Part VII

Afterword

The Specters of Decadence in Later Nordic Literature

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Looking at the variety of Nordic literary decadence has provided us with a perspective that illuminates many tendencies in Nordic literature, extending well beyond the turn of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. As Nordic *fin de siècle* decadence was never an openly proclaimed or critically accepted school or movement, its afterlife in the twentieth century has to be reconstructed from the literary texts rather than critical reactions.[1] Many of the authors discussed in this volume continued their careers while moving away from core decadence and its late satirical and Nietzschean variants toward neo-naturalism, nationalism and high modernism. They often retained their antimodern attitudes, melancholy pessimism and elements of the decadent poetics that they developed in their moves toward modernist perspectivism. Some of them, like Joel Lehtonen, satirized their former decadent stances, but maintained a satirical antimodernity and an essentially decadent sensibility. The wide constellation of decadence we have analyzed helps in understanding these reactions and the further development of Nordic literatures under the aegis of decadence as it has been broadly understood.

In this afterword, we first briefly outline how and what we have analyzed as Nordic literature of decadence relate to what has been seen as modernism in Nordic literary historiography. We explore how naturalist decadence prepared the way for neo-naturalist modernism by reintroducing the aesthetics of banality and how primitivism lived on in twentieth-century naturalist modernism. Then, we outline how decadent themes and forms reappeared in some new modernist schools during the first part of the twentieth century and how they spread in modern popular culture. These glimpses into the afterlife of the controversial constellation we have identified indicate the value of our perspective for new interpretations of Nordic literary history.

As terms, decadence and modernism tend to allow for various—maybe even—contradictory definitions or characterizations; consequently, they enable a multitude of conceptions of their mutual relationship. To understand them as two separate literary movements or periods is tricky: the distinctions seem to blur, especially if we look at the actual texts rather than reading manifestos or other writings of schools willingly declaring their novelty and discarding the old fashions of their predecessors. In Nordic studies on modernism, we notice a marked tendency to overlook decadence or to deny it having more than ephemeral or marginal significance: this old prejudice still lingers on.[2] It is high time to deconstruct it, and, along with it, the "myth of discontinuity," that is, high modernism's rejection of *fin de siècle* literature.[3]

In recent studies on Nordic modernism, decadence is often included in early modernism without assigning it any special role, aside from a few mention of decadent themes or motifs. This is not simply due to the lack of decadent manifestos or schools identifying themselves as decadent, for the same can

be said of modernism. Few Nordic literary schools identify as "modernists" before the 1950s: Anker Gemzøe (2010, 851) notes that it was only then that "the wider use and acceptance of 'modernism' as a key term appeared in the Nordic countries." Gemzøe's own article, however, liberally counts as "early modernism" all the symbolist and decadent works from 1870 to 1913 (his focus is on Danish literature; he neither mentions any Finnish works from this period nor considers Estonian literature in the Nordic context). For him, modernism equals anti-realism with the usual formal characteristics, such as free verse, oxymoronic imagery, meta-poetry, "plotless" narration and "stream of consciousness" techniques. All these formal features develop in decadence, albeit in connection to core decadent themes. This applies to the new genres, such as tableaux and prose poems, as well as "the arch-modernist experience of the splitting of the self," that are quintessential forms and elements of decadent prose but considered "modernist" features by Gemzøe (857–859).

