Verses at the Burning of the World:
Modernism as a Fulfillment of Decadent Ideals

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Abstract

This thesis studies the transition between Decadent and Modernist poetry in England. The general critical perspectives of the evolution between the fin-de-siècle poetry of the 1890s and the high-Modernist verse of the 1920s were either of too great a separation, or too much a continuation. This study suggests that the Decadents were in fact precursors of the Modernists in their attempts to both stylistically and substantively challenge the dominant modes of poetry, its publication, and its relationship with the reading public in the face of the continued and exponential growth of industrialization, urbanization, commercialization, and other perceived consequences of modernity. For reasons such as the resistance of Victorian morality, the perception of corrupted ideals, belief in influence from the Continent, and the relative disorganization and self-destructive tendencies of its figures, the Decadent poets were largely unable to realize their goal of restructuring poetry and challenging the superiority of modernity. The groundwork they did, however, allowed the Modernist poets who were to become well-known thirty years later to make the revolutionary changes that garnered the Modernist movement the critical and populist importance it had contemporaneously and still has today.

Through a mixture of historical and formalist criticism, this thesis attempts to define briefly both Decadent and the Modernist poetry, and trace the transition between the two literary eras. It looks closely at many of the dominant figures in each movement, and links them together within three significant themes that they shared: alienation, disintegration, and reconstruction.

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Dedication

For Jen, and for my beautiful girls Elliot and Finley. I was gone often for this process, and you were always smiling when I returned.

For mom, because you always knew this would happen, even if I wasn't sure. And for my sister and my dad, who would have loved to have seen this.

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Chapter One: Introduction

"The ideal of the Decadence: to be a disembodied voice, and yet the voice of the human soul" – Arthur Symons

The conviction of Oscar Wilde for gross indecency in May 1895 spurred W.E. Henley to claim that "there is not a man or woman in the English-speaking world possessed of the treasure of a wholesome mind who is not under a deep debt of gratitude to the Marquess of Queensberry[1] for destroying the High Priest of the Decadents" (qtd. in Beckson, *London in the 1890s: A Cultural History* 218). The general population seemed to agree, and despite some scattered words in defense of Wilde, the poets and the lifestyles associated with Decadence suffered a blow. "Wilde's arrest precipitated an extraordinary panic in London literary and social circles" (Beckson 216), and publishers, artists, poets, and media sources associated with Decadence or its proponents struggled to find an audience, most only remaining successful by distancing themselves from the furor around Wilde's emblematic case. The trial and Wilde's sentence of two years hard labour in Reading Gaol solidified the general public's hostile attitude towards the avant-garde of the time, and in fact influenced the attitude towards the era for many years to come.

As an artistic and literary era, nineteenth-century fin-de-siècle British Decadence has a contentious critical history. It was censured contemporaneously by writers such as Max Nordau, W.E. Henley, Richard Le Gallienne, and by critics as well as satirists for vacuity or shallowness, obsession with degradation, lack of originality in its texts, and for the lifestyles of many figures associated with the movement. This fraught attitude

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[1] The Marquess of Queensberry was John Sholto Douglas, the father of Wilde's young partner Lord Alfred Douglas. The Marquess was responsible for initiating and encouraging the indecency trial of Wilde.

towards the work and the poets resulted in the treatment of the era in the early twentieth century as significant only in relation to other literary moments like Romanticism or Modernism, or, as seen in Holbrook Jackson's seminal defense of the era in 1913, a focus on definition as the primary work of criticism.[2] Although Jackson calls the Decadent period as "legendary as the Shakespearian or Johnsonian eras" (11), that status did not accrue to the era in the criticism of the twentieth century; at best, the critical work on Decadence has been uneven. The Modernist poets and critics adopted a general attitude of respectful pity, although Pound, Eliot, and Yeats all admitted a minor debt to the poets of the Decadent movement. The Modernist critics and poets had a great deal at stake in acknowledging the import of the Decadent movement as a progenitor: the ideas of political and literary revolution inherent in Modernism cannot but suffer from the erstwhile gloomy figures of Decadence. There is also the tendency to conflate the specific work of the Decadent artists with all of the art produced in the 1890s. Often, "critics have viewed the poetic fin de siècle as a somewhat effete transitional era located between two altogether momentous epochs" (Bristow 1) of Victorianism and Modernism, and this attitude has contributed to the neglect of the Decadent era until the latter decades of the 20th century. As in other areas of research that share a history of disagreement about critical value and significance, the critical openings of many works on Decadence, especially up to the 1980s, focus on defining terms, differentiating it from other movements, and ascribing or denying membership to literary figures. These works often get so mired in this work of defending the topic that they have trouble identifying

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[2] Jackson began the work of retrospectively defining the fin de siècle, though as one of the first to look closely at the poets and poetry of the 1890s his failure to claim the ongoing relevance of the era can be forgiven. It is often the case that early work on an historical movement pays most attention to the membership and the general characteristics, which is what Jackson does.

other significant qualities of the era. Even in the middle of the twentieth century, critics

like Wendell Harris contended that coming to a conclusion about the definition of

Decadence was "essentially profitless" (2), and that the best effort would be to "accept

the term as necessarily broad and vague, and simply attempt to sort out those works

which were seen during the period of the term's greatest currency in England…as

contributing to the atmosphere of decadence" (2). Later in the century, however, it

became clear that some work of definition was in fact possible, and perhaps necessary.[3]

Consequently, a significant amount of scholarship interested in defining the parameters

of Decadence has been written.

I am more interested in the role of Decadence in a larger historical and cultural

arc. It has been largely overlooked in its relationship with other eras, existing mostly as a

footnote to Modernism. It was perceived as too mired in sensibility; its vague and gauzy

imagery and syntax were too fulsome for the pared-down concrete Modernist ideal.

There are, however, too many significant parallels and connections between the

Decadent poets and the Modernists to ignore. As I will outline in what follows, there is a

significant difference in the reception and the success of Decadence and Modernism both

as the movements were taking form and in scholarship since. Looking at both artistic

eras from a primarily historical perspective, but also with an eye for the stylistic

progressions inherent in each, I intend to identify the very similar thematic arcs of both

movements while accounting for the ability of Modernism to achieve, in its lifetime and

later, some critical and commercial success where Decadence struggled. The relationship

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[3] Two essays, "Towards a Definition of Decadent as Applied to British Literature of the Nineteenth Century" by Clyde de L. Ryals, and a response called "Towards an 'Un-Definition' of Decadent as Applied to British Literature of the Nineteenth Century" by Robert Peters, published in 1958 and 1959 respectively, seem to be the markers of a revitalization of the Decadent conversation.

between the two eras is problematic, but I have come to the conclusion that Modernism is in fact a fulfillment of Decadent ideals.

The term Decadence has a variety of origins, but certainly came into usage for some French poets like Baudelaire, Verlaine, and Mallarmé around the middle of the nineteenth century. In Britain, though it arrived a bit late, Decadence appeared as a natural result of the end of the Victorian consensus of ideals, brought about by cultural disappointment and the need for novelty (Perkins 31). The debate about the definition of the term is also problematized by its existence alongside similar and overlapping movements such as Symbolism, Impressionism, and Aestheticism, and the myriad influences of Decadent movements in France, Italy, and Spain. Decadence and the Decadents are also difficult to pin down due to the unwillingness of individual poets to align themselves with the movement while it was in progress or to affirm their membership later in life, and the tendency, as Linda Dowling puts it, to consider individuals as typical of groups and groups as typical of the entire movement (*Aestheticism and Decadence* xiii). One of the primary poetic and critical voices in Decadence, Arthur Symons, provided an early definition of British Decadence in an essay called "The Decadent Movement in Literature."[4] He believed the term Decadence captured "the most representative literature of the day" that "is no doubt a decadence; it has all the qualities that mark the end of great periods: an intense self-consciousness, a restless curiosity in research, and over-subtilizing refinement upon refinement, a spiritual

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[4] Symons' essay, originally published in 1893 in *Harper's New Monthly Magazine*, was intended as a response to public criticism of Decadent writing by other authors like Richard Le Gallienne, and took the perceived weaknesses of Decadence as strengths. Later, in 1908, Symons republished a book-length version of the essay called *The Symbolist Movement in Literature,* clarifying his definitions but mostly distancing himself from the term 'Decadence' following the trial of Oscar Wilde and other image-damaging incidents.

and moral perversity" (858-9). He accentuates the newness and separateness from art characterised by harmony and balance, because the altered forms of art in the Decadence are "certainly typical of a civilization grown over-luxurious, over-inquiring, too languid for the relief of action, too uncertain for any emphasis in opinion of in conduct" (859). This definition was taken wholeheartedly by the public and other poets alike, and held for many years.[5] Outside of this generalized definition, however, there is an additional issue with definition of Decadence: whether the definition refers primarily to the socio-historical qualities of the art and the artists, or the stylistic and linguistic advances of the movement. Symons felt that both held importance in consideration of Decadence as a movement, but he privileges the historical moment represented in the work.

Many critics shy away from using Decadence as the catch-all term for the artistic movement in the last two decades of the nineteenth century, primarily because it has the strongest, and usually negative, associations with the questionable moral and social attributes of the poetry and the poets. However, as Arthur Symons did in 1893's "The Decadent Movement in Literature," David Weir, expanding on the work of Jean Pierrot and George Ross Ridge, considers Decadence the over-arching idea. His definition accounts for the often contradictory qualities of Decadent literature by using the apparently oppositional dialectics themselves – religion and science, nature and art,

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[5] I am confining my discussion primarily to British Decadence, barring specific instances where acknowledging the other European Decadent movements is relevant. This is difficult, as there were other important movements in Italy, Germany, Spain, and most importantly France. The French movement in particular was more clearly defined as a school or movement, and influenced British Decadents and Modernists alike, but to fully outline the history of the term and the philosophy would overextend the purview of this argument. Similarly, I will acknowledge earlier instances of Decadent thought in Britain, especially Swinburne, Rossetti, and Pater, when the relevance to later figures cannot be ignored. Suffice to say, there are many excellent discussions of this historical background of literary Decadence – see Matthew Sturgis' *Passionate Attitudes*, Karl Beckson's *London in the 1890s*, *The Decadent Imagination* by Jean Pierrot, *The Decadent Dilemma* by R.K.R. Thornton, Murray Pittock's *Spectrum of Decadence,* and many others.

romanticism and realism, refinement and brutality – as the stable referent. I agree with Weir's use of these contradictory ideas as they capture well the inherent instability and contrariness of Decadence, but he ends up using the idea only in terms of prose – he instead uses a far less rigorously defined concept of Symbolism for verse. Definitions of Decadence, whether contemporaneous by Lionel Johnson, Anatole Baju, Symons, and Nietzsche, or more recently by Joseph Bristow, Linda Dowling, Marion Thain and others, all concede the movement's necessary engagement with the ideas of decline and degradation, self-consciousness, disease and decay, an updating of tradition, and the intense dislike for cultural norms.

I use Decadence rather than Symbolism, Aestheticism, or Impressionism throughout this work because I believe that, while it encapsulates the technical and stylistic aspects of the others in question, it emphasizes the "autonomy and supremacy of art" (Perkins 10) and foregrounds the importance of the attitudes of the poets towards the milieu in which they wrote. If their intent was to capture and critique the state of life in modern Britain at the end of the century, then their reaction to that life thematically must be considered most significant. I also use Decadent to refer primarily to the group of poets associated with a reaction against the still-dominant Victorian literary mode. As with all literary movements and eras, it is dangerous to refer to a specific group as representative of the whole time period or all the art produced therein. These poets were not the dominant poets of the era – they were in the minority.

Definitions of literary Modernism are similarly fraught. Modernism raises the same problem as Decadence, in the sense that the word means something significant outside of its attribution to an artistic movement. For Modernism this problem is even

more pronounced, as modern simply means that which is new in every age. Like the relationship between Decadence and the other contemporary movements, the term Modernism has been used to "cover a wide variety of movements subversive of the realist or the romantic impulse and disposed towards abstraction" (Bradbury and MacFarlane 23). There are, however, other qualities which can be recognized by A.N Whitehead's criteria for the definition of style, where there is a "conscious mannerism, elected by some writers…which expresses a prevailing, dominant or authentically contemporary view of the world by those artists who have most successfully intuited the quality of the human experience peculiar to their day" (qtd. in Bradbury and MacFarlane 24). Some of those qualities are a quality of abstraction and highly conscious artifice; subversion of reality; abandoning familiar functions of language and form; and the movement towards sophistication, introversion, technical display, and dehumanization in aesthetic refinement (24). A very significant consideration of the Modernist label applied to poetry is that it is no more representative of all the work during the early part of the twentieth century than is Decadence of its own decade. As critical distance allows, however, the Modernist poets have come to be identified more wholly with their era, to the point that we retrospectively refer to the entire period as Modernist, though the label doesn't apply to many of the artists of the time.

Much of the work on Decadence is spent defining the particular stylistic and thematic traits that characterise the movement. Rodensky, Thornton, de Sola Pinto, Pittock, and others ably continue the early work of Holbrook Jackson in exploring the era's qualities and personalities, but ignore the most significant aspect of the era and its writing – that as well as the excellent verse, prose, and criticism the Decadent movement

produced, its most important contribution was to be the real starting point for the crucial literature of the twentieth century. In Decadence was the true advent of literary Modernism. Little attention has been paid to situating the movement in its historical and literary era, and especially in establishing its relationship to its predecessors and successors. To accentuate the primary role of Decadence as the precursor of Modernism, I will employ two approaches. I intend to balance a formalist approach with a historical one. I concur with Perkins' assertion that whatever their associations, these poets were fundamentally formalists (32) and the advancements in style and form the Decadents made are of paramount importance, but I will be particularly attentive to historical context, as I believe that the circumstances that allow Modernists to fulfill the Decadents' ideals depended significantly on the historical and cultural milieu.

The ability of Modernist poetry to find critical and commercial success while remaining censorious of contemporary middle-class society and the comparative inability of Decadence to do so is troubling. For decades, the small group of Decadent poets in the late nineteenth century were seen as the poets that did not fit the dominant contemporary art paradigm, and were contrasted with the likes of Henley and Davidson. Holbrook Jackson saw an important difference as the 1890s were "not, primarily, a period of achievement, but rather of effort: suggestive, tentative, rather than formative" (12). He seems to suggest that Decadence, but for a surfeit of self-consciousness, began the important steps towards Modernism as it came to be, but offers no reason for the shift from effort to achievement. The potential reasons are many, and they include the supposed skill of the poets chosen as representative, the awareness of a changing literary marketplace, a more receptive populace after the upheaval of the early 20th century, and

the more densely populated cities and international trade and travel that spread ideas more quickly. But there are many similarities between the two groups of poets that suggest their trajectory should have been much more similar: they each struggled with the dominance of the cult of progress and the newly powerful middle class and the commercial capitalism it represented, they suffered as poetry was a secondary genre in popularity, both groups of poets were small and loosely organized, and they wrote initially for similar audiences. So what allowed the success of the Modernists? Bradbury and MacFarlane contend that Modernism is

> the one art that responds to the scenario of our chaos. It is the art consequent
> on Heisenberg's 'uncertainty principle,' of the destruction of civilization and
> reason in the First World War, of the world changed and reinterpreted by
> Marx, Freud, and Darwin, of capitalism and constant industrial acceleration,
> of existential exposure to meaninglessness or absurdity…It is the art
> consequent on the dis-establishing of communal reality and conventional
> notions of the wholeness of individual character, on the linguistic chaos that
> ensues when public notions of language have been discredited, and when all
> realities have become subjective fictions (27).

The problem is that except for World War I, the same can be said of the Decadents and their situation. Marx, Freud, Darwin, and I would add Nietzsche, were all writing or had written by the 1890s. The intense urbanization of London from 1850 on had already altered the sense of communal reality fundamentally. So, what made it possible for the Decadents to be reviled for the same things that allowed the Modernist poets to become the voice of an entire era? It comes down primarily to public reception and public

perception. Put simply, the Late Victorian middle class and general public were not ready for the message of the Decadents. Instead, they referred to the Decadents as devolved and childish. After the turn of the century and then the nihilism of the post-First World War years when the cult of progress revealed itself to be an illusion, the public was much more receptive to the Modernists' perception of a "crisis of culture" with the artist "under specific, apparently historical strain" (26). The reading public, now comprised more fully of the middle class, was much more willing to allow an artist to be an individual and to espouse a philosophy of individualism. The change is further made possible by a simple shift from the Decadent's relative status as secondary and anti-populist to the perception of Modernism as the "movement which expressed the modern consciousness" (28), and while Modernism is not the only stream, it is the primary literature identified with the movement and the time.

