fin-de-siècle* experience in Britain had, in its turn, derived much from the art movement known as Aestheticism, a reaction against utilitarianism and blind faith in industrial progress. The Aesthetes, whose ideals descended from the art and poetry of the Pre-Raphaelites, exalted art for its own sake, apart from considerations of morality or social purpose. Their attitudes were generally seen as congruent with those of the Symbolists, and by the last decade of the century the unique aesthetic culture of the *fin de siècle*, embodied in Britain most plainly in the works of Oscar Wilde (1854-1900), reveals the influences of both the Symbolists and Aesthetes, all viewed as Decadents in the eyes of the general public.12

Decadence or *décadisme* was only sporadically regarded an organized, coherent movement, even by critics of the French literature of the 1880s that reflected the inspiration of Baudelaire, Verlaine, or Huysmans. Within the realm of the visual arts, the notion of decadence has had an even more tenuous presence, being largely viewed as little more than an inclination of certain artists who are included in the overriding Symbolist movement, instead of as a category
in its own right. As John R. Reed notes, *fin-de-siècle* Decadence may be regarded as both a social phenomenon and an aesthetic definition, and thus it is not always easy to separate one aspect from the other, nor indeed to define precisely what was meant by the term "decadence" in this period.\(^{13}\) Although Symbolist art in general seeks to create images that might give rise to obscure or transient responses on the part of the viewer, under the influence of decadent consciousness it tends toward a kind of compositional fragmentation that can yield meaning only if subjected to "an intellectual effort at comprehension."\(^{14}\) Not coincidentally, a decadent style has frequently been identified in those artists who are described in Huysmans' iconic novel, such as Odilon Redon, Rodolphe Bresdin, and most especially Gustave Moreau, whose *Salome Dancing Before Herod* becomes a kind of jewel-encrusted reliquary in Reed's eyes, with each gemstone endowed with meaning that cries out for interpretation.\(^{15}\)

In this period, notions of decadence and degeneration were not limited to the aesthetic experience. Nor were they primarily viewed in religious, philosophical or ethical terms, as had long been the case in the history of Western thought.\(^{16}\) As the century drew to a close, decadence and degeneration began to be regarded as sociological phenomena, and indeed they attained pseudo-scientific status in the medical studies of psychiatrists and doctors such as Bénédict Augustin Morel (1809-1873) and Cesare Lombroso (1835-1909), who sought to define the pathologies of the degenerate individual in society.\(^{17}\) These studies culminated in the work of the Austrian physician Max Nordau (1849-1923), whose *Degeneration* (1892) analyzed the art and literature of the Decadents as pathological threats to a well-ordered society. In Nordau's view, a decadent, self-indulgent intelligentsia had forced its ideas of degeneration on the innocent mass of society, instilling within it the absurd notion that civilization was declining inevitably toward its end. For Nordau, decadence equals depravity: the unhealthy Decadent
unreasonably projects his own misery onto that of the flourishing world around him, and thus
yearns to drag it down to his level, to make the rest of society behave as antisocially as he does.
The decadent tendency toward what Nordau calls "mysticism," the inability to view or react to
reality in the traditional, time-honored ways (in this regard he equates the dreams of the
Symbolists with the visions of the Impressionists, Pointillists and other avant-garde painters),
becomes more than a matter of aesthetic taste: for Nordau, these are all signs of "hyste-
ria," of a pathological degeneration of the brain that he sets out to describe in precise medical terms
throughout his book. For instance, in Nordau's view, normal painters depict what they actually
see, whereas degenerates suffer from nystagmus, a kind of trembling of the eyeball, so that they
see everything indistinctly. Thus the entire phenomenon of Decadence, in all of its
manifestations, could always be explained as some sort of physiological condition; however, it
was a condition that, as Nordau imagined, could threaten the very existence of civilization.