Gemzøe is not alone. In their survey "Modernism in Norway" (2007), Lothe and Tysdahl see Ibsen and Hamsun as the most significant Norwegian modernists—when they are not too realist (like Ibsen in his earlier plays or Hamsun in his later novels). Their article focuses on the shift from realism/naturalism to modernism without considering any movements of the *fin de siècle*. Hamsun's modernism, for instance, is proved by his "exploration of the human psyche—or, more precisely, the way in which he foregrounds individual consciousness rather than presenting a broad social analysis in the manner of Émile Zola" (864–865); that is, by quintessential core decadent pursuits.[4] In the same volume, Steen Povlsen allows the term "modernist" to designate both "literature that primarily registers the reality of modernity" (including urban life and "the disintegration of the subject") and literature that "attempts to confront this reality with artistic forms that express the division and the chaos and at the same time constitute a kind of alternative to modernity" (Povlsen 2007, 855). This would, potentially, include naturalism and decadence, but Povlsen twists this into a reflection theory: he argues that modernism could not develop as long as the Nordic societies were largely agricultural and because they had not directly experienced the crisis caused by the First World War (ibid.). However, we have seen how important rural decadences were in the North, not to mention what can be called "rural modernism."[5] The writers of Nordic decadence also clearly reflected upon European (and American) modernity rather than blindly reacting to local circumstances.

All in all, we could conclude that, for these scholars, decadence, with its innovative narrative techniques, is counted as modernism if it is counted at all: it is never accorded any special attention. Its thematic and affective textscapes are not explored, whereas high modernism and its forms function as the paradigm of true modernism.[6] From our perspective, this neglects the innovative impact of decadent literature, making it more difficult to understand many deep and partly troubling undercurrents of later modernism itself. Furthermore, the focus on formal aspects, and the reliance on the distinction between realist/naturalist narration and modernism, obscure the continuity of sensibilities and themes that connects nineteenth-century naturalism to early twentieth-century neo-naturalism and what we have called core decadence. We thus participate in the ongoing remapping of the *fin the siècle* as an open-ended process; while holding on to periodization, we propose an alternative approach to modernism by questioning old dividing lines.[7]

In recent years, the overlapping and continuity of *fin de siècle* and modernism have already been broached by several studies on the relationship between naturalism and modernism which challenge the view of the latter as anti-realism and anti-naturalism. Realism is no longer considered merely as modernism's negative other (see Moi 2006, 3).[8] Acknowledgment of the proto-modernist qualities of

naturalism and naturalist qualities of modernism is gaining ground; for instance, Susan Harrow argues that naturalist works prefigure both stylistic and thematic modernism.[9] Flaubert, of course, has long been considered as an ancestor of modernism, but recently the roles of Ibsen, and Zola have also been taken into consideration (Moi 2006; Harrow 2010).

One aspect of this relationship indicates the return of something repudiated by core decadence. The aesthetics of banality privileged in naturalism are transferred to high modernism both at the stylistic and thematic levels. As modernism strives to disrupt and problematize traditional realist modes of communication (Eysteinsson 1990, 238), the naturalistic poetics of the ordinary frequently constitutes a vantage point for those searching for a new modernist aesthetics. Many key modernists, ranging from James Joyce to Marcel Proust and Virginia Woolf, plunge into the experience of banality in modernity, with its ironies and deceptions.[10] In a way, the modernist novel fulfills the naturalist aesthetics of the everyday as formulated by Flaubert and Zola even more faithfully than the work of its nineteenth-century ancestors.[11] Flaubert's idea of "un livre sur rien," a plotless plot, and the Zolian principle of the novel as "une tranche de vie," a slice of life, reverberate in modernist plots, which rupture the linearity of classic realism through immersion in subjectivity and detailed, catalog-like description. At the same time, the modernist focus on the unheroic and tedious ordinary is fed by the antimodern attitude of the *fin de siècle*. While core decadence distanced itself from gray, everyday life in naturalism, modernism's focus on the boredom and the negative of the everyday is in tune with the loss of idealism, which, as discussed by Moi (2006), permeates modernism from naturalism. As argued by Liesl Olson (2009, 4), "the modernist proclivity to dwell in the regularity of the ordinary often emerges out of a response to what is represented as the hollowness of modern life, the loss of ideals and the difficulty of knowing another person."