Many different perspectives on the date of this shift exist, usually between the 1910 date asserted by Virginia Woolf[6] and other, later dates, like the important publishing year of 1922, but the most significant is the onset of the First World War because the "war itself can be recognized as the apocalyptic moment of transition into the new" (Bradbury and MacFarlane 51). The Victorian sense of Empire, peace, and prosperity did not end with the turning of the century. Tensions were rising between the powers of Europe, but were seen as part of power politics (Bullock 61) and despite this the Edwardian peace ensured the "middle and upper classes of England…enjoyed a

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[6] Virginia Woolf famously, if hyperbolically and somewhat ironically, claimed that 1910 was the year that politics, religion, and literature were forever altered. It is true that Fry's art exhibition drew the English attention to newer forms of visual art, and the early Bloomsbury group was making attempts to unsettle the remnants of Victorian sensibility, but the year's advancements pale in comparison to the War and the publishing that would follow. Woolf was very much aware of the difficulty in exactly identifying cultural shifts to historical dates.

freedom and a security almost impossible to recapture" (62). In fact, as an extension of

the late Victorian period, the middle class was doing so well that there was an ease and

grace of living unparalleled, coupled with, but not antithetical to, "open, uninhibited

acceptance of inequality, power and wealth, class and racial superiority" (62).[7] It was an

age "remarkably unselfconscious, self-confident, far less troubled by the anxieties, fears

and fantasies, the self-consciousness and guilt" (62) that would come after the War. As

Bullock remarks, no one living in this idyllic world "supposed that, when [the War] was

finally over, the Europe of 1914 would be gone forever" (61).

The historical context of the 1890s is critical to the attempts made by the

Decadents to address art and late-Victorian British culture, and the Modernists'

subsequent refining of those attempts. It was a time of contradictions. Religious faith

struggled against the rise of evolutionary and medical science. The echoes of the

Industrial Revolution and the associated cult of progress had ensured the dominance of

capitalism, critics of which were increasingly characterised as Romantics and Luddites

or who self-identified as Socialists or Communists. The advent of moving pictures,

airplanes, and automobiles fed the desire of the populace for innovation. It was the era of

Social Darwinism, the Nietzschean Superman, and the New Woman. The Decadent poets

of the avant-garde set themselves in opposition to many of the established Victorian

traits. The assumption of the rational character of the human mind, the tendency towards

optimism through progress, and the ethical idealism that had filled the void left by the

declining sense of religious moral absolutism were all essential qualities of the late

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[7] Kaplan and Simpson contend that it "became a truism to assert that the culture immediately preceding the chaos had offered an idyllic interval" (vii) and that it was primarily an act of fond recall or nostalgia after the horrors of the War.

Victorian sensibility. Those beliefs were pervasive in the newly powerful middle class, and the Decadents responded with satire and denial in an attempt to negate them.

The biting satire of the Decadents "[has] obscured the crucial role [they] played in the development of Modernism," but many qualities of the Modernists had "been prepared in the last decades of the nineteenth century" (Beckson, *London in the 1890s: A Cultural History* 381). There are a few critics who have begun the work of clarifying the connection between Decadence and Modernism. Matei Calinescu persuasively argues that Decadence was itself a significant movement away from Romantic ideals and the catalyst for the attainment of the desired ends of Modernism. David Perkins suggests that the poetry of the 1890s "forms the immediate background and matrix of the Modernists' work" (3), but while he very adeptly suggests the connection between the two eras, he offers few case studies or concrete examples. Marion Thain refers to the relationship between the eras as one of *homage* (22)*, arguing that the Modernists both hated and revered the Decadents. The Modernists were not the most vocal critics of the Decadent era that had preceded them – the greatest critics of the Decadent movement were their contemporaries and the public at large. David Weir, the most useful author for my purposes, argues in *Decadence and the Making of Modernism* that Decadence, rather than being a passing footnote to the end of the Victorian era, is in fact the most significant movement in the space between Romanticism and Modernism. However, he chooses themes like sickness, decay, perversion, and artificiality, which, though specific, do not capture what I see as the response to the socio-cultural reality shared by both Decadents and Modernists. His project is to use Decadent and Modernist fiction to link the movements together, but he makes only passing reference to verse and claims that

Symbolism is likely the more appropriate term for the movement that links the two together.

The view of English Modernism as a radical shift from what had come previously in art and as the harbinger of a new era in literature is a pervasive one. Some critics, like Cassandra Laity, suggest that "it is taken for granted that theories of modernism emerged *in reaction against* Romanticism and particularly the Decadent Romanticism of the nineties" ("H.D. and A.C. Swinburne: Decadent and Modernist Women's Writing" 464 – emphasis added). As noted by both Thain and Bristow, the relationship between the two eras has also often been viewed as one of either rift or continuation – that is, either there is a significant break between the eras or the latter is an extension of the former. Bradbury and McFarlane propose that, for Modernism, a "general article of belief… [that] the idea of a Great Divide between past and present…has drawn much allegiance" (21). As I will show, however, these views are too simplistic. The idea of a significant rift does not account for the proximity of years, the high number of major poets who span the eras, such as Yeats and Hardy, and most importantly, the similarities in worldview, style, and theme. The artistic and public reaction against the perceived degradation of the Decadents caused a "massive, many-sided repudiation of the avant-garde of the generation before" (Perkins 61) and made the period from 1900 to World War I seem much longer than the actual years. This is a potential source of the sense of rift that divided the Decadents from the Moderns. While the years separating the two eras were few, there were two significant sub-movements that interrupted the evolution of the avant-garde work of the Decadents – the Edwardian and the Georgian. On the other hand, the idea of continuation does not allow for the change in the socio-political

reality of England and Europe, the change in many of the foremost poets, or the radical poetics of those figures. Perkins comes closer with the term 'revival,' but this also suggests failure or inaction on the part of the Decadents, and Thain's characterization of *homage* mistakes the reaction of the Modernists as reactive against Decadence rather than against sociocultural modernity. I will characterise the relationship of these two eras in terms of completion or fulfillment. I contend in this thesis that Modernist poetry is a realization of the goals of Decadent poetry, which ultimately are to acknowledge, record, and respond to the Victorian sensibility mentioned earlier by refining corruption through new forms and purposes of art.[8]

I plan to look closely at three major themes and related literary devices that largely define both eras and link them together. These themes appear in many works in both eras, and they are alienation, disintegration, and reconstruction. I will show that while Decadent and Modernist poets share these thematic concerns, for the Decadents there is neither a clear cause against which to rail, nor is there resolution, while for the Moderns the causes of their sense of ennui and decay are much more clearly elucidated and they are afforded a greater opportunity for resolution. In this way, my project expands on the work of Calinescu, Perkins, Thain, and Weir, and addresses the lack of clarity, the incorrect or simplistic characterisations in the relationship, and the strength of poetic examples addressed by those critics.

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[8] In late 2014, Vincent Sherry published a book called *Modernism and the Reinvention of Decadence*, which is doing a similar thing to what I intend to do here: resituating Decadence as a significant antecedent of Modernism. Alas I came to the book too late to incorporate it significantly into my work here, but interestingly Sherry identifies several of the same issues with the reduction of the significance of Decadence as I do. He suggests that Decadence holds sway above Symbolism because it incorporates the historical and social importance of the fin de siècle. He also acknowledges the resistance to the legacy of Decadence that Modernist poets and critics espouse, mostly because of the unpleasant thematic and social connections. He carefully outlines the deliberate reduction of Decadence as a concept, and accuses Symbolist and Modernist critics of actively removing it from the lexicon and history because of its problematic connotations.

The first chapter addresses the theme of alienation. Alienation appears on two levels for both the Decadents and the Modernists – it is both the individual separated from personal identity and a cultural role to decry the cult of progress, and the tension in the poetry between art for public consumption and art for art's sake. Both groups share an attitude of veneration for individualism, and this sets them apart from their respective cultural milieus. For the Decadents, alienation is forced upon them by the world at large, and they largely accept it and do not attempt to re-integrate; instead they are content to offer up dark images of the modern world and its destruction of the human spirit. The Modernists take up a more active position. They remove themselves from popular society, largely positioning themselves as acerbic critics. In particular, this chapter will address poems by Oscar Wilde, Arthur Symons, T.S. Eliot, and H.D., and look at literary synaesthesia – a device that I will show in both the Decadents and the Modernists is associated with alienation. "The Ballad of Reading Gaol" is Oscar Wilde's most significant and well-known poem, in which he details his alienation from a society he misunderstood and that has now turned on him. In "To One in Alienation," Symons details his separation from his love and the sense of completion that is associated with her. For T.S. Eliot, the characters of "Portrait of a Lady" and "Sweeney among the Nightingales" represent all that is wrong with the modern world: the modern world to which the poet feels he doesn't belong. Finally, excerpts from H.D.'s collections *Hymen* and *Heliodora* capture the artist's disenchantment with England and her yearning for the majesty of Ancient Greece.

In Chapter Two, I take up the theme of disintegration, which also functions on two levels – as a cultural and personal response to a quickly changing world in which

modernisation and capitalism are taking hold, and the sense of dehumanization that the increasingly business-minded world engenders (Ortega 14). The progress of individualism and relativism is explored as natural developments in the process of modernisation, and expressed through the use of synecdoche. This chapter contrasts Ernest Dowson's "Non Sum Qualis Eram Bonae sub Regno Cynarae" and Symons' "Maquillage" and "Hands" with Edith Sitwell's "On the Vanity of Human Aspiration," "The Man with the Green Patch," and several works by D.H. Lawrence, to contrast the changed awareness and response to an indifferent world between the Decadents and the Modernists.

Finally, in spite of the unsettled and unresolved historical milieu, both Decadent and Modernist poets seek a form of reconstruction. In Chapter Three I show that the attempt to rediscover meaning does not, for either movement, find footing in tradition, as the Decadents selectively choose traditional elements to update but eschew looking back in general, and Modernism is dependent only on innovation. Both have figures that turn to faith, though often for different reasons and at different points, and neither movement looks to the natural world as the Romantics did; instead, both seem to further emphasise the individual and the artificial. The focus of both eras on the artificial and their complicated relationship with history resulted in a shared complex and synthetic system of allusion. I also examine the degree to which the things they look to for reconstruction, like faith, populist art, and media, are in fact the things from which they were initially alienated. In this chapter I revisit Wilde's "Reading Gaol" and Arthur Symons, and look at selections by Lionel Johnson, John Davidson, and John Gray's *Silverpoints*. The

Modernist search for meaning comes through work by D.H. Lawrence, Ezra Pound, H.D. and T.S. Eliot again.

By way of conclusion, the final chapter views W.B. Yeats, a poet and critic who wrote extensively through both eras, as a counter-instance. By looking at poems that span Yeats' publication history, I will show that his work functions as a microcosm of my argument: his later work is itself a fulfillment of his own goals and ideals seen in his earlier poetry while addressing the themes of alienation, disintegration, and reconstruction.

Chapter Two: Caliban's Mirror

"The nineteenth century's hatred of Realism is Caliban's enraged reaction to seeing his own face in the mirror. The nineteenth century's rejection of Romanticism is Caliban's fury at not seeing his face reflected in the mirror." - Oscar Wilde

"Humanity is the rich effluvium, it is the waste and the manure and the soil, and from it grows the tree of the arts." - Ezra Pound

Both the Decadent and the Modernist poets sought to retreat from the world, but at first blush Britain was still immensely powerful and globally important. By the end of the nineteenth century, general optimism was fuelled by increased literacy rates, international trade developments, scientific discovery and technological innovation like faster railroads, ocean-going steamships, photography, electric lighting, and advancements in physics and chemistry. The Victorian British public thought of their age as 'modern' (Beckson, *London in the 1890s: A Cultural History* xii), and these advancements and the achievements in physical science did more than anything else to "convert the imaginations of men to the general doctrine of progress" (Bury 113). Amidst this optimism and progress, however, a few experienced a strong sense of disillusionment with a developing country losing touch with artistic, moral, and spiritual values. Some artists in particular felt out of touch with the cult of progress, and negative consequences of the Industrial Revolution like poor working conditions for low wages, pollution and health risks, and overcrowding, for example, were felt acutely, particularly in London. Many poets rejected Victorian tradition and modern culture – they were melancholy stylists in retreat from the modern world, for which they felt a strong aversion (Perkins 10). The capitalist and utilitarian tenets of an industrial culture ensured that the Decadents "and their art did not fit in, they did not function organically within

society's natural evolution, and therefore by definition were degenerate rather than progressive" (Haley 215). Into the early twentieth century, T.S. Eliot claimed several times, in letters to *The Dial* for instance, that the traditional Georgian poetry of the time was artistically bankrupt because it pandered to the general public and was dominated by the middle-class sensibilities it was written for (*London Letters*). In the late 1910s, the more commercially successful and publicly approved Georgian poetry showed Eliot, Pound, and others in their circle that the self-proclaimed Modernists were out of step with modern Britain. In this chapter, I will explore some of the reasons the artists of both the Decadent and Modernist movement felt alienated from modern society, and the effects of that alienation on their work. I will then look at some poetry by Oscar Wilde, Arthur Symons, T.S. Eliot, and H.D. to illustrate this personal and cultural alienation as demonstrated in the poetry itself and particularly through the use of synaesthesia as a device to express it.

The social and psychological effects of industrialisation and urbanisation[9] which "enslaved millions of workers in gloomy industries and created cities of dreadful night" (Beckson xiii), were seen everywhere in the physical setting of London and in its inhabitants. Linking the Decadents and Modernists together is the sensation of alienation: as a "reaction to the rise of modernity in the nineteenth century, Decadence contains the psychological tropes that developed in twentieth-century war and peacetime,

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[9] The population of London increased to 4 million by 1890, and 72% of the population of England was urban, up from 50% in 1861. An agricultural depression from the 1870s to the 1890s exacerbated the problem – poor harvests, declining arable land, low prices for wheat and other products, and lower-priced imports caused an additional 3 million people to move to cities in those twenty years (Fletcher).

of ennui becoming a pathological withdrawal from reality" (Krockel 14).[10] The

Decadents wished to remove themselves from the causes and the effects of progress, but

remained immersed in London and so were forced to reflect the world around them even

as they retreated into their own world to create a Petronian[11] decadent style which is "the

agonisingly beautiful lament of the dying civilisation" (Beckson, *London in the 1890s: A*

Cultural History 44). Other contrary perspectives, like the conflict between religion and

science, created tension in the worldview of late Victorians. Darwin's theory of

evolution had gained ground, although the idea of evolution was yet poorly understood

and many writers in various fields blithely applied ideas of evolution to society. Some of

these theories were then applied to the Decadents,[12] although Symons implied that the

application of these ideas actually "justified the avant-garde artist's sense of superiority

to and alienation from the common man" (Beckson, *London in the 1890s: A Cultural*

History 65).

By the early part of the 20th century, the Decadents' disdain for the industrial

world's factories and commercialism was a luxury the artists of the Modern movement

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[10] The description of the progression of ennui is important here – the general malaise that is often associated with the Romantics is, at the end of the 19th century, much more. It is a deeper response, like Baudelaire's almost paralyzing depression or neurosis.

[11] I use this term to denote the style of the work of Petronius, who wrote during the age of Nero near the end of the Roman Empire. The later Romans were the Classical inspirations for the Decadents, rather than the High Romans that inspired those of the 17th and early 18th century. The style is characterized by a focus on details other than plot, the emphasis of beauty and pleasure that echoed Petronius' life as a seeker of luxury, and the use of satire and allusion. Gautier was one of many to connect the Decadent style to the late Roman, calling them both "already mottled with the greenness of decomposition" (qtd. in van Roosbroeck 8). Sturgis refers to the late Roman style where language had been "corrupted [by] new words, strange syntactical quirks, awkward constructions" (10) and Decadent poets thought that by "borrowing the literary styles of decadent Rome…they would be better able to reflect and express the thoughts and feelings of their own decadent age" (10).

[12] Max Nordau's *Degeneration*, translated to English from the 1892 German tract, is the most famous example. Nordau was a physician and novelist who said that the Decadents exhibited madness and degenerate morality. Others, like Maudsley, Ellis, and Nisbet, took the idea of pathological states of mind and applied it variously to the poetry and philosophy of the Decadents.

could no longer afford. In a consideration of Modernism's advent and defining events, attention must be paid to the 1890s and the "intensifying discovery that the thrust of modern consciousness raised issues that were more than representational, were crucially aesthetic problems in the making of structures and the employment of language and the social role of the artist himself" (Bradbury and MacFarlane 49). The issues associated with Modernism were very much a product of the end of the nineteenth century, largely due to the modernisation of Britain and the internationalisation of its economy – leading up to 1913, the "expansion of the international economy was more rapid than ever before or since" (Bullock 59). Around 1900, London, along with Paris and Berlin, was at the centre of an increasingly powerful and wide-reaching network of industrial, commercial and financial communications. The technological advancements of the end of the nineteenth century continued unabated, and the expansion of London that had begun years ago resulted in the shape of the early twentieth century as "urbanized, industrialized, mechanized, its life shaped to the factory or office" (60). Urbanization and imperialism had not slowed: by 1910, London itself had a population of over 6 million people, and the British Empire covered one quarter of the earth and included some 400 million people. The social structure had changed little; it remained stratified, though the traditional upper class now shared space with new money as wealth became the "single common denominator, arrogant and ostentatious in the vulgarity of its taste" (60). For the Modernists, facing this wealth-based capitalist ethos became like being a single soldier in a global conflict. The ability to see the reality of the industrial age was immensely difficult, and the Modernist poets endured "an analogous condition to industrial alienation in the social alienation of the city" (Krockel 10). The continued

economic development of Britain and London in particular is a primary factor in the natural development of the art of the Modernists from the Decadents. The hostility to the Decadents required the Modernists to shift tactics and audiences to find critical and financial success.