The confusion over how to define and characterize the experience of late nineteenth-
century decadence, which has been called more of a "sensibility" than a true style, becomes quite
apparent in the case of Friedrich Nietzsche (1844-1900), one of the principal philosophical
influences on the fin de siècle. Whereas Nordau could only regard Nietzsche as a capital
Decadent, an amoral, pathological, egomaniacal babbler of nonsense, Nietzsche himself
identified true social decadence in the values and attitudes of Christianity, which he
characterized as devoted to illness, corruption, decline and nihilism. In Nietzsche's view,
Christianity had made a virtue of whatever was weak, debased or flawed, and therefore needed to
be replaced with something that reflected the true greatness of man. Christianity was nihilistic
because it reduced the natural aspirations of man to sin. In effect, for Nietzsche, the end was
already here, in the form of the death of old verities and religions; thus the only hope of social
renewal lay in the rise of a strong, confident human type that would be capable of living according to nature and instinct. At the same time, Nietzsche's doctrine of the eternal recurrence, a central notion of his influential work *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* (1885), explicitly denied the possibility that humanity could ever reach an end, since an essentially purposeless cosmos cannot have a goal or be directed toward a final state; thus all things are locked into a condition of endless and senseless repetition. This is the condition to which mankind must learn to adapt, and in which it must find a way to flourish.  

By the final decade of the century, the themes and motifs of decadence had become more pervasive and tended to manifest themselves in diverse ways throughout culture. Attitudes toward decadence became ambiguous, often falling somewhere between the wholehearted embrace of Gautier and the Symbolist poets on the one hand, and the strident condemnation of Nordau on the other. As a result, decadence and degeneration might well appear as central themes in a work that would otherwise seem to be disposed to reject their validity.  

It has been noted that the pathologically neurotic (or as it was known then, "neurasthenic") Des Esseintes of Huysmans' *À rebours* ends his antisocial experiment, his attempt to achieve the total aestheticization of existence, as a miserable failure. Moreover, it would be difficult to argue that Oscar Wilde expected his readers to yearn to imitate the insensitive depravity of the protagonist in Oscar Wilde's *Picture of Dorian Gray* (1891), nor indeed to desire to share his fate. The Time Traveler in H. G. Wells' *The Time Machine* (1895) is only too glad to leave the supremely decadent society that he discovers hundreds of thousands of years in the future, wherein the childlike, ineffectual Eloi live on nothing but fruit and passively allow themselves to be consumed by a superior but more sinister human subspecies, while they dwell in apparent bliss amid the ruins of a failed civilization.  

This ambiguity of the *fin-de-siècle* vision of
decadence is perhaps most evident in the historical novel *Quo Vadis: A Narrative of the Time of Nero* (1895), by the Polish author Henryk Sienkiewicz. At first glance, Sienkiewicz's work appears to provide an unabashed exaltation of the virtues of first-century Christianity in the face of unrelenting pagan persecution; and indeed, the author made no secret of his fervent Catholicism. Nonetheless, the novel does not fail to titillate or fascinate its readers to a certain extent by offering them pruriently decadent material, not only with its lavish descriptions of the feasts and orgies of Nero's court, but also with lengthy descriptions of horrific martyrdom. At the end of the novel, there is relatively little description of the happy life of the ostensible protagonists, the Christian lovers who have barely managed to escape the horrors of Nero's persecutions. Instead, the primary emphasis is on an act of *mourir en beauté*, the extended suicide of the work's decadent- aesthete hero, Petronius Arbiter Elegantiarum ("the arbiter of elegance"), who cheerfully opens his veins along with his beloved slave-mistress on orders from Nero, surrounded by every artistic refinement in a sumptuous party setting. Once the two find their happy death by exsanguination, they become, in effect, works of art themselves: "The guests, looking at these two white forms, which resembled two wonderful statues, understood well that with them perished all that was left to their world at that time—poetry and beauty." The novel purports to provide an apotheosis of nascent Christianity, yet this orientation becomes at least partly subsumed by a last long, fascinated look at the degeneration of pagan Rome, on the brink of collapse in an orgy of beauty, refinement and death.