Knut Hamsun's *Sult* (*Hunger*, 1890), a novel frequently considered as one of the founding texts in Nordic modernism and even a predecessor of high modernism (Humpál 1998), is an interesting example of the entwinement of decadent naturalism and modernism. It combines an aesthetics of disgusting banality with decadent/modernist poetics. This "strange novel," which "had neither intrigue nor story," as André Gide (1961, 5–6) observed, conforms to the Flaubertian idea of a novel without plot. "Nul autre drame, nulle autre action, dans ce livre, que la faim," to quote Octave Mirbeau (1961, 9) in his preface to the French translation in 1895.[12] In fact, it is legitimate to situate *Sult* in the framework of core decadence. This novel, translated into English in 1899 by George Egerton, inspired authors of decadence in Western and Central Europe.[13] Egerton (1921, vi) called it "magnetic and repellent," thus stamping the novel with "the allure of disgust" prominent to decadence. *Sult* can be compared to *À rebours* in the sense that it targeted documentary, societal naturalism. It also challenged all authors who had written on hunger, even parodying the naturalistic portrayal of hunger (see Rossi 2010).[14] Indeed, *Sult* repudiates naturalistic, tragic novels of poverty like Zola's *L'Assommoir* (1877) and *Germinal* (1885) and moves toward absurdity fed by an aesthetics of decadent contradiction and transgression. The unreliable narrator-protagonist of Hamsun's novel claims to be hungry but refuses to eat, inspired by the feeling of starvation. This narrative of a hungry person who vomits up the food he gets and gives his money away anticipates Hamsun's later protagonists who are constantly taken by sudden caprices, whims and "actes gratuits" (as in *Pan*, Lieutenant Glahn, shoots himself in the foot by a sudden caprice).[15]

Sult, as "a psycho-pathological study of the hungering with beauty" (Egerton 1921, x), echoes *À rebours* in its themes of oversensitivity and neurosis, even paranoia fed by hunger. It is the "joyful insanity of hunger" that excites the narrator's madness and obsessions (Hamsun 1967, 78). The narcissistic,

constantly and openly lying protagonist of *Sult* figures as a man of the underground, evoking the narrator from Dostoyevsky's *Notes from the Underground* (1864, *Zapíski iz podpól'ya)*.[16] His greatest problem is not hunger, to quote Gide (1961, 6–7), but pride and egoism, resulting in what Dorrit Cohn (1978, 155), called a "wholly self-centered, indeed self-obsessed novel." We may also speak of saying yes to madness and neurosis stimulated by hunger; a Nietzschean, Dionysian type of transgression (see Lyytikäinen in this volume). At the same time, the grotesque banality matches or even surpasses naturalist descriptions. All in all, *Sult* can be considered as a kind of veiled manifesto of modernism: hunger, with all its everyday misery, comes to signify a hunger for modernist aesthetics, the appetite for a new word and a new form of literary expression (see Rossi 2010).

Another thematic bridge between naturalist decadence and high modernism is the ambivalent imagination of the primitive and its various manifestations in the *fin de siècle*. Different versions of the primitive reverberate in several high modernist authors, from T. S. Eliot to Ernest Hemingway, D. H. Lawrence and Joyce (Torgovnick 1990; Rossetti 2006; Bell 2010). The modernist version of the primitive, especially in comparison with naturalism, frequently signaled a move toward, or a return to, a romanticized version of the primitive, emphasizing primordial authenticity.[17] In the Nordic context, however, this modernist nostalgia for the primordial blends with the legacy of nineteenth-century rural decadence. A reader of Hamsun and Sillanpää is confronted with scenes depicting corruption, decay and death set in a realistic countryside milieu or in small provincial villages. We find rural families in degeneration and the sickness and ferocity of the rural people. The agrarian landscapes in A. H. Tammsaare's novels *Kõrboja peremees* (The Master of Kõrboja 1922) and first and fifth volume from his pentalogy *Tõde ja õigus* (Truth and Justice 1926–1933) illustrate this new primitivism.[18] However, these Nordic authors generally distance themselves from the tendency to degrade rural folk in the style of Zola (see the introduction to this volume). In their early twentieth-century work, authors like Hamsun and Lehtonen envision a fusion of the Darwinian naturalistic primitive and the romantic cult of innocent primordiality, and use the primitive to create contradictory images, mixing savage animality with ideas of innocence and originality.[19] This figure of the primitive is rooted in the naturalist images of animality and sexuality, but differs from the instinctive "human beast" in its authenticity and emotional sensibility, providing a contrast to the corrupted civilized people in the cities. For instance, the couple of heroic settlers in *Markens grøde* (*Growth of the Soil*, 1917), Isaac and Inger, are depicted as contradictory characters, morally ambivalent and naturalistically ugly, yet strong, hardworking and fond of their animals and the soil. "That was their way. Lonely folk, ugly to look at and overfull of growth, but a blessing for each other, for the beasts, and for the earth" (Hamsun 1921/1, 31).[20]