The substantive change in the poetry from the Decadent poets through to the Modernists hinges largely on their reaction to industrialisation representative of modernity. The Modernist poets felt their poetry should reflect a difficult and complicated world. The resulting obscurity that is often associated with Modernist poetry is accepted as a natural consequence of this reflection, but Delmore Schwartz identifies a more apt and less simple explanation for the nature of the poetry. He contends that there are two aspects of poetic response to the modern industrialised and capitalised England – the process of separation and eventual divide between intellect and sensibility brought about by the conflict between the traditionally imaginative world of poetry and the rational basis of the physical sciences, and the tendency for poets and poetry to become more introverted and self-referential in the face of the loss of familiar poetic subject matter (211-213). The consequence of this division is that the Decadent and Modernist poet finds that he is a stranger and an outsider who is separated from everyone because of the fundamental disjunction between his work as an artist and the values of modern society. The movement towards aestheticism and obscurity in Decadent poetry that was then furthered in Modernism was the direct result of the turning inwards and towards other art for inspiration because of the poets' inability to reflect the world around them in a poetic way.

This disjunction between art and reality led the poets of both eras to openly criticize their respective milieus. David Perkins suggests that the Decadents believed that great art was impersonal, and that it is not "formed or influenced by the prevailing attitudes of the age" (36). From an historical perspective this is unlikely, and even the poets of the movement did not make this claim. Bristow suggests that the Decadents "thought to express an intense dissatisfaction with the idealism of inherited cultural forms" (11). It is much more likely that the desire for separation from the historical moment was the same for both the Decadents and the Modernists. The gradual disintegration of the "mainstream Victorian literary culture, with its social centrality and its sense of progress and positivism, was a disintegration which left the artist isolated either in the precisions…of his own artistry…, or else in a new and stressful view of his own relationship to society" (Bradbury 174).[13]

Exile from modern and popular society functioned in two primary ways for the poets of both eras. The first was the individual artist separated from a personal identity and cultural significance because of the industrial and social modernity of the time. The second was the new role of art as a public consumable. Both of these versions of alienation were closely tied to the idea of individuality. Both the Decadents and Modernists took individualism as a central tenet of their art and their philosophy, and this immediately set them apart from the dominant social norms of their respective eras. For the Decadents in particular, the desire and call for autonomy caused conflict with the

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[13] This transition is accentuated in art by the development from art that had spent "a hundred years of adulation of the masses and apotheosis of the people" (Ortega 6) to Decadent and then to Modernist art that made no secret of its desire to appeal to an elect reader, humiliating and estranging the common reader in the face of an art he cannot understand (6). The movement towards aestheticism and away from realism contributed to the alienation of the artists in the Decadent movement, as it further removed the general public from the art that did not reduce the "strictly aesthetic elements to a minimum and let the work consist almost entirely in a fiction of human realities" (11).

reading public, because for the Victorian public the "concept of individualism was fraught with apprehension, for it implied private judgement in a society that had traditionally relied on absolute truths" (Beckson, *London in the 1890s: A Cultural History* 18). In the 1890s, voices were raised in "repudiation of two of the most cherished beliefs of the nineteenth century liberal mind – that society and not the individual was the real custodian of human values, and that 'truth' once established was absolute" (MacFarlane 80). The 1890s, however, bequeathed to the early 20th Century a new sensibility: the loner or exile was no longer the Romantic "reject of a self-confident society, but rather those who, because they stood outside, were uniquely placed in an age when subjectivity was truth to speak with vision and authority…and the custodies of life's integrities began to pass from society to the individual" (82). This particular shift in the dominant paradigm denotes one of the most important points of the Modernists' success where the Decadents had failed.

The burgeoning middle class, which had come to prominence as a result of the Industrial Revolution, was seen as an identifiable enemy who offered nothing to artists but the uneducated and unrefined desire for mass-produced low art. The Decadents and the Modernists shared an "aversion to popular art and populist tastes" (Weir 16) and were part of a movement that "transform[ed] 'the folk' into 'the masses'" (16), though there is some irony in the fact that these artists who feared popular regard mostly drew their small audience from the newly solvent and scorned ranks of the bourgeoisie. The immense growth in the literate class meant that the

> reading, listening, looking public, was expanding with each clanking revolution of
>
> the industrial machine…but as industrial processes mass-produced coarse versions

of what was once hand-made, so…industrial society mass-produced a readership with coarsened tastes, lacking in those refinements that marked the aristocratic connoisseurs of the past, and wanting only amusement and relaxation at the end of exhausting labours. (Sturgis 13)

The rise in literacy created another problem for "the aspiring literary man: there was now a clear separation of literature from journalism" (Sloan 47). Sensational journalism supplanted political or literary news, and while the approximately eighteen hundred periodicals published in London alone should have meant an increased opportunity for artists, most did not benefit because the periodicals were not directed or inclined towards presenting new poetry. For Wilde and other Decadents, those who found beauty in beautiful things were the 'elect,' while the "uneducated and uncultured masses in Victorian society…were doomed to the ugliness of the industrial age and the mediocrity of their own narrow minds" (Beckson 50). In a culture which Symons claimed celebrated the crushing of all noble and beautiful things, the "serious artist felt increasingly alienated, his rebelliousness intensifying as the nineteenth century came to an end, and with the early rechristening of Aestheticism and Decadence as Modernism, the artist's rejection of the bourgeois audience led to an increasingly difficult, obscure art" (Beckson, *London in the 1890s: A Cultural History* 45). For many artists "popular success came to be regarded as a sure sign of mediocrity, public abuse and incomprehension the mark of real distinction" (Sturgis 14). For the most part, Modernist poetry was "an arcane and private art… [which] tend[ed] to divide its audience aristocratically into two groups – those who understand it and those who do not" (Bradbury and McFarlane 27) and thus the Modernist ethos represents "a privation and a

hoarding of the artistic powers against the populace" (27). Central to Modernism, and responsible for the Modernists' complicated relationship with difficult art, is the serious artist's isolation in the creation of private vision destined to be rejected by an uncomprehending public. This echoes the view of the Decadents, as Symons asks if it might not, after all "be the finest epitaph for a self-respecting man of letters to be able to say…I have kept my secret, I have not betrayed myself to the multitude" (*The Symbolist Movement* 114). This attitude undermined the Victorian belief in artistic and moral standards in the relationship between the artist and the public, as the "artist's cultivation of his own alienation…prompted a continuing rejection of bourgeois taste and morality" (Beckson, *Aesthetes and Decadents of the 1890's* 380).

The difference in response to audience and mass culture is an important division between Decadence and Modernism, and a key to the relative acceptance of one and not the other. For the former, the rejection of modern values was a stand against the Victorian moral mass culture. For the latter, and contrary to much of the history of Modernist criticism, the stance was more complicated – the image of Modern poets like Pound and Eliot as ivory tower recluses is inadequate to describe their relationship with the public. The tension in Modernist poetry is a clarification of that of the Decadents for two reasons. First, the public's response to the unsustainable attitude of the Decadents showed the Modernists that success would not come through antagonism, and second, the clarification of the threat from mass culture in the new prevalence of cinema and radio. These two factors contributed to the more realistic attitude towards mass culture of Modernism that managed to hold in tension the definition of itself through a conscious

strategy of exclusion while "knowingly exploiting the economics, publicity mechanisms, and content of mass culture" (Pease 200).

As has been effectively argued by many scholars, the characterization of modernism as violently and inherently opposed to populist interest is too simple – it does not take into account the reality of the artists and their production of art.[14] Rainey argues that "Modernism's ambiguous achievement was to probe the interstices dividing [high and low art]…and forge within it a strange and unprecedented space for cultural production" (3). He suggests that this required a retreat from the domain of public culture; however, I would suggest that it is not a retreat as Rainey characterizes it but a moving *towards* the domain of public culture, as a clarified and more considered approach than the Decadents' desire to, somewhat petulantly and awkwardly, remove themselves from a system they didn't understand or desire to engage with. Both the Decadents and Modernists were accused of elitism, and it is certainly true that both groups held a public disregard for mass-produced art that offered no challenge to the reader. The swift growth of the cinema, the huge publication runs of cheap and simple books like the penny dreadful novels which had increased in publication from 26 million copies in print in 1896 to 54 million in 1911 (Pease 198), and the explosion of mass market newspapers like *The Daily Mail* or *Titbits* that blurred the lines between news and gossip seemed proof enough that public taste had abandoned those who considered themselves serious poets. The middle class was an easy target for these poets and critics

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[14] To name just a few: Lawrence Rainey, *Institutions of Modernism: Literary Elites and Public Culture;* Andreas Huyssen, *After the Great Divide: Modernism, Mass Culture, and Postmodernism*; Kevin Dettmar (ed.), *Rereading the New: A Backward Glance at Modernism;* Mark Morrisson, *The Public Face of Modernism: Little Magazines, Audiences, and Reception;* Rod Rosenquist, *Modernism, the Market and the Institution of the New;* David Chinitz, *T.S. Eliot and the Cultural Divide*; Delmore Schwartz,. "The Isolation of Modern Poetry"; Perry Meisel, *The myth of the modern: a study in British literature and criticism after 1850*; and John Cooper, *Modernism and the Culture of Mass Market Society.*

as the audience for mass-produced and advertising-centred magazines, and the modernists feared the semi-educated public that spent increasing amounts of time and money on consuming mass-entertainment. The Decadents responded with an insistence on the autonomy of art that refused to make any concessions to the feelings of the middle class, which all but ensured they would be limited in their sales on the scale of the popular novel. Here again is one of the primary differences between the Decadents and the Modernists and their relative success; the reactionary stance of the Decadents made for short, difficult careers for most of the poets, but the modernists' ability to engage with, overlap, and intersect with the public realm resulted in the acknowledgement of a powerful movement almost as soon as it began.

Delmore Schwartz suggests that the poetic response to modern capitalist England reached critical mass for the modernist poets, as the process of division between artistic intellect and sensibility and the evolving world of capital and physical science reached its conclusion. As an example, Ezra Pound's 1920 poem "Hugh Selwyn Mauberley" identifies the Decadent and Modernist difficulty in miniature, following a process of alienation from and disgust with a world that has become obsessed with surface and show rather than substance. As well as in his poetry, Pound gave voice to his criticism by writing for and editing several poetry and artistic journals, in which he actively put forth work that he considered of quality and that would challenge the mass produced art of the time. Pound, then, stands as an example of the approach of the Modernists who, instead of retreating into their art, chose a more active approach to change, and as it turned out, the reading public which had rejected the perceived elitism and inappropriateness of the Decadent artists was much more prepared for the Modernist experiment. Ultimately, the

speaker of "Mauberley" says it best: "Don't kick against the pricks,/ Accept opinion. The "Nineties" tried your game/ And died, there's nothing in it" (187-189).

In a milieu characterized by fewer collections of poetry published and purchased, and the general unwillingness of many publishers to attach their names to questionable or contentious poets,[15] it was difficult for many of the Decadent poets to find readers. Most of the poets of the Decadent movement relied on little magazines. These smaller publications were intended for a small elitist audience and were interested in avant-garde concerns and works counter to popular magazines and books (Beckson, *London in the 1890s: A Cultural History* 235). The publications limited themselves to artistic concerns, becoming a home for ideas that challenged Establishment views and defied mass-produced commercial magazines (235). Many of these periodicals had short runs, partially because their care in design was costly, and because being too highbrow had doomed them. The most well-known of these was the *Yellow Book,* which was published by John Lane and in part edited by Aubrey Beardsley. It balanced on a knife edge: offering work that would not be published elsewhere while knowing that "unconventional literature and art could be included only by pacifying readers with acknowledged conservative contributors" (Beckson, *London in the 1890s: A Cultural History* 243). For many of the editors, publishers, and contributors, "failure was the consequence of their refusal to compromise with the petit bourgeoisie and of their determination to separate themselves from mass readership" (255). These periodicals

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[15] A notable exception was John Lane and Elkin Mathews' Bodley Head (which later split into two publishing houses), which was the primary publisher of Decadent poetry. Smaller periodicals like *The Century Guild Hobby Horse, The Dial, The Savoy,* and later *The Yellow Book* offered collections of poetry. All these promoted Aesthetic ideals and published many of the Decadent poets.

had, in their attempt to balance the desire for a new art and the need to sell copies, subtly

rejected many of the dominant Victorian attitudes and conventions in art and literature.

By the high point of Modernism, poetry publication had rebounded significantly,

increasing from only about fifteen significant books of poetry published each year in the

1890s to closer to forty significant volumes per year in the late teens and 1920s (Perkins

13). As mentioned earlier, the Modernists possessed the acumen to realize that success

must involve responding to and working within the structures of mass culture, and so

took advantage of the desire for wealthier buyers to want to buy limited editions of

collections. For the Modernists, little magazines also served an important purpose, but

contributed to the difficulty the poets had with their audiences. Much like those of the

Decadents, the little magazines had small print runs and delivered to select audiences. A

significant difference in the early twentieth century was the regeneration of interest from

wealthy patrons. Whereas the Decadent periodicals were often run by the poets and their

publishers, many of the Modernists' magazines like *The Dial* and the *Little Review* were

backed by rich collectors and patrons (Rainey 50). Also like the Decadents, these little

magazines offered the Modern poets a place to publish their work which they would not

have otherwise had, although the corollary was a "frenetic, self-enclosed environment in

which poets wrote only for each other, losing touch with a larger, more general

audience….Insecure, alienated, and identity-seeking, they issue manifestoes, trumpet

eddies as 'movements,' and whirl in step with fashion" (Perkins 319). The poets of the

Decadent and the Modernist era found themselves alienated not only socially from the

dominant cultural and moral perspectives of the general public, but also fiscally from the

modern middle class consumption of low-brow art and media. The Decadents took a

stand against this alienation by revelling in it, but the Modernists knew that this meant short and unhappy careers, and so they managed to temper their social critiques in advanced language and involvement with the academy and ease the monetary strain by reviving patronage and taking advantage of their perceived exclusivity. The work of individual poets provides the clearest perspective on these differing approaches.

The alienation of Oscar Wilde from late Victorian London was as complex as any. Equal parts self-imposed and enforced by the public, his separation from polite society was strange. He was beloved by many for his aplomb in public situations and for his unabashed aestheticism, but even artists like Max Beerbohm and Aubrey Beardsley who initially admired him and agreed with his artistic perspective often turned away from his over-bearing demeanour and, later, his lack of circumspection about his sexual proclivities (Sturgis 145-6). His relationship with Decadence was also strange – for all Wilde became the disliked, even hated, representative of English Decadence, his work was often reviewed less harshly than Symons' or Dowson's. He was popular in many public circles, and his comedic plays were smash hits right up to his trial and incarceration. This seeming paradox stands as a contradiction to the nature of Decadence, and it is clarified in his understanding that, in the age of the loss of aristocratic patronage, the artist must engage with the paying public. He recognized the "virtue of having an identifiable persona…based on extravagantly shunning the very public he sought to gain" (117). Symons considered him the ultimate in what was meant by Decadence, but Wilde himself disagreed with the use of the term. He never bothered to define the Decadence with which he was linked, but he displayed many of the characteristics attributed then and now to a Decadent artist: the "habit of self-display or

peacocking; the show of hedonism, irresponsibility, and insincerity; the use of enigmatic

paradox and indefinable symbols; and the aesthetic preoccupation with moral

disintegration" (Haley 229). Faced with this persona, the British public recoiled from his

public figure even while they watched his plays over and over.

Wilde's trial and conviction illustrated the rift between the artists and the general

public. Max Beerbohm asserted that the proceedings allowed the public to freely criticise

an art it didn't understand, and Ernest Newman called the British public stupid and

prejudiced (in Beckson, *London in the 1890s: A Cultural History* 224). It seems clear

that Wilde's trial became an easy opportunity for revenge against the movement to

which he had become attached. The full sentence for Wilde's crimes allowed by law –

two years hard labour – was rarely apportioned, but the public nature of the figures

involved as well as some scandal surrounding the current Prime Minister, Lord

Rosebery,[16] ensured that no clemency would be given. Though the distrust and fear of

homosexuality prevalent in the culture was certainly responsible for some of the attitudes

towards Wilde, there were other figures less circumspect than Wilde who remained

unprosecuted. The public's response to the trial and conviction was fuelled by the

Victorian middle-class "obsession with 'appearances,'" which lent "keenness to the

general condemnation of one who had been exposed" (Sturgis 235). It seems that had

Wilde been more concerned with keeping up appearances, much of the scandal could

have been averted. The proclaimed figurehead of English Decadence, and Decadence as

a movement, had been struck an irreparable blow. That Wilde had, for much of his

career, been associated with many different movements and only later took for himself a

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[16] Rosebery's name was in fact mentioned in connection with the suspicious death of Queensberry's oldest son as part of a sexual scandal.