The essays in this volume reveal the remarkable variety of forms and modes of expression that characterized the various visions of decadence, degeneration and the end of things during the *fin de siècle*. The term decadence can reflect a mode of expression, a thematic inclination, a stylistic attitude, or an aesthetic tendency, but it can also function as a
manifestation of actual cultural deterioration. In the latter context, it may be conjoined to
depictions of cultural or physical degeneration. These in turn lead quite naturally to the idea of
the "end," defined both in temporal terms, as the death of individuals or the fall of civilizations,
and as the expression of general societal pessimism that characterized the fin de siècle, with its
delusions concerning positivistic ideals of progress, as well as its notion that God and traditional
displays of piety had been effectively supplanted by recent scientific discoveries.

The volume is divided into four parts. The first, "The Twilight World: Decadent Visions of the World, Society and Culture," presents four essays concerning various responses, including
those influenced by prevailing scientific theories, to perceptions of decline or decay of societies
in the past, present or future. The first of these provides a vision of the death of the entire
universe, in Mason Tattersall's "Thermal Degeneration: Thermodynamics and the Heat-Death of
the Universe in Victorian Science, Philosophy, and Culture." Tattersall describes the impact of
the prevailing fin-de-siècle theory that the universe was fated to die a slow, cold death according
to the new theories of thermodynamics, concentrating especially on the manifestations of this
notion on the arts, religion and society of Britain. This essay is followed by the contribution of
Natalia Santamaría Laorden, "A Regenerative Decadence or a Decadent Regeneration:
Challenges to Darwinian Determinism from French, Spanish and Latin American Writers in the
Fin-de-Siècle." Here Santamaría Laorden explores the influence of Darwinian evolutionary
theory on contemporary explanations for, and responses to, the perceived political decline of the
entire Latin race, inspired in part by gloomy assessments of the military defeats of France in
1870 and Spain in 1898.

Even though fin-de-siècle artists and writers were often perceived to be estranged from
society, both by themselves and by others, many of them felt moved to provide social critiques.
Such efforts might include a reassessment of history as a means to criticize contemporary society, especially the history of classical antiquity, which, as has been noted, held a special fascination for fin-de-siècle writers and artists. The interpretation of antiquity is the central topic of Anastasia Antonopoulou's essay, "Late Antiquity as an Expression of Decadence in the Poetry of Constantine P. Cavafy and Stefan George," which is the next chapter of the first section of the volume. Although neither was familiar with the work of the other, the Greek poet Cavafy and the German poet George shared a common interest in Byzantium and the Late Roman and Hellenistic-Alexandrian eras, regarding them as transitional periods, characterized by exhaustion and the decline of grandiose empires. In her article, Antonopoulou shows how the two prominent fin-de-siècle poets employed antiquity as a means of expressing their decadent vision of contemporary life.

The last chapter in the first section is provided by Magali Fleurot, who describes the critique of British society provided by the fairy tales of one of the key figures of the fin de siècle, Oscar Wilde. In her essay titled "Decadence and Regeneration: Oscar Wilde's Fairy Tales as a Tool for Social Change," Fleurot demonstrates that Wilde's fairy tales were ultimately intended to call for regenerative improvements in a Victorian society subverted by the upheavals of modernity, regardless of the accusations of degeneration that were leveled at the author by critics.