Markens grøde elaborates on the creation of a new nation. The narrative of Isaac, a simple-minded man who takes control of the earth, embodies Hamsun's vision of the man of the future. At the end of the novel, Isaac rules the earth with the priestess of his heart, Inger, "a Vestal tending the fire of a kitchen stove" (Hamsun 1921/2, 253).[21] Here, however, the recuperation of the romantic primordial entails nationalism in the sense of traditionalism and expresses nostalgia, which involves political conservatism and regressive tones. The novel compares with Zola's *Fécondité* (*Fruitfulness*, 1899) where the idea of a return to the countryside combines with a program for national reform to make France great again. The idea of primitivism as a form of nationalism also blends with the sinister discourse of the primitive in discussions of "blood" and "fertility" in fascist contexts (see Torgovnick 1990, 6). At the turn of the twentieth century, championing the purity of the white Nordic race gained ground. As Monica Žagar (2009) has shown, these ideas influenced Hamsun's conceptions of race and gender.

Similar conceptions of gender characterize Tammsaare's works, which illustrate the entanglement of masculinist misogyny with a fascination and strong identification with the empowered feminine so typical of literary modernism (see Dekoven 1998). The aspects of primitiveness are conspicuous in Tammsaare's constructions of women and femininity toward which the narrator and male characters have particularly ambiguous attitudes. The negative feminized primitiveness so typical of core decadence is strongly present, with features such as a lack of rationality and logic, insufficient memory, domination of emotions and sexual drive, egoism and narcissism.[22] Yet, like his European and Nordic colleagues, Tammsaare tends to idealize feminized infancy and childhood, and the child-like features in his female characters, best preserved in primitive conditions.[23]

The heritage of core decadence lived on in experimental modernist and avant-garde groups. This heritage mingled with important new trends, coming to the Nordic countries mostly from Western and Central Europe but also from Russia. Such was the work of the Finland-Swedish poet Edith Södergran, who introduced "a 'modernist' movement for the first time in the Nordic countries" (Jansson 2007, 838). A major modernist poet and early exponent of Finland-Swedish modernism,[24] Södergran developed a free verse form in her very first collection, *Dikter* (Poems, 1916). She was inspired by German expressionism and Russian futurism, but her imagery has been connected to decadence, due to aestheticist poses indulging in the cult of beauty, a particular mixture of Eros, Thanatos and Dionysos, evoking baroque imagery and picturing death as an orgasm, seeking inspiration in mysticism and alternating ecstasy with melancholic overtones (Jones 1992, 113–128; Petherick 1992, 29–46; Lillqvist 2001, 172–195).