Decadent identity did not matter to the public or the press. His biting wit, total disregard for fools, inflated sense of self, and flamboyant nature had already soured him to much of London society. His trial and conviction were only the final and most definite acts of his alienation from British society.

Wilde's body of work is varied. Though most critically acclaimed for his plays, prose, and lone novel, he wrote several volumes of poetry. His short lyric poems aren't well-known, but exhibit many characteristics of his Decadent and aesthetic ideals. Several literary devices became popular in the Decadent era, and were later echoed by the Modernists. Synaesthesia in particular was popular for both groups, which is a device that describes images using multiple or unexpected sensory systems. Though the device was known and used from ancient Greek literature and poetics on, it was rarely codified and used in a concerted form, even though many Romantic poets made use of it, and the French Symbolists used it extensively to communicate abstractions and imagery that was particularly shocking or vivid.[17] In his introduction to an edition of Baudelaire's *Fleurs Du Mal,* Gautier referred to synaesthesia in a description of the Decadent style that Baudelaire adored, acknowledging Baudelaire's love of "borrowing from all technical vocabularies, taking colour from all palettes and notes from all keyboards" (qtd. in van Roosbroeck 8). Some studies have used careful analysis of verse to identify the uses of synaesthetic metaphor: for example, Ullmann's analysis of Keats and Byron suggests that the former had to express an "inner urge impelling him to reflect in his poetry the interplay of sensations which was constantly taking place in his own mind"

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[17] Baudelaire used the device extensively, and included it in his definitions of Decadent style, which he borrowed significantly from Nisard's earlier work. For discussions of the definitions and history of literary synaesthesia, see Glenn O'Malley, Stephen Ullmann, and Alfred Engstrom.

("Romanticism and Synaesthesia" 827) while Byron was merely keeping with the synaesthetic vogue of the time.

In the case of Decadent poets like Wilde and Symons, the motivation was threefold: to echo the usage by French Symbolists like Baudelaire and Rimbaud in order to further align themselves with that school and provoke the British reading public; to seek new ways of describing the novel sensory experiences they sought, which happened to parallel the advent of Symbolism; and to explore the interstices between visual art, music, and poetry. The association with alienation for the Decadents came not only from the challenge it posed to the reading public and movement towards Symbolic expression as mentioned above, but also because of the popular belief that artists were particularly capable and suited to experience sensations more purely and deeply than regular people. For the Modernists, the use of synaesthesia not only echoed their sense of poets as particularly sensitive, but it was also a natural result of the disjunction between modern utilitarian life and the metaphorical nature of poetry. As the ability of poets to accurately depict the industrial world around them was challenged, dramatic and narrative poetry waned, and poets turned increasingly to devices like synaesthesia to capture the juxtaposition of poetry with modernity**.**

In "Impression du Matin," Wilde paints a picture of morning in London. The short lyric consists of impressions of the city waking to another day and highlights the alienation of a prostitute who has yet to retire. The poem begins in a synaesthetic way that was popular with Decadent poets – the use of musical terms to describe visual imagery was widely spread, and in this poem "The Thames nocturne of blue and gold" (1) is "Changed to a Harmony in grey" (2). Musical nocturnes are lyrical and often

gloomy, used to evoke a sense of nighttime or evening. They were popularized in the mid-nineteenth century by composers like Chopin, who wrote twenty-one of them, and poets were not the only ones to make use of the idea; James Whistler, a painter with whom Wilde famously had an ongoing rivalry, titled many of his Impressionist paintings "nocturnes." The interrelationships between the musical, literary, and visual arts were an important part of Decadent ideology, and the synaesthetic device captured that ideology precisely. In this particular instance of synaesthesia, the appeal of the device is clear – as a metaphor it is powerful and compact, creating an entire mood and tonal quality to the description of the river. The usage is significant, in that the description of the nocturne version of the Thames as 'blue and gold' and the more pleasant idea of perfect harmony in the daytime Thames as 'grey' suggests a privileging of the evening. That reversal is carried through to the end of the poem, where the speaker describes "one pale woman all alone,/ The daylight kissing her wan hair,/ Loitered beneath the gas lamps' flare" (13-15). The colourless woman, clearly a prostitute with "lips of flame and heart of stone" (16), is a vestige of the night out of place in the morning ritual of the city. Her separation from the bustling city is accentuated thematically by her juxtaposition with the religious imagery of the 'Matin' in the title, and stylistically by the contrast of her colourlessness and stasis compared to the bright and active preceding stanzas and the exclusive use of end-stopped lines as opposed to the enjambment in the other three stanzas. The woman's alienation from the city mirrors the Decadent alienation from the bustling commercial and urbanized modern world.

Undoubtedly, Wilde's most well-known poem is the "The Ballad of Reading Gaol," which he wrote after being incarcerated in Reading Prison for two years of hard

labour. Based on this poem, De Sola Pinto somewhat uncharitably suggests that if Wilde could have "outgrown the shallow hedonism which he mistook for a philosophy of art, he might have become the poet of the awakening social conscience of his age" (17). For the most part, Wilde did not seek to be 'the poet of the awakening social conscience of his age,' but this particular work was specifically designed to tell the story of "man's inhumanity to man that every literate person could read with sympathetic understanding" (Buckler 38). The poem uses the figure of a murderer incarcerated and executed in the same prison as the speaker to do a number of things, at least one of which is to show the conditions of the British prison system. Though the choice of crime problematizes the potential symbolism of the situation to Wilde's own, there are clear parallels between the murderer of the poem and Wilde himself. The murderer is set up as a hero who, despite his obvious and absolute guilt, has taken on himself the task of carrying the sins of the public, illustrating the deplorable conditions of the prison system, and raising the individual "above the faceless wardens of society" (Alkalay-Gut 355) while "consciously [creating] himself as an outcast from society" (355).

Though it seems obvious that a person locked away in prison would feel isolated from the society that put him there in a literal way, it is actually the symbolic nature of Wilde's incarceration that is more relevant. In an extension of the new realist[18] nature of the piece, and most of Wilde's work, the speaker of the poem conflates the guardsman's crime and punishment with his own, suggesting that sharing the same prison space negates any difference in the nature or degree of the offense. The treatment of criminals

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[18] This term is used to denote the extension of Victorian realism. Sandra Woods characterizes it as looking "honestly at lower-class life in this quasi-scientific manner" (1) and Wendell Harris defines it in three aspects: it "pushed into new realms of subject matter, it insisted upon the right to present a pessimistic view of life, and it denied the necessity of an elaborate or ingeniously fascinating plot" (4). It is essentially synonymous with the idea of French Naturalism.

in "every prison that men build" (549) is worse than any of the crimes committed by those inmates, because this treatment is cold, impersonal, and systemic – it is not to keep prisoners in that there are bars, but "lest Christ should see/ How men their brothers maim" (551-2). Regardless of the spirit in which the prisons are created, such "systems of punishment take on a life their own and have effects that are inescapable, counter-productive, and wholly demoralizing for those who are caught up in them" (Buckler 34). This criticism of the British penal system is a primary theme of the poem, but perhaps secondary to the consideration of the nature of human sin and crime. It is perhaps extreme that Wilde should choose a crime so distinct as premeditated murder to illustrate these two themes, but it allows both themes a stronger import: if even a murderer can incite pity, then conditions must indeed be bad, and, by choosing the worst crime possible as a repository of human offense, then all others can be similarly absolved, especially Wilde himself, whose crime pales in comparison. The focus on the murderer rather than the actual murder and its victim and the description of the crime as one of love and passion in a "confusion of realism with symbolic significance" (Alkalay-Gut 350) clearly demarcate the themes of the poem as symbolic rather than literal.

The alienation in this poem is of a different sort from that which Wilde experienced in his life and work. Initially, he flew in the face of Victorian custom and propriety, but the speaker of "Reading Gaol" is a different kind of exile. Gone is the erudite wit of the social butterfly, careless of the impact of his words and actions, replaced by a pariah of whom polite society has made an example. Sharing an unlikely bond with a convicted murderer, he is likewise alienated from society as "A prison wall was round us both,/ Two outcast men we were:/ The world had thrust us from its heart,

/And God from out His care" (169-73). He feels pity and sorrow as he never has before, and in the speaker's sadness for the hanged guardsman are "alien tears" which "will fill for him/ Pity's long-broken urn" (531-2). The exclusion in the poem is of mourners who are "outcast men,/ and outcasts always mourn" (533-4). Though the speaker claims to "know not whether Laws be right,/ or whether Laws be wrong" (535-6), it is clear that the punishment does not fit the crime: the sweeping result of imprisonment in these conditions is that "Something was dead in each of us,/ And what was dead was Hope./ For man's grim Justice goes its way,/ and will not swerve aside" (359-62).

In an interesting way, "The Ballad of Reading Gaol" identifies many qualities of Decadent poetry by contrast. Stylistically, this poem is quite different from most of Wilde's earlier lyric poetry. Wilde admitted to this change in his work, suggesting in letters to Robert Ross that he was aware of the divided style that was the result of a divided aim of the poem. The poem is "unique in the Wilde canon: it is written in a poetic style altogether new for him, and its appeal is to a popular audience he had never before tried to reach through verse" (Buckler 38). The motivation to reveal something real and profound about his own experience and the situation of the British penal system, and perhaps his fundamentally changed being after his difficult imprisonment, changed Wilde's approach to verse in this his final creative work. Instead of the style of Decadence in his earlier work and in the work of his contemporaries, characterized by things like un-italicized words borrowed from other languages, neologisms and archaisms, and odd juxtapositions (Sturgis 260), Wilde turned to stylistic qualities that would match his adjusted motivation for this poem: the adapted ballad form, the simple and frequently colloquial language, an emphasis on feeling, and a lyrical impulse

designed to make the realism of the work more immediate (Buckler 39). In all this, however, he retains the power of synaesthesia, as the speaker observes how "with open mouth he drank the sun" (119) and the prisoners' struggle with "green Thirst" (583). Wilde uses a device now entrenched in his practise, but otherwise, in many ways, the poem "satisfies the popular notion of what poetry is or should be" (Buckler 39), and is a final lament to a public and artistic world which had rejected him.

Though Wilde "became the leader of the new fashion" (Ullmann *The Principles of Semantics* 274) and used synaesthesia extensively in much of his work, he was far from the only poet to make use of it and link it to the Decadent sense of isolation. John Gray,[19] in "Summer Past," writes of "warm hours of leaf-lipped song" (2), the "naiads' floating hair, caressed/ By fragrant sun-/Beams" (13-4), and "By what listening well/ Where holy trees,/ Song-set, unfurl eternally the sheen/ Of restless green?" (20-4). The artificial description of the tree "cast[ing] a pearl" (5) frames the impression of a sensuous refuge set apart from the encroaching world. Theodore Wratislaw, in "Reminiscence," describes how "the sea far out at ebb grew duskily/ Fainter, a long thin line of misty snow,/ a languid murmur only" (4-6) to evoke the sensation of being alone at the ocean's edge with his love. The idea of retreat from the modern world is essentially Decadent, whether or not the retreat is chosen, as for Gray and Wratislaw, or forced upon the poet, as for Wilde, and to a lesser degree, Arthur Symons.

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[19] Gray was another important figure in British Decadence. He was a protégé of Wilde, and it is supposed that he was the inspiration for the beautiful young Dorian Gray, although the novel was published in Lippincott before the two became very close friends. His best-known and most Decadent collection of poetry, *Silverpoints,* was published in 1893 and was a gorgeously bound and distinctively shaped set of verse. Gray later, like many Decadent poets, sought to distance himself and his advancement in the Catholic Church from his earlier work and image. I will take up this aspect of Gray's life and poetry later.

For Symons, alienation meant something very different than it did to Oscar Wilde. Symons was the son of a preacher and used art and literature as an escape from a strict home and family (Sturgis 64). He worked steadily at writing as a profession until he was published enough to be recognized and to invest his time and energy into welcoming a shift in art to England. He knew well the response he would receive from the general public for both his prose and poetry, but welcomed it. He was also one of few vocal proponents of an organized Decadent movement in Britain, but due to his general unpopularity with other artists, he failed to become the leading figure he hoped to be. In 1889, he and Havelock Ellis did the "standard itinerary of the educated Englishman in Paris" (Sturgis 7), but also visited the Decadent spots in Paris, meeting the leading figures of the more organized French movement like Verlaine, Mallarme, J.K. Huysmans, and the Goncourts. Symons took the collections of poetry he found in Paris back to London and tried to emulate their style, and also produced translations for publication. His own poetry was mostly well-received by his contemporaries and censured by the public, which is what he wanted. In all, it was simply his personality – too forceful and passionate, too reckless at times – that made him mildly unpopular and prevented him from becoming the face of Decadence in Britain. He considered carefully and wrote eloquently about the theory behind the movement, he was one of the best read and most thorough researchers, he lived the life that was assumed to be in the Decadent mode, and he had some talent for verse, but this wasn't enough. The close friends he had, like Patmore, Gosse, and Michael Field, were older members of the Parnassian school (Sturgis 79), and he worked on the periphery of some of the groups of poets. Even so,

Symons published many poems and was responsible for the most significant tract on the movement published at the time.

"The Decadent Movement in Literature" was published in *Harper's Monthly Magazine* in 1893, and in it Symons defined the stylistic and substantive qualities of the French-inspired Decadence, and identified its primary sources of inspiration. While the essay identified and clarified the tenets of the movement for proponents and practitioners, it also served as a focus point for detractors. Symons' name was linked to Decadence from then on, and he worked hard at developing both his own Decadent practise and encouraging the qualities in others, but in part because of his own shortcomings as a leader and the lack of clear allies in the other poets of the time, he "became somewhat isolated in his pursuit of bizarre impression and sensations" (Sturgis 94). Symons patrolled the music houses of London, in which he found "a safety valve for the pressure-cooker of repressed Victorian sexuality" (100), and those music halls provided him with a "toy decadent world of which he could become the toy decadent laureate[:] it was artificial, it was perverse, it was sexually charged, it was overflowing" (102) with the curious and strange sensations he craved. It was very much the London of the Decadents, and Symons felt deeply that any modern poetry must be a "poetry of cities, that rarer than pastoral poetry, the romance of what lies beneath our eyes, in the humanity of streets" (*Studies in Two Literatures* 45-6) and that the true test of modern poetry was "its capacity for dealing with London" (46), and so he aptly turned his vision on the city he both loved and hated.

The first edition of *London Nights* in 1895 was rejected by the Bodley Head,[20] and Symons had to turn to Leonard Smithers, a notorious publisher responsible for no small portion of the burgeoning trade in erotica and pornography. Smithers published the tract, and though it was quite poorly received by the critics and papers, it caused no shortage of opposition and prejudice from the reading public, to which Symons referred in a preface to the second edition in 1897, suggesting that "such a reception of a work of art would have been possible in no country but England" (*Collected Works Vol 1* 165). The poems that make up the volume are lyrics of a poet actively searching for a space to ply his trade of sensation-searching, but who also wants some recognition for his verse and his anti-Victorian position. Many poems deal with his tastes in prostitutes and the kinds of love he experiences, both real and imagined. "To One in Alienation" is a lyric in two parts: the first is three ten-line stanzas in an inconsistent iambic tetrameter and pentameter that details the loss of the speaker's love to another man through marriage; the second part is four quatrains with lines one, three, and four as iambic tetrameters and the second line as a pentameter, and tells of the relationship considered in retrospect from the discomfort of a prostitute`s bed. The rhythm of the poem evokes the natural speech qualities that Symons prized, and the poem makes effective use of the juxtaposition of archaic language ("when you would fain, for his sake, be more fair" [4]) with contemporary idiom ("Last night I saw you decked to meet" [1]). The suggestions and faint colours that Symons associated with Decadent verse are here in the "primrose ribbons that so grace/ The perfect pallor of your face" (5-6), and the well-used catachresis in "that most sweet accursed violence" (18). All of these devices identify the

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[20] Unlike many of the other poets, both older and more recent, who shed the mantle of Decadence at the public's rejection, Symons had too much invested in the Decadent ideology to shy away and remove the mask after the Wilde trial. John Lane, however, considered the collection too risky a venture.

poem as particularly Decadent, but they also serve to accentuate the theme of alienation of the speaker. The character is left alone again, to lie "awake for very misery" and eventually find no solace in the arms of a prostitute – even being with someone leaves him alone. Of particular note are the synaesthetic devices – the first that describes the speaker "cursing a sleepless brain that would but scrawl/ Your image on the aching wall" (15-16), and the second that closes the poem with the image of having "kissed her, for your sake/ My lips were sobbing on your name" (46). The speaker's isolation is magnified in the mixing of sound, vision, and touch, and throughout the poem, the Decadent alienation is pronounced. It is alienation of a different sort from Wilde's: Symons set out to deliberately shake the late-Victorian sensibility first through his writing, while Wilde's isolation, while he too denigrated the uneducated mass reader, was a result of his unwillingness to first conform socially rather than through poetry. The same act of rebellion and subsequent alienation in the life and work of Symons and Wilde continued through to the Modernist poets, with a few minor but important differences.