The second section of the volume is "The Seduction of Sickness." The interest in morbidity and pathology during the fin de siècle was undoubtedly due in part to commercial reasons, thanks to social changes and increased literacy among the wider European public. Other important factors included the influence of positivism, advances in medicine, and the different theories of physical and mental degeneration that came to the fore during the second half of the
nineteenth century. *Fin-de-siècle* culture, especially the decadent movement, was more obsessed with the portrayal of illness than any other aesthetic or intellectual movement that had preceded it. Sickness was also employed as a metaphor by social critics and decadent artists who saw themselves at odds with the values and visions of the ostensibly "healthy" bourgeois society. Pirjo Lyytikäinen's chapter "Decadent Tropologies of Sickness" analyzes disease as a literary trope in Nordic decadent literature, with emphasis on the ways in which the pervasive "embrace of decay" in the novels of Ola Hansson, Volter Kilpi and Joel Lehtonen might serve to subvert bourgeois values, especially under the influence of the imagery of illness in Huysmans' *À rebours*. This chapter is followed by the work of Abigail Susik, which concentrates on two social problems of the period: consumerism and drug addiction. In "Consuming and Consumed: Woman as *Habitué* in Eugène Grasset's *Morphinomaniac*," she analyzes Grasset's lithograph *La morphinomane* as a form of aestheticized critique of social degeneration. Kyle Mox offers the final essay of this section, "Decadence, Melancholia, and the Making of Modernism in the Salome Fairy Tales of Strindberg, Wilde, and Ibsen," a study of the imagery of melancholia in some important *fin-de-siècle* literary depictions of the character Salome, the most pervasive artistic creation of the decadent movement.

Misogyny was another of the salient characteristics of the *fin de siècle*. It has been interpreted as a consequence of the exaltation of the artificial on the part of some Decadents, as well as their hostility to nature; but it may also reveal their tendency toward a kind of hatred of life which regarded woman, the one who gives birth, as a central symbol. The prevailing misogyny also appears to result from male responses to nineteenth-century movements for the emancipation of women, which represented a threat to traditional notions of the inherent superiority of men. *Fin-de-siècle* views of women are reflected in the third section of the
volume, "Decadence and the Feminine," beginning with Kristen M. Harkness' chapter "Mariia Iakunchikova and the Roots of Decadence in Late-Nineteenth Century Russian Modernism," the study of a consumptive Russian painter who attempted to disassociate herself from the critical expectations of her homeland while seeking a place in the highly competitive Paris art scene. Iakunchikova's efforts to create her own self image and come to grips with her physical decline, all the while resisting the tendency of critics to define her art as decadent, reveal many of the tensions inherent in the fin-de-siècle aesthetic experience. They also reflect the perceived threat to masculine identity that was embodied in the emancipated woman, a threat that reached its fullest expression in the myriad depictions of Salome, the ultimate "castrating" femme fatale of decadence. Her popularity as a trope in the visual arts and literature was so great that critics have coined the term "salomania" to describe the phenomenon. In his essay "The Spectral Salome: Salomania and Fin-de-Siècle Sexology and Racial Theory," Johannes Burgers analyzes the figure of the biblical princess, with emphasis on Oscar Wilde's incarnation of her, in conjunction with the sexual and anti-Semitic theories that so often characterized views of degeneration by the end of the nineteenth century. The third section of the volume concludes with Gülru Çakmak's chapter "'For the Strong-Minded Alone': Evolution, Female Atavism and Degeneration in Aubrey Beardsley's Salome." Here the emphasis is on the illustrations that Beardsley drew for Wilde's English edition of his play Salomé in 1894. In harmony with Burgers' thesis, Çakmak demonstrates that Beardsley was inspired by the scientific notions of nineteenth-century naturalists and criminal anthropologists in his depiction of the biblical princess as a symbol of pathological atavism and degeneration.

The pessimistic atmosphere of the fin de siècle might culminate in visions of the end of the world, or it might manifest itself in a fascination for the death of the body. This theme,
ultimately descended from the motifs of Romanticism, took on a new characterization in light of the scientific discoveries of the later nineteenth century, which made death essentially meaningless in the eyes of many, by abolishing traditional concepts of divine providence and the afterlife. The volume concludes with the section titled "Two Studies of Death," including Maura Coughlin's chapter "Death at Sea: Symbolism and Charles Cottet's Subjective Realism," a study of the ways in which the French painter Cottet (1863-1925) depicted the isolated world of the fishing communities of Brittany as a land consumed with the imagery of death and mourning. Rejecting the traditional view that Cottet indulged in artistic primitivism, a kind of mythic romance of the rustic in nature, Coughlin describes instead the artist's mastery of a subjective realism that revealed hard truths of contemporary life. This is followed by the last chapter of the volume, "The Seduction of Thanatos: Gabriele D'Annunzio and the Decadent Death" by Marja Härmänmaa, which explores the various notions and depictions of death that appear throughout the works of the Italian author D'Annunzio (1863-1938). D'Annunzio's quest for personal immortality through grand gestures and works of art, as well as the myriad references to death that pervade his cult of self, can be viewed as an almost paradoxical incarnation of Nietzsche's idea of the eternal return: the life that is lived so well, and makes so fine an end, must be worthy of imitation, and therefore, endless repetition.