Many of Södergran's poems have been read as a kind of "liberation from the decadence of previous generations" (Lindqvist 2006, 815), resulting, eventually, in a particular mixture of Nietzscheanism,[25] Steiner´s anthroposophy and a very personal version of Christianity. This reaction can be seen to be in line with (late) decadent ambivalences, although the ecstatic way of professing Nietzschean defiance and revolutionary spirit vis-à-vis death visions of the *fin de siècle* transformed the decadent paradoxes. Södergran's poetry enacts the "power of self-definition," of "recreating oneself from the ashes," as she wrote to the poet Elmer Diktonius, who belonged to the same circle of Finland-Swedish modernists (see Witt-Brattström 2011). In Södergran's poetry, the *fin de siècle* figurations of the New Woman are developed into bold visions of the Overman, the androgyne, into fantasies of sisterhood and sisterly love. All this made her the icon of Nordic feminism from the 1960s. Yet, Södergran and her peers emerged from decadent soil. Kuhlefelt (2018) shows how Södergran's "modernist sister," Hagar Olsson, another Finland-Swedish modernist, playwright and translator, had decadent roots, though she later criticized decadence in her writings. Some of Olsson's characters develop decadent ways of evoking mismatches between sex, gender and desire, decadent figurations of female masculinity, male femininity and cross-dressing; "*fin de siècle* decadence constitutes a beginning rather than an end, and continues to shape modernity through its questioning of gender and 'natural' sexuality" (ibid., 293)—be this in the name of artful self-construction, masquerade or identity politics.

Södergran and other Finland-Swedish modernists were associated with the avant-garde and its various "isms," including surrealism (cf. Chambers 2015, 163), which, in its own fashion, continued the decadents' obsessive interest in the oneiric and the "dark side" of the human psyche, or, if we wish, the unconscious. If we understand avant-garde to signify "the more radical, norm-breaking aspects of modernism" (Eysteinsson 1990, 178), decadence was the most fertile soil for it. Unlike decadence, however, Södergran's poetry also featured another avant-garde characteristic, "pointing toward the

future" (178). Yet even here, the Nietzschean mode of decadence, with its ambivalent entanglement between degeneration and regeneration, is connected to Södergran's poetry.

In Estonia, the proto-modernist literary group Siuru (Firebird, 1917–1919), which included former Young Estonians like Tuglas and Suits, developed a parallel ambivalent relationship to decadence. The members of Siuru saw the realization of their aesthetic ideal in the fragmentary prose of Jaan Oks. Oks introduced various poetical techniques and registers in his prose poems, mixing myths, sarcasm, spiritualism and naturalism (Tuglas 1918). Oks himself characterized his style as decadent, but he has been related to modernism, expressionism and "village realism" (Lind 2018). As preachers of life affirmation and happiness, the members of Siuru opposed decadence, but paradoxically, their themes tightly relate to decadence and expression of emotions against the grain. Their provocative impact was clear. The group's only female member, poet Marie Under, shocked the Estonian public with her three collections of poems (1917, 1918, 1918) combining sensual descriptions of nature with representations of the explicitly erotized female body. Ironically, she was criticized not only by outsiders but also by her male colleagues from Siuru, who went far beyond their female colleague in expressing their own sexual desires and fantasies.

After the dissolution of Siuru, many new texts focused on decay, decline, war, death, corpses, crimes, eroticism, outcasts, disease, devil, prostitution, orgies and the sense of ending while dealing with war traumas. These works go under the label "expressionism" but were obviously recycling many themes of naturalism and decadence. Some texts drew inspiration from modernist visual arts, such as futurism, cubism and surrealism (see Pählapuu 2012). The symbolic uses of contrasting colors by Estonian symbolist-expressionist painters even inspired a new surge of "decadent colors." These come to light in the titles of texts by a former member of Siuru, August Gailit: *Fosfortõbi* (Phosphorus Disease) and *Kollane hullumeelsus* (Yellow Madness), both in 1919, and *Purpurne surm* (Purple Death, 1924). These texts full of fantasy and grotesque explore the consequences of First World War, and more specifically of the use of poisonous gas in the war (Undusk 2015); they focus on the dreadful disease that destroys entire nations. Gailit offers also a wider (allegedly Spenglerian) philosophical generalization: they are living in a doomed world, in the last days before the apocalypse.