The Decadent goal was, as stated, to challenge the existing hegemony of realism by showing that it did not in fact accurately reflect the changing industrial world, and to unsettle the mass cultural reader into a contemplation of personal and purely artistic considerations. This usually appeared to the public and to critics as a degradation of the dominant value system. The Modernists, on the other hand, attempted to elevate and sharpen the perceptions of reality and the individual for the mass reader – they still wrote about sex and drugs and unfulfilled desires, but the public attention was muted in the context of the post-War era, and the critical response somewhat dulled by the speed and

variation in new artistic ideas. The salacious subject matter was less the focus than a means to, like the Decadents, unsettle the mass cultural reader into an awareness of the corrupt nature of the modern world.

The transition between the Decadents and the Modernists has sometimes been described as the movement from lament to critique – from passive inaction and weariness to a more forceful exhortation. Eliot's attitude towards criticism and poetry and their role in British culture is a fine example of this. In an essay on the music hall performer Marie Lloyd, Eliot notes that her death is a significant moment in English history, as she was "the expressive figure of the lower classes" (*Selected Essays* 458). Further, there is no such figure for the middle class, who have no idol and are "morally corrupt" as they do not have "any independent virtues which might give them as a conscious class any dignity. The middle classes, in England as elsewhere, under democracy, are morally dependent upon the aristocracy, and the aristocracy are subordinate to the middle class, which is gradually absorbing and destroying them" (458). He blames mass cultural media like radio and cinema, and suggests that they are responsible for the subjugation of the minds of the middle class. This illustrates an important difference for the Moderns. Not content to illustrate the deficiencies of modernity subtly and by suggestion, Eliot identifies specifically the problem and offers a clear solution. That solution happened to coincide with his idea of criticism and poetry, and the poetry he wrote, as he believed that art should be an active collaboration, and mass culture "hypnotizes its audience into a state of pure receptivity" (459). As I mentioned earlier, the traditional view of Modernism as completely antithetical to mass or popular culture is much too simplistic, but it must remain that the relationship as

stated by Modernist figures themselves is critical of and contradictory to the perceived weaknesses of mass culture. The alienation of the Modernists then is a withdrawal, certainly meant to criticise but also to ameliorate from above the deleterious effects of modernity. The concept of modernity was inherited from the Decadents: ideas like the dehumanizing nature of capitalism and globalization, the difficulty of representing industrial and urban life in art, and the valuing of simple entertainment over rich art. Eliot and others offered not the destruction of lower forms of art, but the refinement of them. This refinement would include writing literature about common life, but doing so in a way that speaks to both the history and the continued development of verse, with complex stanzaic and sometimes narrative structures, challenging imagery and allusions, and elevated language. There is value in art that interacts with the public and speaks to the attraction of lowbrow culture, but Chinitz believes the Modernists felt that lowbrow culture must be refined into something that more closely resembles high art (238).

Through the many smaller movements that characterized the Georgian poets on their way to becoming Modernists, Eliot becomes a leader of the new style. Responding directly to the attempted reassertion of traditional ideals by the Edwardians, Eliot writes and expounds upon poetry that is "objective and impersonal, learned, allusive, indirect" (Perkins 297), and that would appeal to elite readers. Early Georgian poetry was still a popular or populist poetry that was "sensitive, appreciative, often wry and usually unpretentious," and it "evoked fugitive, complex moods by simple means" (297). As part of the program of active adjustment of cultural practice, many Modernist critics like Eliot and Pound "demanded analytical rigour and moral seriousness in their critical enterprise. They shaped and institutionalized literary canons, specifically the Modernist

literary canon, in opposition to mass culture, believing that the works they championed demanded interactivity and raised the level of an individual's moral fitness for life" (Pease 208).

Schwartz's conception, discussed earlier, of the modern poet's isolation from the modern world because of the inability of art to accurately reflect the effects of capitalism and industrialisation comes to fruition in Eliot. His poetry makes use of "indirection and all forms of emotional reticence, notably those of irony, symbolic association, and antithetic metaphor" (Williamson 17), and displays the Modernist traits of the "liveliness that comes from topicality and the difficulty that comes from intellectual abstruseness" (18). Schwartz notes that the "modern poet has been very much affected by the condition and the circumstance that he has been separated from the whole life of society" (211), and Eliot's tendency to juxtapose historical and modern figures to illustrate the tragic and pitiable nature of the common person of the modern era becomes representative of the fact that the "culture and the sensibility which made him a poet could not be employed when the proposed subject was the lives of human beings in whom culture and sensibility had no organic function" (217). These human beings find an image in some of Eliot's earlier poems, especially "Portrait of a Lady" and "Sweeney Among the Nightingales."

"Portrait of a Lady" presents two characters equally isolated from each other and their separate conceptions of cultural value. The speaker is alienated from "all segments of culture" (Chinitz 241) – both the romantic and intimate Chopin, meant to be "resurrected only among friends/ Some two or three, who will not touch the bloom/ That is rubbed and questioned in the concert room" (Eliot 11-13), and the "comics and

sporting page" (72) that pique his interest. Compared to the waning culture of the lady, the "modern has mass culture in its side" and is sensational and interesting, but with mass culture "apparently come vulgarity and materialism" (Chinitz 242). In this way, the poem is similar to "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" in form and theme, though it has "a social malice which makes it more objective in attitude and more conversational in tone" (Williamson 70). The speaker's alienation from the cultural experience and the older woman with whom there is an unclear relationship is tracked through the shifting imagery in the poem and the related synaesthesia that follows. In the first section, musical imagery dominates, following the imagined scenario of the two watching a performance of Chopin. Afterwards, the awkward "conversation slips/ Among velleities and carefully caught regrets/ Through attenuated tones of violins/ Mingled with remote cornets" (Eliot 14-17). The synaesthetic description of the sounds of the violins and horns as both distant in space but also remote as in detached or aloof illustrates the space between the perception of the recital between the two characters, and also the distance between their desires. Later, in part III, the speaker tells the lady he is preparing to go abroad, and her passive-aggressive reaction shows him how desperate she is, which pushes him further away; his "smile falls heavily among the bric-a-brac" (92). In the end, the speaker understands little of the cultural impact of the performance and even less of the missing connection between himself and the woman, and so he is left "not knowing what to feel" (119).

In "Sweeney among the Nightingales," the speaker is no longer the character – withdrawn from the situation, he is free to comment on the both comic and pitiable figure of a man tired of life and its sordid enterprises. Heavily allusive, like all of Eliot's

work, the poem compares Sweeney to Agamemnon, making use of the juxtaposition of historical and modern figures to illustrate the brutish nature of modern humans. The crimes of Agamemnon are equated with Sweeney's ignorance, and the parallel suggests that modern humans are but crude versions of Agamemnon – equally corrupt and deserving of a similar fate. Though there is debate about whether or not Sweeney is killed,[21] his role is more important as a modern figure who is in some way devolved and lacking in dignity. He is alienated from the worthy art subject through descriptions of him as stupid and animalistic, compared to an ape, a zebra, and a giraffe variously, and is in fact just "one of the crowd flowing over London Bridge…devoid of the spiritual vitality which constitutes the only significant life" (Davidson 403). In both of these poems, Eliot presents images of the modern person from whom he feels alienated. The male characters in both poems represent the unsophisticated and simple people who constitute the uneducated lower class. At the same time, Eliot attempts to identify those same two characters as themselves alienated and unaware of their situation. It would make sense to show both figures as comfortable and at home in the modern world of which they are supposed to represent the failings, but instead they are awkward and derisible. Eliot seems to suggest that even those on the modern side of the imbalance are lacking in happiness and completeness, which is an adjustment of the ideas of Wilde and Symons. Wilde's prisoners and Symons unhappy lovers present only the perspective of the alienated artist figure, cast out by modern society, whereas Eliot sees no winner in the moral soulless corruption of modernity: both the artist and the citizen are devalued

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[21] Much criticism in this regard suggests that Sweeney is the target of some assassination plot and is "threatened by death" (Williamson 97), based primarily on the comparison with Agamemnon and a statement by Eliot that he intended a mood of foreboding. James Davidson, though, I think correctly argues that there is little actual evidence in the poem for this threat, and in fact sees Sweeney as essentially a comic rather than tragic figure who is "just not worth killing" (403).

and dehumanized by modernity. This is a Modernist interpretation of the struggle against modernity, and shows a maturation of the understanding of the effects of modernity on the human soul from the Decadent one: instead of an insular and hopeless plight of the individual, the Modernist vision of alienation from the modern world actually includes the general public as victims, rather than simply as offenders. Eliot saw this, and so did other poets like Hilda Doolittle.

For Doolittle, alienation as a poet in the modern age was exacerbated by her difficult relationships with other artists like Pound and Lawrence, her struggles as a woman poet, and her discomfort with or uncertainty about her own sexuality. H.D. was part of the original Imagist movement with Pound and her future husband Richard Aldington, and with Pound's support became well-known for her short lyric poetry. Unfortunately, the title of "H.D., imagiste" followed her throughout a long career filled with many other kinds of work, long after Pound's rejection of her as he moved on to other movements and ideas. Though her work has not garnered as much regard as that of the more well-known Modernist poets, she was certainly a part of the same tradition that created the work of the established poets, and she was an active member of the London literary society (Friedman 46). As part of the easing of her isolation as an artist and a woman in the indifferent modern world after her friendship with Pound and her marriage with Aldington (and affair with Cecil Gray) ended, H.D. turned for answers to the same places as many of the other Modernist artists – myth, religion, and literary history. In a different way, however, H.D. more openly acknowledged the influence of the Decadent poets – whereas many of the male Modernists allowed for some influence to have come from the Decadents, overall they "maintained a safe distance…[from the] 'effeminate'

and 'unwholesome' poetics" (Laity "H.D. and A.C. Swinburne…" 461) of Decadence. H.D., however, found inspiration in the sexual ambiguities of some poets of the 1890s, and she and others used the Decadents to fashion a feminist poetic of female desire" (462). This is certainly not to say that H.D.'s poetics and poetry were limited to an exploration of alternative sexuality or feminism – this is a danger in any feminist perspective on her work. She was also very much a Modernist poet, admired by her contemporaries, and she displayed in her work the primary themes of Modernism. Her poetry addresses the modern milieu and her artistic and personal alienation from it much like her contemporaries, male or otherwise.

H.D.'s early work in particular explicates Pound and T.E. Hulme's original sense of Imagism, which is why they initially approached her to publish with them. Her poems are direct and pared down, objectively presented without superfluous adjective or commentary. In *Hymen*, a collection published in 1921, her style matured slightly in response to the difficulty of losing many friends and a husband who were important in her life, having a child with a man who was not her husband, and the aftermath of WWI. It also contains clear challenges to the heteronormative nature of her world, celebrating same-sex love inspired by H.D.'s newfound love affair with Winifred Ellerman, also known as Bryher. The volume moves away from a "focus on flowers and landscape to offer the first fully realised example of the emphatically woman-centred poetry" (Graham 113) which also explores the "impact of war on the modern world" (113). The collection shows her attention to the Greek poetry that she loved and translated often, with a series of poems which modernise and revise the stories of women from Greek legend, though there are poems which illustrate the modern concern without referencing

the Greek influences. "Cuckoo Song," for example, is a lyric free verse in her characteristic style that equates the particular song of that bird to the absence of strife. There is a simplicity in the bird's "clear note" (H.D. 3), which is "not song, not wail, not hurt,/ but just a call" (5-6) "to a gracious/ cedar-palace hall" (13-14). Other birds call to other things – the nightingale summons to "wistful joy" (26), the oriole evokes "some island-orchard/ in a purple sea" (35-6) – but the cuckoo promises only respite from the "throbbing of our brain" (45) in "warm length/ of crimson wool/ and tinted woven stuff/ for us to rest upon" (38-41). The extremes of the modern world, "numb with ecstasy/ nor drown with death" (42-3) are avoided in the gentle evocations of Calypso's wild garden. H.D. uses synaesthesia to describe the other bird songs, those that offer no respite. The "fiery throat" (34) of the oriole calls the speaker to passion and a surfeit of emotion rather than peace.

In *Heliodora*, published in 1924, H.D. continues with Greek-influenced poetry, in particular a series of poems based on fragments from Sappho, but again, a poem outside of this group is a clearer statement of her attitude. In "We Two," the speaker and an unnamed other person, likely Bryher, remain as refuge against the cold blank modern world. In this case, the synaesthesia is not used as a contrast, but as the moment of contact that protects; the lover takes the speaker's hands and "scald[s] their weight/ as a bowl, lined with embers" (7-8). The two are protected from "the world,/ earth and the men who talk,/ saying their space of life,/ is good and gracious,/ with eyes blank" (14-8). The cold blank world that H.D. evokes is the world of England immediately following World War I, the world that the Decadents feared and the Modernists shunned. The

promises of industry and capitalism echoed hollowly in a world marred by conflict and a loss of moral security.

The Decadent poets like Wilde and Symons saw the increasingly modern world of the late Victorian era as incompatible with the goals of art to lift the human experience above the solely practical and monetary. It should have been that the late Victorian public and its staid religious exactitude, its class-conscious rigidity, and its reliance on collective and imperialist tradition resisted the advancement of modern capitalist, globalized, mechanistic, and individualistic utilitarianism, but it didn't. The newly influential and burgeoning middle class were both largely responsible for and largely the benefactors of the modernized world, and so the remaining qualities of mid-century British Victorianism were swallowed up by the inescapable advance of modernity. Class-consciousness shifted towards income-consciousness. Expansionist imperialism became globalized trade. The artists of the Decadent movement were outsiders from the pre-existing Victorian social order and the growing modern one, and so were alienated from both. As the century turned, and the sense of impending doom at the fin de siècle grew into the sense of doom at the irreversible flow of capitalism and European conflict, the Modernist poets like Eliot, Pound, and H.D. felt obligated to explore again the incongruence that the Decadents had identified – the life and purpose of art to express the deepest qualities of humanity was challenged even more as the world fell more deeply in the thrall of modernity. The modernist poets took the exile of the Decadent poets and made it a pedestal, donning the role of critic and turning over the languishing malaise of the Decadents.

Chapter Three: Mechanical Devices for Multiplying Inferiority

"For its very disease of form, this literature is certainly typical of a civilization grown over-luxurious, over-enquiring, too languid for the relief of action, too uncertain for any emphasis in opinion or in conduct." – Arthur Symons

In 1927, still in the heyday of Modernism, G.L. van Roosebroeck asked "where is the decadent of yesteryear?" (1). Van Roosebroeck seemed already nostalgic for the persona of the Decadent figure, who carried on though "around him went on the incessant din of the glorification of Progress, of Energy, of Health, of Common Sense, of Success – the adoration of the household deities of the 'enlightened bourgeois'…but he believed, languidly, that the end of civilisation had come and he wanted to die in beauty" (2). The Decadents' attitude towards the modern world seemed already sentimental for van Roosebroeck, though the world had only progressed further, suggesting that the Modern artist's sensibility had atrophied slightly. His tone suggests a romanticised affinity for the Decadence pose, as "in the face of an inimical society [the Decadent writer] took an attitude which he dreamed sublime. He disdained its factories, its guns and its railroads, steamboats, gas-lights, democracies and money-bags…his pose was a protest against the tyranny of a philistine epoch" (2). The sense of the Decadents as romantic and immature in their stance is characteristic of many Modernist critics and artists, though van Roosebroeck suggests that their "aesthetic and languid attitudes have been taken very seriously. They are responsible for the fact that modern poetry has been stamped as Decadent" (5).

As alienation functioned on two distinct levels, the personal and the cultural, so disintegration functions on two levels – as both a cultural and personal response to a quickly changing world in which modernisation and capitalism were taking hold, and the sense of dehumanization that the increasingly business-minded world engendered (Ortega 14).[22] Ortega's definition of dehumanization is important for the consideration of poetry in the Decadent and Modernist eras, particularly in the face of the artists' alienation from the modern world, as the removal of human qualities and emotions from modern art becomes the space in which the struggle for relevance and public acceptance is fought. It also functions as the primary move in the development of literary individualism, because the humanity that is abandoned in modernity is the humanity of the collective – I think that if viewers or readers fail to see their sense of a collective identity or cultural norm reflected in an art object, they are forced to look instead for a reflection of a personal connection. The Decadent ethos is bound up in this idea, and many or most definitions of the movement suggest a focus on the dominance of the part over the whole. Calinescu summarizes Bourget's suggestion that "Decadent societies are highly individualistic: the social organism becomes decadent as soon as individual life becomes exaggeratedly important under the influence of acquired well-being and heredity" (170).[23] The sense of alienation shifted from the Decadents to the Modernists – the middle class represented the Victorian moral uprightness against which the Decadents railed, whereas the Modernists identified mass culture as the prime offender.

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[22] The tendency towards dehumanization in modern art is, I believe, a direct result not only of the advancements in aesthetic considerations that Ortega discusses, but also as a response to the dehumanizing aspects of modernization. As a reaction against realism, whose sole purpose is to reflect human experience in art by "exhorting the artist faithfully to follow reality" (Ortega 25), Decadent and Modern art makes conscious use of style that separates the viewer/reader from the human qualities of the art object.