1 For Schopenhauer's discussion of the contemplation of art as a means to free the individual from the tyranny of the will, see especially A. Schopenhauer (2008) The World as Will and Presentation 2 vols., trans. R. Aquila and D. Carus (New York: Pearson) vol. 1, pp. 221-29. For Schopenhauer's influence on pessimistic expression in the art of this period, see P. Jullian (1971) Dreamers of Decadence: Symbolist Painters of the 1890s (New York: Praeger), pp. 32-33. For the characterization of Schopenhauer as one of the fathers of Italian decadentismo, along with


3 On the persistent imagery of late antiquity in visions of Decadence, see P. Jullian *Dreamers of Decadence*, pp. 149-61; and M. Calinescu *Five Faces of Modernity*, pp. 158-60.


7 On Moreau's pervasive influence in this period, see P. Jullian *Dreamers of Decadence* passim; E. Lucie-Smith (1972) *Symbolist Art* (New York: Jaeger) pp. 63-69; and J. Birkett (1990) "Fin-


13 J. Reed *Decadent Style*, pp. 1, 11. For the problems of defining *fin-de-siècle* notions of decadence, see D. Weir *Decadence and the Making of Modernism* pp. 1-21.


15 J. Reed *Decadent Style*, p. 135. For the descriptions of these artists in Huysman's novel, see J.-K. Huysmans *Against Nature*, pp. 44-53. On the literary characteristics of Moreau's art, and

16 See D. Pick Faces of Degeneration, p. 20.


18 For Nordau's characterization of avant-garde painters as hysterical degenerates, see M. Nordau (1968) Degeneration (New York: Fertig), p. 27.

19 For the notion of Decadence as a sensibility, "in particular, a critical sensibility and an unusually worshipful mode of spectatorship," see E. Hanson Decadence and Catholicism, p. 30.


21 Nietzsche's best known exposition of the eternal recurrence appears in Zarathustra's conversation with the homunculus who represents the force of gravity that impedes human endeavor; see F. Nietzsche (2005) Thus Spoke Zarathustra, trans. G. Parkes (Oxford: Oxford UP), pp. 134-37. For a basic discussion of Nietzsche's nihilism as well as the notion of the eternal recurrence, which Nietzsche wanted to imagine was scientifically demonstrable, see A. C. Danto (2005) Nietzsche as Philosopher, expanded edition (New York: Columbia University Press), pp. 4-17; 182-95.
For the notion that writers drawn to decadent imagery were not necessarily disposed to call for the *triumph* of decadence, see E. Hanson *Decadence and Catholicism*, p. 29. On the inherent "instability of meaning" of the term Decadence, which might by turns express either a lament for dehumanizing aspects of nineteenth-century social and technological progress, or else an inevitable decline into a state of barbarism, see D. Weir *Decadence and the Making of Modernism* pp. 11-13.

See M. Calinescu *Five Faces of Modernity*, p. 174; and also C. Lloyd (1990) *J.-K. Huysmans and the Fin-de-Siècle Novel* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh UP), pp. 99-100, wherein it is noted that Des Esseintes' efforts to achieve self-sufficiency and liberation are in fact destroying him.


For a very different but contemporaneous view of the historical figure Petronius as author of the *Satyricon*, which exalts his nobility of spirit as "the most wanton of scoffers" and emphasizes his opposition to "decadent" Christianity, see F. Nietzsche *The Antichrist*, p. 50.


See D. Weir *Decadence and the Making of Modernism*, p. xvi.