Similarly, contradictory and even paradoxical ways of drawing on decadence can be traced in the literature of the 1920s[26] written in Finnish, namely in the texts of the first literary group in independent Finland, the *Tulenkantajat* (The Torch Bearers), a Nordic modernist movement (Eysteinsson 2007, 834). Their cult of exoticism can be seen as inspired by nineteenth-century core decadence, though it was also informed by various contemporary European avant-garde movements. Together with a fascination with the effects of opium, the occult, the bizarre, the morbid, evil and other echoes of decadence sometimes coexisted with—and got overshadowed by— more avant-garde themes and ways of expression, including reactions to futurism and to its cult of the machine, enchantment with modern cities and the image of the city as machine. These elements can be found in the early work of the best-known member of the movement, Mika Waltari, himself an ardent admirer of E. A. Poe. Waltari`s fascination with the decadent mode and themes included its cult of exoticism and the Orient, focused largely on Egypt after the 1922 discovery of Tutankhamun's tomb.

Waltari's enthusiasm for decadence in its most spectacular aspects carries over to his later historical novels, particularly *Sinuhe egyptiläinen* (1945, abridged English tr. *The Egyptian*, 1949). This novel epitomizes the development of Nordic decadence beyond *fin de siècle* and illustrates what David Weir

(1995) characterizes as "the decline of decadence." Weir discusses the widespread exploitation of decadent themes and figures in popular fiction and films, showing how the specter of decadence in the form of purple motifs and themes invades the imaginary of mass culture (165–166). Weir sees the signs of decline early, in what most classifications count as late decadence: in fashionable novels from the 1890s such as the work of Octave Mirbeau and Catulle Mendes's *Méphistophéla*. These exploit shocking themes while hypocritically condemning licentious and "monstrous" (often meaning "queer") characters, whose behavior they depict in detail, without any ambitious or experimental style of narration (154–156). Waltari's *Sinuhe* draws on the cult of Egypt and central decadent themes from *femme fatale* to sadistic violence and degeneration of the ruling elite while abandoning the modernist style he had developed in his early avant-garde works. But it was the novel's English translation which transformed it into popular entertainment (by omitting the more serious historical and philosophical reflections), inspiring the Hollywood film industry. This practice of recycling decadent imagery (from vampiric *femme fatales* to effeminate dandies, from magic and the occult to hedonism, from orientalism to the fear and allure of the Other) while dropping decadent aesthetic or philosophical ambitions has remained a perennial feature of popular culture up until present-day Nordic literature and art, especially in fashionable genres such as the Nordic crime novel and Nordic noir.

Weir's "decline of decadence" includes the late satirical attacks on cultural decay, which share the antimodern attitude of earlier decadents but distance themselves from decadent aesthetics and aestheticism. Weir relates this to the "bourgeois" phase which moves the formerly "aristocratic" decadence into the public domain (153–154) and exemplifies it with Mirbeau's satirical works that condemn the decay of contemporary society and culture while (and by) indulging in excessive shock effects. In the Nordic context, this phase seems to involve Strindberg's late works (see Ahlund in this volume); these abandon the aesthetic program of decadence, and foreground the condemnation of cultural decay. Strindberg does not indulge in the vulgar shock effects of boulevard decadence, but the satire of *Götiska rummen* and *Svarta fanor* dwells on cultural decadence, similarly to Max Nordau. This type of satire is compatible with a conservative nationalist political agenda, although it stems from the pessimism, a sense of ending, and (anarchist) individualism typical of all decadence.[27]

As Ahlund shows, this satire in its "paradoxical ambivalence" may be in itself "a mark of the decadent" and affects efforts to envision ways out of the cultural decay. Many chapters in this volume have shown that such ambivalence is characteristic of *all* the Nietzschean efforts to overcome decadence and affirm life, including the attempt to unearth a "New Man" from the ashes of the old culture. The road to vitalism in Johannes V. Jensen, who "registers a modern worldview early on" (Povlsen, 855), and Einar Elkær's manifesto about becoming "a New Man through dissolution" are fraught with this oxymoronic decadence (Norup in this volume). We may add that later modernisms often inherit the paradox.