[23] The idea seems to have originated with Nisard, and was then taken up by Bourget and later Nietzsche (Calinescu 170).

The attitude of the English poets was, like many aspects of Decadence and Modernism, a British version of the French conflict of preceding years. For Gautier and the artists that followed him and his philosophy, even though it was the age of the country's industrialisation and "there seemed to be grounds for satisfaction, even complacency, in the march of material progress and the spread of new-found wealth" (Sturgis 10), the "course of the century appeared to be marked…by the twin evils of political cataclysm and opulent materialism" (10), two qualities that were dampened in a UK without major political revolutions and tempered by staid British decorum.

Britain's economic and social health had altered significantly by the end of the 1800s, particularly in terms of its role as a superpower in international trade, its wealth and access to resources, and its balance of social structure and opportunity.[24] The conflict between the sense of progress and the ennui caused by the industrialisation of the country was confusing for most of the population. It seemed as though the quality of life should be increasing, but the reality for most of the people living in London was in fact the opposite. The burgeoning middle class continued to have success, but the masses of poor and working poor did not live well, remaining subject to long hours in poor working conditions, little opportunities for meaningful education, and a decline in living conditions due to significant over-crowding. There was a sense amongst the populace "that the industrial organisation, which had yielded rent, interest and profits on a

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[24] The agriculture crisis and the marked increase in urban population mentioned earlier put a significant strain on the resources and infrastructure of the UK, particularly London, as did the loss of several former colonies of the Commonwealth. Also, the Prime Minister at the time, William Gladstone, involved the UK in three separate conflicts in Afghanistan, South Africa, and Ireland, which not only taxed the resources further but damaged the trust in the government. J.B. Bury identified the attitude of the last decades of the century as strained, because although there were many technologies and inventions which contributed to the sense of progress at the end of the century, he made clear that "against all this technical progress…ha[s] to be set the exploitation and sufferings of industrial workers, the distress of intense economic competition, the heavier burdens of preparation for modern war" (332).

stupendous scale, had failed to provide a decent livelihood and tolerable conditions for a majority of the inhabitants of Great Britain" (Beckson, *London in the 1890s: A Cultural History* 6). The apparent advancement of British society contrasted with the decline of the quality of life became a fundamental conflict of the era.

The media, trying to find the voice of the people, searched for both cause and effect of this conflict. They searched for evidence of decline and decay, finding it in the loss of quality of genius, romance, marriage, and even cricket (Beckson, *London in the 1890s: A Cultural History* xiv). The recent developments in science were taken and skewed to explain the alternating degeneracy or supremacy of the race. The initial dismay at the publication of *The Origin of Species* gave way to a "radical age of biologism, in which world-views based upon evolutionary biology" (Gibbons 4) began to compete with the "mechanistic physical sciences" (4). A general belief in the degeneracy of the current human species was commonplace. Naturally the population of Britain was confused and scared by these developments, as "cultural trends in the final decades of the century were…moving in two simultaneously antithetical directions: declining Victorianism and rising Modernism" (Beckson, *London in the 1890s: A Cultural History* xiv). Gibbons refers to the end of the nineteenth century as the Age of Evolutionism, and though he overestimates the importance of the concept by calling it *the* overarching idea that links everything of the period together, the often poorly understood ramifications of Darwin's and other's theories certainly impacted late-Victorian culture.

With urbanisation and the increase in international trade, and the decline in the general standard of living, there was a "growing sense of impatience; frustration [became] one of the more usual motivating forces…and the desire to remove, to

supplant, to replace, [became] the overriding consideration" (McFarlane 78). This frustration and desire to replace the existing structures began with an "emphasis on fragmentation, on the breaking up and progressive disintegration of those meticulously constructed 'systems' and 'types' and 'absolutes' that lived on from the earlier years of the century" (80). The response from both Decadents and Modernists was not to dissolve in the face of this fragmentation, but to attempt to capture it, to try to move beyond traditional realism to capture the essential human experience.

For clarification, it is important to note the associations of the term 'progress.' The idea of Britain experiencing the wonders of progress, the idea of the cult of progress, and the usage of the term to relate to the increased importance of science, technology, and industry are all variations of the same thing: the idea of progress as characterizing the advancement of society.[25] It is this very idea of advancement that the Decadents and Modernists challenged, arguing instead that this is not progress, as it did not make the lot of humanity better, but instead it cheapened and weakened both social and individual moral and spiritual well-being. For Decadent and Modernist artists, the increased dominance of science resulted in a degrading of the significance of human life as science undermined the "bases of religious faith, [and] went on to corrode man's belief in his own importance" (Sturgis 11). Calinescu aptly separates these ideas and their conflict, suggesting that "modernity, in the broadest sense…is reflected in the irreconcilable opposition between the sets of values corresponding to (1) the objectified, socially

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[25] Thornton further explains that the idea of progress can thrive despite appearing to be in conflict with many other perceived states of being – for example, he identifies the writings of people like Lankester who suggested that progress could coexist even with ideas of degeneration, and that it was possible to advance in some ways while being inferior to the ancients in terms of "mental capacities…[and] powers of perceiving and expressing beauty" (qtd. in Thornton 11).

measureable time of capitalist civilization…and (2) the personal, subjective, imaginative duree" (5).[26] At some point in the first half of the nineteenth century an "irreversible split occurred between modernity as a stage on the history of Western civilization – a product of scientific and technological progress, of the Industrial Revolution, of the sweeping economic and social changes brought about by capitalism – and modernity as an aesthetic concept" (Calinescu 41).

The Decadents were "obsessed with decline and decay, [but] the speakers of these poems cannot muster the energy to resist the decline they so insistently and persistently register" (Rodensky xxiv). Here Rodensky identifies a quality of Decadent art that persists – rather than identifying with and participating in the declining culture of the Moderns, the Decadents are languorous and worldsick. In France particularly, some "relished the feelings that the modern world was headed towards catastrophe," and there were artists who were

> conscious promoters of an aesthetic modernity that was…radically
>
> opposed to the other, essentially bourgeois, modernity, with its promises of
>
> indefinite progress, democracy, generalized sharing of the 'comforts of
>
> civilization'…such promises appeared to these decadent artists as so many
>
> demagogical diversions from the terrible reality of increasing spiritual alienation
>
> and dehumanization. (Calinescu 162)

In a tirade against the derogatory use of the term Decadent for his and others' poetry, Arthur Symons concluded that "there has been great talk of late of degeneracy, decadence, and what are supposed to be perversities; such as religion, art, genius, and

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[26] See also discussions of this tension by John Lester and Grant Allen – summarized by Thornton – as the "sense of frustration of the imagination by those very material developments which represented progress" (9).

individuality. But it is the millionaire, the merchant, the money-maker, the sweater, who are the degenerates of civilisation, and as the power comes into their hands all noble and beautiful things are being crushed out one after another, by some mechanical device for multiplying inferiority" (*Eleanora Duse* 1). To Symons and other Decadent poets, things like the cheap commodification and reproduction of art were representative of the falsity of progress, but they could not coalesce and offer a considered response. Instead, they continued to write lyrics of decline and ennui, and struggled with the representation of modern life in verse.

There is a delicate relationship between the modernism decried by the artists of both the Decadent and Modernist eras, and the style and subject matter that should have been in conflict, but was in many ways analogous. The "technology and industrialism of the age – often condemned…as a depressing achievement of bourgeois culture – nevertheless informed [Decadent] verse and prose as urban imagery, a celebration of artifice's triumph over nature" (Beckson 381). Though it seems counterintuitive that the artifice of modernism should find an echo in the art of groups opposed to its dominance, the artists were able to make a distinction between the artificiality of urban industrial capitalism and the art meant to reflect it. The most concrete image or symbol of the difficult contrast between the modern world and the art ideals of the Decadents and Moderns was the urban space.

The modernisation of London was inescapable, and so then was the representation of that London in the poetry of the Decadents. The difficulty for the artists was that a movement away from or a reaction to the cult of progress could not be a move towards the nature worship of the Romantic poets, as the fin-de-siècle poets valued

artifice and the construction of art too highly. It seems like a coexistence of modernity

and Decadent poetry that decried that modernity without turning to nature would be

impossible, but Calinescu argues that "a high degree of technological development

appears perfectly compatible with an acute sense of decadence. The fact of progress is

not denied, but increasingly large numbers of people experience the results of progress

with an anguished sense of loss and alienation" (156). In other words, it is because

modernity is inescapable that the Decadent poet must represent all the ugliness of

progress, and not by turning to the natural world, but by attempting to find beauty in the

ugliness of progress.

The increasingly urban nature of England had a significant impact on the poetry

of the time – as Symons put it in a review of W.E. Henley's work, modern poetry must

deal with the metropolis of London. The Decadent poets were interested in the city to

varying degrees. Symons certainly felt it was a necessary topic for poetry, as did Lionel

Johnson, but I think many others felt that poetry about London would devolve into some

form of realism or descriptive narrative. For the Moderns, this tentative relationship

between the City and art remained, as the "great works of Modernism live amidst the

tools of modern relativism, scepticism, and hope for secular change…they turn on

ambiguous images: the city as a new possibility and an unreal fragmentation" (Bradbury

and MacFarlane 49). Eliot and others learned from Baudelaire and Conrad that it was

"possible to make moving and profound art about what was to become a major modernist

preoccupation: the impress of urban industrial civilization on the human spirit" (Sultan

34).[27] Richard Aldington, a critic and Modernist poet, compared life in the city to life in

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[27] G.M. Hyde paradoxically refers to the city as "inherently unpoetic…and yet the city is inherently the most poetic of all material" (338), referring I think to the plurality of experience available.

the trenches of World War I, drawing parallels between the battlefields of Europe and the intricate trench systems of the streets and the warfare that goes on behind closed doors, suggesting that the only difference is that the desperate warfare is for money as a symbol of power (in Krockel 10). The Modernist heritage of the city, according to Krockel, is as a "nightmare world of monstrous, predatory egos where confrontation can be sudden and shocking, or a slow accumulation of obsessive fears building into morbid hysteria, all in the struggle to survive" (10). The city, described this way, but without the option of turning to the bucolic countryside for respite, is the setting of the tortured Decadent and Modernist poetry of modernity. The qualities of modernity mentioned above all had an impact on the continuities of the poetry between the Decadent and the Modern periods: the increased reliance on science and the decline of spiritual beliefs, the commercialism and consumerism associated with an expanded middle class, the decline in the quality and kinds of art objects, and many others. The simplistic ways in which the Decadent poets addressed these issues contributed to the resistance of late-Victorian England to the Decadents' work, while the Modernists were able to bring thirty years of experience with the progression of modernity to bear. There was, however, one aspect of the modern world that clarified the destruction of the familiarity of life that most significantly changed between the era of the Decadents and that of the Modernists – World War I.

The War was so "shattering in its impact, so far-reaching in its consequences, that it is profoundly difficult to capture what preceded it" (Bullock 58). When it broke out, people generally thought it would be over quickly. The War created many difficulties for poets: for example, it was difficult to focus on art and its creation in the

midst of the terrible reality of the European war-time situation. Many of the artists went to war themselves, and maintaining a theoretical or aesthetic perspective was difficult when faced so starkly with mortality. The poets of the First World War were then and are still problematic for discussions of Modernism. Some of them, like Wilfred Owen and Siegfried Sassoon, rejected the Modernist ideal of impersonality and distance in favour of a didactic poetry that more effectively captured the realities of the horrors they witnessed. Others, like T.S. Eliot and D.H. Lawrence, for example, did not see battle, but experienced the effects of war second-hand. Because they never saw direct conflict, the effects on their life and writing are more difficult to ascertain than for Owen or Sassoon. Krockel correctly contends that "the actual traumatic event is difficult to identify in both Lawrence's and Eliot's biographies, and consequently reading their work in terms of war becomes more a matter of identifying symptoms as reactions to events, than the events themselves" (21). This is true of much of the poetry of the Modernists – though not all of the verse contains direct references to the war, the effects of the conflict during those four and a half years threads inescapably throughout the literature.

We are now again faced with the question of what shift made the Modernists able to engage in a more direct way with the milieu and be recognized by the public as voices of change when the Decadents could not. For both eras, "crisis is inevitably a central term" (Levenson 4), and while not all was doom and gloom, "figures of nihilism, of degeneration and despair, circulate quickly both in the work and in the response to the work. The loss of faith, the groundlessness of value, the violence of war, and a nameless, faceless anxiety" (5) all loom large in the milieu of both eras, but Levenson suggests that a primary difference in the artists' response and reception has to do with the earnestness

of their resolve (5). The Decadents largely, perhaps following Wilde's satirical attitude towards earnestness, were acerbic and critical, whereas the Modernists were distinguished by a "deep, sometimes even dour, seriousness" (5). This seriousness may have allowed them to create manifestoes and to organize in a way which the Decadents were never able to. The insular nature of Modernist art became a self-fulfilling prophecy: as art became a separate sphere from science and morality, it became more and more "divorced from the culture at large, the work of the ivory tower rather than the community" (Longenbach 102). At the heart of the Decadent and Modernist verse, however, is the fundamental desire to record the dissolution of the modern world.

To aid in recording the disintegration of the modern world, poets wrote works that either obliquely or more directly referenced the decline of artistic values. Both the Decadents and the Modernists utilized various tropes and devices to accentuate the sense of decline, and both regularly used synecdoche. The device of using part to evoke an image of the whole became useful to describe the fragmentation the poets perceived. In other words, to capture the lack of wholeness in a society which does not offer artistic inspiration, the poets used synecdoche to reveal some diseased part of a whole.

One of the Decadent poets who captured the sense of decline best was Ernest Dowson. Symons' search for a poet to help him spread the doctrine of Decadence led him to Dowson, who seemed a likely candidate because of his verse and his lifestyle, which was dedicated largely to excess.[28] Dowson knew the work of many of the French Decadents as Symons did, was a sometime member of the Rhymers' Club, and was well-

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[28] There has been, and remains to be, significant discussion on the 'legend of Dowson' from which he emerges as a "raddled Keats, a pale and tragic figure who almost deliberately failed to outlive the century and the decade to which his work belongs" (Thornton 75). It seems this legend was mostly put forward by Symons, although it also appears that Dowson did his part to create this image of himself.

read. Unfortunately, Dowson was not a theorist and could not articulate his ideas of
Decadence or Symbolism, suggesting that Decadence was merely the dominance of
sound over sense. In many ways, frustratingly for both Symons and more recent
Decadent critics, he is the ideal Decadent poet as his poetry was a "musical lament for
the passing beauty of the moment, the inevitable failure of the ideal…but it lacked any of
the programmatic concerns of Symons' vision" (Sturgis 89). David Perkins calls him
"skilled, but simple" (43), and refers to his most well-known poem, "Non Sum Qualis
Eram Bonae sub Regno Cynarae" as "typical of his metrical achievement" (43). The
poem, originally published in the *Century Guild Hobby Horse* in 1891, is generally held
as the most complete expression of the Victorian fin de siècle because of its "obvious
intention to defy middle-class morality, its plush and gaslit classicism, its elaborate and
musical artifice, its nostalgia of the libertine for lost innocence, its desperation and
hopelessness" (43), while paying special attention to condensed sound and technical
rhythmic qualities. Eliot and Pound both considered Dowson a skilled craftsman, and
this poem in particular made Eliot suggest that "with a slight shift of rhythm, Ernest
Dowson freed himself from the poetic diction of English verse of his time" (qtd. in
Thornton 101). This is interesting and strange and frustrating, because Dowson, though
held as emblematic, refused to theorize about Decadence, and stubbornly chose drink
over the movement.

   In "Non Sum Qualis Eram…," the speaker laments the loss of innocence and the
decline of the intensity of experience that comes with aging. The poem grieves the loss
of the youthful innocence and idealized love in the face of the search for new and ever
more sordid experiences. Thornton suggests that the poem is central to the nineties "not

simply because it collects fashionable predecessors, or has a new music, a shift in rhythm, a technical excellence, but because it voices the dilemma which was the great subject of the period" (94).[29] Dowson claimed the poem was his attempt at Symbolist verse in the line of Verlaine, and it certainly has the feel of sin and illicit experience that became associated with both French and English Decadence. The themes mentioned above are explicated through Dowson's use of synecdoche, as the isolation of the speaker from the symbolic women in the poem is accentuated by the distance created from them. In the first and last stanzas, the speaker uses "thy shadow" (2, 31) to illustrate the imagined interjection of Cynara in his life. The shadow, in this case a memory embodied, serves as a constant reminder of the loss of idealized life the speaker experiences, instead seeking solace and excitement in the "madder music and stronger wine" (29). The speaker also turns to a prostitute as distraction, but instead of the prostitute's experience of satisfaction "within mine arms in love and sleep she lay" (18), satisfactory human contact eludes the speaker again, as the woman is distanced with her own synecdochal representation, reduced merely to a "bought red mouth" (19), symbolic of the artificiality inherent in the colour and application of makeup, and the status of the woman as a prostitute. Both of the women – the memory of the sweet recollected love and the unsavoury dalliance – are reduced to parts that represent the whole, and the separation removes the speaker from both worlds. The ennui for which Dowson was famous is revealed in this poem and others through the gradual withdrawal of the speaker from the modern world of beautiful sin as the only response to cold materialism.

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[29] The Decadent Dilemma, from Thornton's book of the same name, is the desire and attempt to reconcile the artificial ideal and the sensual real.

Beautiful sin is a topic to which Arthur Symons returned regularly, at least partially in his attempt to flaunt a Decadent idea of virtue and beauty in the face of late Victorian sensibility. Capturing the Decadent love for artifice and illicit love, he paints a picture in "Maquillage" of a woman symbolically ideal. Using a technique that Eliot would employ later in "Prufrock," Symons builds a picture of a woman using synecdoche rather than a more traditional blason, or describing a woman's figure spatially – each piece eventually contributes to an unseen whole, and each piece has some imagistic quality that doubles as symbolic. The contrast of the alluring and the delicate in the "charm of rouge on fragile cheeks" (1), the repetition of pale colours as pearl and creamy white, and the eyes lined with the exotic "dark and lustrous Eastern dyes" (3), add up at the end of the poem to the image of "an April sky withdrawn" (10). The short lyric gathers the impressions of colours on parts of the woman's body to represent the fleeting pleasure of the "scented boudoir" (5), and the transient delight of pleasure more generally defined. The poem "Hands" achieves a similar goal, this time focussing on the titular single attribute of the woman, described as 'little' and 'soft white', to advance the theme of innocence contrasted with depravity which is also present in "Maquillage." Symons uses synecdoche, particularly focussed on the forms of women, to evoke a whole image of the human form, somewhat dehumanized by its breaking apart, to express the themes of transience of experience and the destruction of innocence in the modern world.

The Decadent challenge to the declining artistic sensibility of the Nineties gives way to a more clearly defined and sharply expressed dissatisfaction with the modern world of the Modernists. The Decadent poets railed against a more generalized sense of

imbalance or wrongness in modernity, but for the Modernists reasons for the spiritual corruption in modern Britain were much clearer. Materialism and unchecked globalization at the expense of care and a moral centre had led to World War I. Mass culture and media had culminated in the forms of popular literature and cinema. These and other causes led the Modernist poets to have a more focussed point of approach to addressing the ills of modernity. Even a poet like Edith Sitwell, who was concerned primarily with her place in the poetic world, recognized and addressed the materialism and coldness of the 1920s. Much like the Decadents before and the other high Modernists in her circle, her first move was to react against the dominant poetic ethos of the time, and in her early work she spent a great deal of time "pitting her wits and talent against the prevailing Georgianism" (Glendinning 4). She also, like Eliot, Pound, and others, was very aware of the poetry from the end of the nineteenth century, and leaned "most heavily on her reading of the French Symbolists" (4). As a sixteen-year-old, she was introduced to Verlaine, Rimbaud, and Baudelaire to enlarge her rapt readings of Swinburne, Morris, and others (32). She loved Swinburne's poetry, and his attention to sound, much like the Symbolists mentioned, was an inspiration for her own verse and became her focus.

Though much of her early poetry was written primarily from her lived experience and dealt with her poor treatment at the hands of her parents, there remains a distinct awareness of the state of England post-World War I. In *Bucolic Comedies*, published first in 1923, Sitwell makes heavy use of symbolism in the artificialized figures of mythic characters and settings, and juxtaposes images of the natural world with modern technology. For example, her "On the Vanity of Human Aspiration," opens with a

description of modern industry as "In the cold wind, towers grind round,/ Turning, turning, on the ground;/ In among the plains of corn/ Each tower seems a unicorn" (1-4). The towers here function as a synecdoche for the factories of mass production that were appearing further and further from city centres in the agricultural land. In "The Man with the Green Patch," an Admiral returned from war, broken and half-blind, spends his days reminiscing of the "friendships long ago/ with fairy aristocracies" (19-20), but he is unable to see "the real world, terrible and old,/ Where seraphs in the mart are sold/ And fires from Bedlam's madness flare" (32-34).[30] The poem relies heavily on colour symbolism throughout, particularly green for imagination and youth and gold for aged richness. One of the central images of the poem is the synecdoche of the British Navy via the Admiral, from which the Admiral would be retired and which is a central symbol of the declining British Empire as the Admiral declines. The image of the sea and the ships appears twice; first as "blue and white dead bone" (18) of the ships on the water, and second as "blue-white harsh bone" (41). Both times the image is used to accentuate how out of place the Admiral is, though he is surrounded by "unreal owlish people" (46) who sit and listen to his stories while thinking of their own "long heritage" (50). The changing state of England registers even in Sitwell's preoccupation with her own childhood and her desire to find a place in the coterie of modern poets. The encroaching industrial complexes and infrastructure on previously agricultural land warned of the continued dominance of capitalist enterprise, and Sitwell's poetry captures the dehumanizing and destructive tendencies of industry and war.

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[30] The reference to Bedlam is to the Bethlehem Royal Hospital, which at the time was full due to the soldiers experiencing what we would now call PTSD and the general increase of patients due to the effects of overcrowding and poor working conditions in London.

D.H. Lawrence spent much of his life and career as an outsider. His views were not always in step with a more radical Modernist ethos – for instance, his partial return to a Romantic sense of nature as potentially restorative and his unapologetic subjectivity. He believed that "too much repression and intellectualization were destroying the instinctual part of man's nature" (Moore 13), which set him against the ideas of poets like Eliot and Pound. However, he, like the other Modernists, was familiar with and fond of the French Symbolists. Also like the other Modernists, a primary drive in his creative work was the witnessing of the collapse of the Victorian dream of progress (145). The First World War and its marking of a transition from a "world of apparent order and contentment to a world of chaos and sick nerves" (Moore 13) affected Lawrence much as it did all of England, but on a more personal level, Lawrence had several of his works banned during wartime and was persecuted by the authorities as a suspected spy (Krockel 6). Lawrence, in fact, left England after the war and travelled the world searching for some sense of internal peace and relief from the ravaged Britain he knew.

Though he felt strongly about the situation in England and wrote about it in his work, Lawrence claimed that he was unwilling to have his poetry "nailed to the mast of anyone else's cause" (qtd. in Lockwood 155), but much of his work still addresses a modern world slipping into ruin. It is perhaps telling that a poet claiming not to address social reality in any particular way is still unable to restrain himself from commentary. Lawrence reacted against the "firmness, uprightness, and sobriety, commonly the virtues of civilization [which] persisted in beyond their day, have become a vice and a perversity" (Lockwood 107). Lawrence was still pushing against the same qualities of Victorianism that drove the Decadents and continued to drive the Modernists. In fact,

Lockwood refers to the "elements of deliberate posing, of humour and playfulness" (104), what he calls the "downward looking nature"[31] of the work, and, I would add, the resistance to objective measures of morality, as a kind of "arch decadence" (104). In 1923, he published *Birds, Beasts and Flowers*, which stands out as the "first of [his] mature verse" (104), and falls in the third phase of his work, in which he travelled largely in the search for social certainty.[32]

This collection was poetry of a "different texture, freer and more volatile, full of rhythms that were more conversational than before, yet without sacrifice of good lines and living images" (Moore 171). In short, though the themes of the poems relied heavily on natural images of plants and animals, the verses were simultaneously the most Modern of his works due to the free structure, the attention to sound, and the allegorical nature of the imagery. A fine example of this is the poem "Grapes." In it, the speaker contrasts the rose and the grapevine, each representative of a period in human history. He equates the rose with the modern era, simpering and explicit, and with the "mechanical automatons of industrial society, the rigid and sober legislators" (Lockwood 108). He then contrasts the rose and its modern representatives with the grapevine, which is ancient and reminiscent of a "dusky, flowerless, tendrilled world" (21) and peopled by "men, soft-footed and pristine,/ Still, and sensitive, and active" (24-5). Throughout the poem, Lawrence uses the fern as a synecdoche of this ancient world, as in the "fern-

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[31] I understand this to be in reference to Lawrence's desire to move poetry away from the brain and towards the more visceral areas of the body – quite literally the heart, gut, and groin. Lawrence championed a balance in poetry that did not neglect the "lower centres of consciousness and of life within himself" (qtd. in Lockwood 118).

[32] Moore identifies four stages: first, from 1909-1912, was concerned chiefly with recording his youth; second, from 1913-1919, was concerned with the intensity of modern love and psychological explorations into emotional consciousness and ended with despair over WWI; third, from 1920-25, the 'wander years,' when he moved around from Italy, to parts of Asia, to eventually the USA.; and fourth, from 1926-1930 and his death, marked by a return to some of his original themes of sex and mortality (14).

scented frontiers" (56), the "fern-scented world" (76), and the "fern-seed on our lips"

(77). The fern, associated with the pre-flowering plant world, holds special power and

conjures images of primordial jungle. The privileging of the primeval and instinctual

world untainted by "our vistas democratic,/ boulevards, tram-cars, policemen" (66-7) is

characteristic of Lawrence's themes, as he often suggests that a return to more visceral

humanity is a potential solution for the problems of modernity. In "Peach," Lawrence

suggests the inferiority of industrial human-made objects, as the peach if made by people

would be "round and finished like a billiard ball" (23). Instead, the idealized peach is

imperfectly shaped, described through a series of synecdochal parts, like its "groove"

(15), its "bivalve roundness" (16), and its "ripple down the sphere" (17). The poems in

this collection all celebrate the old and instinctual, the viscerally human, in contrast to

the mechanical and cold creations of humans.

The Britain of the Decadents and Modernists was a world increasingly steeped in

the apparently freeing qualities of modernity. For many poets of both eras, however,

modernity offered no freedom, only a culture devoid of moral and spiritual significance.

The Decadents like Arthur Symons offered hedonistic reactions to the strictures of

Victorian society purveying the culture of progress, but they were largely unformed and

certainly not well-received by the public. The Modernists had similar problems with

modernity, but were able to identify more clearly the threats to poetic expression, and as

I will show in the next chapter, more able to get the message out in carefully constructed

ways.

The poets in this chapter all attempt similar things, the first of which is to identify

the failing of modernity as essentially destructive to humanity. They differ in their next

steps: Lawrence suggests that attending to ancient human instincts can in some way remedy the soullessness of the time. Others, however, have trouble seeing past the disheartening coldness of the era and can offer little solace. The search for meaning was not a hopeless one though, and many poets of the time were not content with recording the destruction of their world – they felt a need to provide some hope, if for no other reason than because nihilism is not a natural state for humans.

Chapter Four: Foot of the Cross, Mouth of the Pistol

"After the world has starved its soul long enough in the contemplation and the re-arrangement of material things, comes the turn of the soul." – Arthur Symons

The rapidly changing world that I have presented so far resulted in a fundamental question for the public and artists: as science gained pre-eminence and religious faith declined in a materialistic world concerned with production and capital, how did one find significance and direction? As the disintegration of artistic worth and individual human worth continued, the search for meaning meant a "re-structuring of parts, a re-relating of the fragmented concepts…to match what was felt to be the new order of reality" (McFarlane 80). The crisis happens when a significant portion of the population, artist and public alike, find new truths and realities in the face of science which challenge the idea of ultimate authority, but do not necessarily like what those truths mean for their lives. For example, if humans are not created distinctly and purposefully by God, human importance is challenged. As I have previously mentioned, artists felt this intensely, for if science offers truth, it rarely offers poetry. As disintegration continued, the search for order drove the work of many artists.

The search, then, was to find a new divinity, a new source of artistic meaning. The work of poetry in both eras served in part as a "retort to [materialistic] scientism, a program for poetic re-establishment of the analytically dissolved harmony between…the sense of the significance and ultimate harmony of human experiences" (Gibbons 7). For artists of the Decadent and Modernist movements, the search took on three distinct flavours, not necessarily mutually exclusive. To reconstruct meaning out of the deteriorating modern world, artists looked to religious faith or a mystical alternative, a revised philosophy of aesthetics, and/or the allure of myth and history as balms to

fractured sensibility, and the poets of both movements made use of complex systems of allusion as a link to all three sources of hope.

As previously discussed, one of the primary differences between the critical and commercial success between the Decadents and the Modernists was the relative ability of each to spread their message of anti-modernity. Critical to getting that message out were the options for publication, and the ability to make a living as a poet or person of letters. There were more publishers of books and collections that challenged the dominant cultural value for the Modernists, but even more valuable were the other options for publication, like the little magazines. By the high point of Modernism in the early 1920s, poetry publication had rebounded significantly, increasing from only about fifteen significant books of poetry published each year in the 1890s to closer to forty significant volumes per year in the late teens and 1920s (Perkins 13). As mentioned earlier, the Modernists possessed the acumen to realize that success must involve responding to and working within the structures of mass culture, and so took advantage of the desire for wealthier buyers to buy exclusive copies of collections. The result was something like a trickle-down effect: the apparent desirability of a text based on collectors and special editions resulted in a self-fulfilling prophecy of consumption by the middle-class reader. The shift in production also marked a change in the structure of patronage. The old model of a landed aristocracy funding art that would reveal the current world gave way to a system of philanthropists interested in furthering their own stake in the cultural world. In addition to having wider readerships and larger print runs than the Decadent little magazines, those of the Modernists added the introduction of wealthy patrons. The addition of wealthy backers was amplified by a more nuanced approach to advertising,

which also helped the little magazines of the modernists survive and reach a larger audience. Though mass advertising in magazines existed throughout the latter half of the Victorian period, it was a deliberate aim of the Decadent magazines to avoid it. Advertising was often done as a removable insert, usually with separate pagination. For the most part, however, the advertisements were few, and usually the notices were for books sold by the publisher of the magazine as well; for example, the Bodley Head for *The Yellow Book*, and Smithers' company for *The Savoy*. The magazine that stands out is *The Dome*, which had the longest and most regular publication. It was the only magazine to include advertisements for things other than books, like typewriters and soap. These were unthinkable in the other publications, but the economic effects ensured its success where the others had failed. Whereas the Decadent periodicals were often run by the poets and their publishers, many of the Modernists' magazines, like *The Criterion* and the *Little Review,* were backed by rich collectors and patrons (Rainey, *Institutions of Modernism* 50). The Modernist attitude towards the little magazines was much more practical and less ideological than that of the Decadents. The artists and publishers created a market for their works by ascribing monetary and aesthetic appeal to collecting those works. This was a modification of the Decadent purpose in their special editions. The Decadent goal was to create beautiful books that were works of art, in line with the William Morris philosophy of printing. The Modernists, by contrast, produced special editions so that they might drive up the price of and interest in the work before it was ever released, which ensured that the voiced support of the elite collector would influence the general public to purchase the text once it became available to them. Rainey identifies this process as key in the construction of the modernist relationship

with the reading public, addressing the issues of modern technologies,[33] as modernist

works came to rely not on the individual reader, but on an amalgam of investor,

collector, and patron. These important shifts in the publication of poetry between the

Decadents and the Modernists not only made it easier for the poets to share their images

of the negative effects of modernity, it also allowed the Modernist poets a more effective

way to communicate the solutions to the spiritual vacuity left behind by modernity.

The crisis of faith resulted in the British public searching for new sources of

meaning. Many adopted the tenets of science as the ruling order of the physical universe,

but for others this left the world devoid of spiritual significance. For those people left

searching for more, religious faith kept its importance in their lives, and others who

needed a balance between the cold logic of science and spiritual fulfillment began

searching for alternatives. The rise of mysticism at this time coincides with this search,

which was essentially the desire for a unifying principle. Artists of the Decadent and

Modernist movements were particularly sensitive to the search for meaning, and they

represented all three groups – the scientific truth-seekers, the religious faithful, and, in

the middle of this imagined continuum, the spiritual alternative-seekers. The poets of

both movements sought to identify and create a place in which poetry and poetic values

of personal spiritual experience could exist amidst the scientific materialism of their

time.

Organized religion seems at first blush an incompatible idea with the tenets of

Decadence and Modernism. Should the refined aestheticism and the encouraging of

unwholesome subject matter not be directly at odds with Catholic and Anglican

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[33] Waller suggests that "by the time of the Great War, and the development of the cinema, telephone, and wireless, audio-visual communication was ready to fetter the written word" (3)

doctrine? Or, as Ellis Hanson puts it, "are not the religious, aesthetic, and erotic three entirely different categories of experience that should not be confused?" (1). It seems not, as many poets of both movements were already practising Catholics and even more converted. For Pater in *Marius the Epicurean*, "Christianity holds out the hope of an eternal order in a transitory universe" (Beckson 40); thus the two primary reasons for the attention paid to the Church by Decadent and Modernist poets: the search for some unifying sense of meaning I mentioned above,[34] and the allure of the symbolism and rich history of the Church.[35] To many, both the Catholic and Protestant churches were stiff regulators of morality and tight managers of their members, which would seem totally at odds with the goals and worldviews of the poets at hand. However, as artists are wont to do, many of the poets took rather lightly the more stiff regulations of the church and found instead a "taste for all that is sumptuous, brutal, and bizarre in Christian traditions" (5). Perkins suggests that Catholics and Catholicism were seen as rare and exotic, and goes so far as to say that many were converts for the sake of aesthetics (19), but although this may account for the initial attraction to the Church, it does not necessarily account for the search for meaning that these poets were already undergoing.