Central elements of modernist poetics thus emerged in decadence. In Nordic and other literatures, decadence greatly stimulated and participated in "the making of modernism," although later modernisms grew increasingly detached from core decadent themes and pathos. Importantly, high modernism opened up fictional worlds to embrace the multiple voices and perspectives of characters and narrators, and abandoned reliance on one solipsistic and narcissistic consciousness; but, in doing this, it also looked back to naturalism.[28] At the same time, literary decadence inaugurated the questioning of the human subject, the revaluation of old values and the turmoil around genders that are at the heart of modernism and still with us today, in the early twenty-first century.

We must, however, emphasize once again the ambivalent impact of decadence: its aesthetic innovations and critical input are often entangled with regressive philosophy and politics. Decadence created uncanny alliances, also in the Nordic countries, enabling authors to entertain various and contradictory political stances. But all in all, literary decadence, with its radically antimodern but politically ambivalent, critical, and even anarchist stances, reveals a central face of modernity, and even its core. If ambivalence is, as Zygmunt Bauman (1991) argues, characteristic of modernity, it is this very art of contradictions which has made decadence alluring to literary modernisms and continues to attract new audiences. We may also relate the *fin the siècle* sense of ending with our even more acute and worrisome perspectives in our millennium. The voices in Nordic decadence deserve to be heard amongst the wider public, scholars and students of Nordic literatures and the *fin de siècle* world.

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[1] Thus, a study such as Kristin Mahoney's (2015), which documents the British interest in decadence and the Yellow Nineties by the generations from the 1910s onwards, relying largely on open critical reactions and literary discussions, does not seem possible for Nordic literature, but the afterlife of decadence could be a focus for further study. Our afterword tries to sketch some aspects of this.

[2] See, for example, Riikonen (2007), Hennoste (2016), also Sherry (2015). Even David Weir's idea of decadence as "transition" seems to imply that what came before (romanticism/naturalism) and what comes after (modernism) are the "real things." This attitude is common in modernism studies, although he admits that "decadence itself developed as an independent movement at the same time that other, better known movements were developing through it" (Weir 1995, ix).

[3] For this deconstruction in Britain, see Thain (2007).

[4] See also Bjørn Tysdahl et al. (eds., 2002). The volume does not reflect on the designation of modernism in relation to decadence or symbolism but seems to see modernisms in the plural against realist paradigms.

[5] Karkama (1994). Cf. similar developments in American modernism with William Faulkner et al.

[6] We cannot go deeper into these issues here. For a discussion of this paradigm, see Eysteinsson (1990, 8–49).

[7] See, for example, *Beyond the Victorian/Modernist Divide* 2018 and its editors' introductory chapter; Besnault-Levita et al. (2018, 1–18).

[8] Of course, we have to remember that other perspectives emerged much earlier, for example, Erich Auerbach's approach to modernism as a form of realism; Auerbach (1974, 525–557, esp. 536, 542).

[9] For instance, the visual, dense descriptions in Zola's work prompted new techniques of depicting perception and an experience of modernity charged with multilayered tropes. Despite the reputation of Zola as an author of readable, classic narratives, he has challenging writerly qualities, including hybridity, indeterminacy, fracture, blurring of positions, merging of perspectives, forms of dissolution, ellipsis and abstraction (Harrow 2010, 11, 61).

[10] Joyce expected to be called the "Irish Zola" at the outset of his career (Weir 1995, 43). He praised Ibsen for "portraying average lives in their uncompromising truth." See Joyce (1959, 63), Trotter (1999, 75). On the everyday in Joyce, Woolf and Proust, see Olson (2009).

[11] On the aesthetics of the everyday in naturalism, see Rossi (2008).

[12] "No other drama, no other action in this novel than the hunger."

[13] In the Anglophone context, the novel was conceived as even more decadent than it was in Norway. The decadent cover image of the first edition of *Hunger* by William T. Horton was inspired by the grotesque aspects of the work, playing on the attraction of repulsion. See Rem (2002, 68).

[14] In a letter to George Brandes, Hamsun responded to the former's judgment of *Sult* as monotonous: "My book must not be considered as a novel. There are enough authors who write novels when they write about hunger – from Zola to Kielland. And if it is a lack of the 'novelistic' that possibly makes my book monotonous, then that is in fact a recommendation, since I had made up my mind quite simply not to write a novel." Letter 064 to Georg Brandes in Hamsun (1990).

[15] The impulsivity and absurdity of Hamsun's characters were also noticed by contemporary readers. George Egerton (1921, ix) called Hamsun "a master of probing into unexplored crannies in the human soul, the mysterious territory of uncontrollable, half-conscious impulses." Octave Mirbeau (1961, 9–10) featured *Sult* as "a curious parade of unpredictable, strangely bizarre figures."

[16] Hamsun himself called Dostoyevsky "the only author I have learned something from" (see Nag 1998, 195).

[17] As argued by Gina M. Rossetti (2006, 25) in American literature, representation of the primitive undergoes a dramatic change in the modernist context; instead of the negative Darwinist interpretation of the primitive, the authors aestheticize primitive figures to escape the deadening modern culture.

[18] In *Kõrboja peremees*, this primitivism associates with something "nameless" (in Estonian "nimetu" cf. Tammsaare 1980, 8) in the nature of its male protagonist, the peasant Katku Villu. This "nameless" thing manifests itself above all through Villu's unbridled sexuality and his restless behavior driving him to drink, fight and work like crazy. Villu thus resembles Lehtonen's Villi (see Ahmala in this volume).

[19] For example, Joel Lehtonen's *Putkinotko* (1919–1920). On Lehtonen's depiction of rural people as "humane primitives," see Rossi (2013).

[20] "De ensomme mennesker, ja så stygge og altfor frodige, men et gode for hverandre, for dyrene og for jorden!" Hamsun (1963, 156).

[21] "en Vestalinde som som gjør op ild i en kokeovn." Hamsun (1963, 397).

[22] Otto Weininger exerted a considerable influence on Tammsaare although the latter was in critical dialog with Weininger's ideas, see Hinrikus (2015).

[23] For example, Tammsaare (1983, 235–236); see Hinrikus (2015).

[24] The group around Södergran was "the one major modernist 'movement' in the Nordic countries before the Second World War" (Eysteinsson 2007, 834). Jansson (2007) appropriates it into Swedish literature, as it strongly influenced later Swedish modernism on Swedish soil.

[25] Södergran developed the *fin de siècle* decadent women writers' paradoxical and complex involvement with Nietzsche (cf. Parente-Čapková 2004) and continued it into the twentieth century.

[26] According to Robert Pynsent (1989, 224), decadent imagery and influential decadent artists were still active in the 1920s, but "it was not until the pessimistic 1930s that the Decadence could have its first revival." Pynsent discusses Central, Eastern and Western European decadence.

[27] It may even annihilate the critique, satire's *raison d'être*. "Actual amelioration of social wrongs seems the farthest thing from Mirbeau's mind, even though his satire of society is rhetorically intense. In fact, the satire is so completely an exercise in righteous indignation that it lacks moral force altogether" Weir (1995, 155).

[28] Erich Auerbach evaluates these alternative ways of depicting reality strongly in favor of modernism. In his short discussion of Huysmans's (and Hamsun's) works, he sees these decadent texts as conveying an "extremely subjective, individualistic, and often eccentrically aberrant impression of reality," in other words, a "strictly unipersonal approach to reality" (Auerbach 1974, 536, 542). Therefore, they are unable "to ascertain anything objective or generally valid" in regard to reality and thus inferior to the "multipersonal representation of consciousness" in Woolf and Proust (ibid. 536).