Hanson details the qualities that made Roman Catholicism "central to both the stylistic peculiarities and the thematic preoccupations of the decadents" (5):

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[34] Huysmans, a late convert to the Catholic Church, who resisted the title of Decadent for some time, defined his conversion to Decadence as "an essentially Roman Catholic revolt against the materialism of the age" (Hanson 5). He would eventually become a Benedictine oblate.

[35] Or: "the paradox of rebellious Decadent writers rejecting the stifling Victorian world of bourgeois morality and the liberal theology of the Church of England in order to embrace the binding dogmas of Roman Catholicism can be explained, in part, by the crisis of faith…and the consequent need for ancient, universal authority. The aesthetic experience of Roman ritualism was undoubtedly a further attraction" (Beckson 49).

The Church itself is a beautiful and erotic work of art…it is like a great museum in its solemn respect for art and its extraordinary accumulation of dead and beautiful things. It is a relic of itself…the sheer excess of the Church – its archaic splendour, the weight of its history, the elaborate embroidery of its robes, the labyrinthine mysteries of its symbolism…has always made it an aesthetic and fetishistic object of wonder. (6)

Catholicism is itself a paradox, and the Decadents revelled in it – the Church is "at once modern and yet medieval, ascetic and yet sumptuous, spiritual and yet sensual, chaste and yet erotic, homophobic and yet homoerotic, suspicious of aestheticism and yet an elaborate work of art" (7).[36] The allure of the Church to the artists and poets who moved in the circles of Decadence was both light and serious, interchangeably profound and superficial, simultaneously ephemeral and eternal.

Few eras boast as many artistic converts to the Roman Catholic church than the Decadent era (Hanson 11). J. K. Huysmans is perhaps the most abrupt or unexpected example, but the finale of his most well-known work now,[37] *À Rebours,* shows the progression of the Decadent worldview to Christian conversion. In many ways, Huysmans probably represents the quintessential Decadent convert: he joined eight years after *À Rebours,* but was unapologetic in the face of criticisms of hypocrisy and considered his Catholicism not antithetical to his Decadence but complementary (127). His character, Des Esseintes, spends the novel searching for more and more beautiful and unusual experiences and objects. The search leads him eventually to an impossible conclusion – which is the inevitable conclusion of Decadence writ large – the search for

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[36] In his lyrical and fascinating creative non-fiction biography of John Gray, *The Man Who Was Dorian Gray,* Jerusha McCormack further explores the allure of Catholicism to Wilde, Gray, Johnson, Dowson, and others. He discusses the appeal of forgiveness – that the divine cannot be reached except through sin – and again the attractiveness of the sumptuous ritual and tradition of the Church.

[37] He wrote many other texts, and at the time some of his autobiographical Catholic novels outsold his earlier 'perverse texts.'

novelty and rarity cannot be infinite, and as such it is ultimately a search with no

endpoint, no satiation. In a review of *À Rebours* published in *Le Constitutionel*, Barbey

D'Aurevilly echoed a comment he had already made about Baudelaire's work,

suggesting that "il ne vous reste plus, logiquement, que la bouche d'un pistolet ou les

pieds de la croix," or that the only logical solace for the Decadent soul is at the foot of

the Cross or the mouth of a pistol. Certainly the Decadent pose was without hope; it was

a "creed of compensation, claiming moments of sensory pleasure as fleeting distractions

from the enduring awfulness of existence" (Sturgis 40). Notable converts included

Wilde, Douglas, Johnson, Dowson, Beardsley, and Gray. Many converted on their

deathbeds, attempting perhaps some final recompense for their Decadent lifestyle and

literature. Alfred Douglas, the young lover of Wilde who caused him so much grief,

offers the best argument for "conversion as a flight from decadence" (Hanson 13), as he

spent the rest of his years publishing regrets about the errors of his youth.[38] All of these

figures[39] looked to the Church for a solution to their Decadent dilemma – the literature

struggles with conclusion, but the end of life is certain.

Wilde is perhaps the most famous example. He flirted with conversion many

times throughout his life, and like Huysmans' protagonist, Wilde's equally decadent

Dorian Gray considers the Church as he sits in Mass one afternoon. Wilde's conversion

came late in life, quite literally as he lay dying, but there are hints of its imminence

around and after his imprisonment and exile. In "The Ballad of Reading Gaol," Wilde

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[38] There is an undeniable parallel with the alternative sexualities of many of the Decadent figures listed here and their conversion to Catholicism. For a fascinating discussion that I have not the space for here, see Hanson's *Decadence and Catholicism*, in which he draws some interesting conclusions about this intersection.

[39] Other converts include Fredrick Rolfe, John Francis Bloxam, Montague Summers, Michael Field, Renee Vivien, and from the later era Ronald Firbank, E.F. Benson, and Evelyn Waugh.

compares himself to the condemned murderer, suggesting that they are both thrust from God's care (172). The poem is full of biblical allusions, many more than in his earlier work, and these allusions are indicative of a burgeoning plea for salvation. At the end of the first section of the poem, the speaker compares the chaplain of the prison to the head priest responsible for the persecution of Jesus, and suggests that the doomed man seems barely cognizant of the severity of his fate as he does not "feel upon his shuddering cheek/ the kiss of Caiaphas," (95-6). In the section detailing how the other prisoners felt the guilt of the condemned man and prayed when they had never prayed before, the speaker compares the vinegar-soaked sponge offered to Jesus on the cross to the harsh taste of pity as "bitter wine upon a sponge/ Was the savour of Remorse" (281-2). There are many other biblical allusions to Judas, Peter's denial of Christ, and the Gospels of Luke and Mark. They create a tapestry of a poet for whom the perceived sins of his life have been laid bare, and shortly after his release from prison, his declining health prompted him to seek out absolution in the Catholic Church.

John Gray, whose lush poetry from *Silverpoints* I have previously analyzed, owns perhaps the starkest transition. One of the young, beautiful disciples of Wilde, Gray was a low-born man who became a high clerk in the Post Office. Partly because of his perception of himself as self-made but potentially an imposter, Gray wrote always from behind a persona. In an introduction to his poetry, R.K.R Thornton identifies the 'Dorian' decadent, and then later the Canon, as cool and aloof (1). Through an apprenticeship with Charles Ricketts, he became part of a circle that included many of the prominent Decadent artists – Johnson, Dowson, Shannon, and others, and through this he fell briefly under Wilde's spell. After he broke with Wilde, at least partly out of

fear of repercussions from the illegality of homosexuality, he moved towards creating a new image of himself. The persona of Father Gray became the dominant one, and by 1896 he was ordained in the Church. The early poetry has all the hallmarks of Decadence, like the lush imagery of what is likely his first sexual experience with Wilde in "Passing the Love of Women," and is starkly contrasted with the poetry of his later career as he searches for fulfillment in religion. This poetry is replete with pleas to God for answers to his troubles with identity and faith, and with his heartache surrounding his desires. In a later poem "Vauquelin de la Fresnaye," Gray apostrophizes the "beautiful soul, whose heart forever glows/ with chaste and lofty thought" (1-2) as it "quits the unmasked avenues of shame,/ chooses the path where many a lily blows" (7-8). His conversion complete, Gray even helped other formerly Decadent figures such as Aubrey Beardsley and Michael Field transition to Catholicism. The figure of the Canon lived out Gray's life, eventually proclaiming little knowledge of the associations he once had and the poetry he once wrote.

Lionel Johnson was the scholar of the Rhymers' Club. He was well-read and an accomplished critic, and Yeats would later identify him as a poet and a critic from whom he learned a great deal. He was another of the Decadent poets characterized by his conflict between his desires and habits and the idealized life he wanted to lead. In "The Precept of Silence," Johnson writes of the "solitary griefs,/ Desolate passions, aching hours!" (1-2) that capture his sense of internal conflict. He struggled to reconcile his own pain with the quickly changing world around him, feeling out of place and unable to express his difficulties, and even though "Some players upon plaintive strings/ Publish the wistfulness abroad:/ I have not spoken of these things,/ Save to one man, and unto

God" (9-12). This struggle led him to the solace of the Catholic Church, and though his faith could not save him from his alcoholism, it provided some consolation. In "A Proselyte," a poem about his own conversion, the speaker welcomes the discomfiting experience of the Holy Spirit breaking his "cloistral peace, so hardly won" (4) as "On me thy devastation came,/ Sudden and swift;/ a gift/ Of joyous torment without name" (18-21). His faith offers peace again in "The Red Wind," as personified and terrible earthly temptations are quelled and the speaker asks that the "Red Wind! hear God's voice:/ Hear thou, and fall, and cease" (25-6). Johnson found in his conversion to the Church an answer to the upheaval of his life and the Decadence that threatened to swallow him whole. He was also likely responsible for the conversion of Ernest Dowson, who, like Johnson, sought release from sexual desire and impure urges.

The search for stability continued for the Modernist poets, and some of them looked to the church as well. It was even more difficult for them – modernity and its related scientism had progressed even further in the intervening thirty years, and after the First World War it was clear that the "progress of technology and material wealth…was bankrupt and hopeless" (Weidner 1) but equally unstoppable. Eliot is a great example of a poet who looked to religion as an answer to the fragmented mess that was Western European culture. In the absence of a stabilizing presence, Eliot searched for constancy in aestheticism, humanism, idealism, and even Buddhism (2), before converting to Anglicanism in 1927. If the Decadents converted for the mystique and trappings of faith as well as some search for permanence, Eliot and other Moderns were less fascinated by the mythos. Many of Eliot's acquaintances suggested that his conversion was "not a conversion of passionate belief, but a conversion of will" (2) as he turned "reluctantly

but determinedly to the last available source of authority and meaning" (2). He believed

strongly in organized religion as a balm for an avarice-laden modern world, a

counterpoint to the focus on "acquisitive, rather than the creative and spiritual instincts"

(*Christianity and Culture* 76). Faith offered what nothing else could – an "apparent

meaning to life…and [protection for] the mass of humanity from boredom and despair"

(106). This characteristically Modern and intellectual approach to the idea of faith and

religion wasn't particular to Eliot. For example, Graham Greene was a convert to

Catholicism at the age of 21, initially because of the woman he wanted to marry and

because of the sense of the spiritual promise.[40]

　　While many poets turned to or turned back to the Church, others could not

reconcile the "doubts cast by biblical criticism on the literal interpretation of the

scriptures" (Gibbons 12) with the message of both the Catholic and Protestant faiths. The

result for these poets was to look to other spiritual sources – Buddhism, theosophy,

spiritualism, mysticism, occultism, magnetism, and others – to find evidence that "the

universe is living, spiritual, and unified, and earthly phenomena symbolically

correspond" (11). Many poets embraced alternative spiritual codes, including two of the

most famous poets from the end of the nineteenth century in Yeats and Symons.

Towards the end of the 1890s, Symons, perhaps because of his close associations with

Yeats, began to turn more and more towards mysticism. In his poetry, Symons identifies

symbolism as the attempt to spiritualize literature and free it from the bondage of

materialism (79), because both symbolism and mysticism satisfied the need for

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[40] In his autobiography, *A Sort of Life,* Greene describes his transition from staunch disbeliever to
moderate disbeliever. The apparent paradox found no particular resolution, but the Church offered solace
from his personal mental health issues and his weariness with the world at large.

something that makes it "worthwhile to go on living…at our finest intensity" (qtd. in Gibbons 79).

John Davidson is representative of those caught between the decline of faith and the problematic implications of a scientific world. As it became clearer that "truth could only be known through scientific rationalism and that shapings of the imagination reflected nothing more than subjective emotion," there was also a fear that the split "between truth and imagination…had impoverished life" (Perkins 72). Davidson was an atheist, but could not believe that scientific rationalism could create a world for the heart and mind, and so he sought to create poetry that would explore the ideas of science. Davidson believed that an awareness of the scientific reality of the world would in fact free poetry from the weight of existing philosophy and religion. For Davidson, the path through the difficult and changing status of poetry was to further immerse himself in the apparent cause of that difficulty. In "The Wastrel," Davidson describes a "pale dissenting chapel" (3) that is "an eyesore to the tourist" (1) wherein the minister expounds on the parts of religion Davidson found untenable, "with strong, pathetic preaching that the very dead might rouse" (4). Davidson presents a view of religious figures as narrow and deadened to the world, as "little but his Bible and his creed the preacher knew,/ And dogma like a razor his emotions had unsexed" (11-12). In his three-part dramatic poem cycle centered around Mammon, the atheist King of Thule, the speaker outlines the role of evolution to take over at the death of Christendom. The poems attempt to register the wonder of the physical and natural world outside of a creator, and to instil that wonder as a panacea for a world lacking in awe.

D.H. Lawrence had a complicated and shifting attitude towards religion. The distinct periods or sections of his writing life saw corresponding shifts in his belief. He was in his early years a member of a non-traditional Christian church of the sort that branch off periodically from larger denominations, but wasn't particularly staunch and drifted away in the early 1910s. After this, he attempted to set an idea of God in his growing awareness of life as a whole – it was not necessarily the Christian figure of God, rather an "impulse he call[ed] 'God the Father'…[a] stable, all-embracing, one; a being in togetherness with all created things; an existence in the flesh, in sensation, linking us with the whole natural universe" (Kinkead-Weekes 384). Later, though, in his difficult period after the beginning of the First World War, Lawrence lost what faith he had developed in the face of his perception of the end of civilization. He equated modern Judeo-Christian faith with any and all qualities of a failed western cultural development. In his subsequent travels around the world, he aligned his beliefs with a sense of animism and pre-cultural naturalism, or a belief in the inherent majesty and order of the natural world. Christianity was set against this in his mind, and as he saw Christianity as representative of colonialism he turned his back further on the Christian idea of religion (391), until in the final five years of his life and with his health failing he attempted to reconcile one final time the prospect of death and rebirth. He at all times was governed by a struggle between making sense of his own life and resisting the surrender of himself to a larger movement (Paulin 90). Lawrence's complex attitudes towards faith and religion shifted as did his sense of the worthiness and justice of the world. This fragmented approach to faith and belief is typically Modern.

The search for meaning wasn't limited to those either for or against religious affiliation and adherence. Many poets and artists removed themselves from queries of faith and looked instead to art itself as a source of meaning, or searched the artistic world for inspiration while also considering deeply the role of faith. To seek meaning in art was a natural extension for both the Decadents and the Modernists, especially since both groups eschewed the idealized natural world of the Romantics. Weir calls this turn 'hyperculturalization' (16), which he describes as the movement to make all reference, imagery, and allusion in art to things created by humans as opposed to the natural world. Wilde, and his perspective was representative, suggested that art did not imitate nature – in fact, the reverse was true. As a result, the "effect was not to divorce art from life…, but to bring the two together again, though with the priorities changed" (Ellmann, *a long the riverrun* 7). In his preface to *Dorian* Gray, Wilde suggests that art is the only answer; the production and consumption of art trumps any search for morality or teaching. Later, Pound evolves the idea of art as an end of its own as instructive – the pedagogical *ABC of Reading* elevates the contemplation of poetry to the ultimate end to connect with the world and other people, because he believed strongly that "if a nation's literature declines, the nation atrophies and decays" (32). Levenson suggests that, in "complicated, unforgiving times" ("Why We're Still Struggling…*"* 1), Modernists turned to art in the hopes that it could "be what religion had been, and what politics had failed to become – a sphere of conviction and a site of shared value" (1). The idea of art as an end of its own stems from the desire to have art serve as both source and product of imagination,[41] a sort of recursive loop. The matured version of Wilde's aesthetic into Pound's pedagogy

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[41] Nicholls refers to art as a source of meaning as an "aesthetic 'religion' in which imagination and sensibility silently usurped dogma and belief" (52).

takes art as a rejection of popular values of morality, and extends it to capture the potential of art to be restorative.

The result of looking towards art and human creation for inspiration and meaning is a microcosm of a larger movement, which Calinescu describes as "a major cultural shift from a time-honoured aesthetics of permanence, based on a belief in an unchanging and transcendent ideal of beauty, to an aesthetic of transitoriness and immanence, whose central values are change and novelty" (3). The attraction to artifice only served to increase the speed at which the world was perceived to move. The City was critical in this seeming paradox, as both the Decadents and the Modernists realized the necessity of reflecting the changed urban world of England. Here I refer to the City not simply as a setting that challenges the creation of poetry, but as part of the study of art itself – as inherent in the style and structures of the poems themselves. The bucolic world of the Romantics was long past, and the forms that the later poets chose reflected the new living spaces. In the 1890s, and certainly then in the Modernist era, there was a fascination with fixed forms that were "updated to represent a bustling urban centre" (Bristow 12) that could exhilarate as well as exhaust. Both the Decadents and the Modernists shared this dual sense of urban space – John Davidson is a fine example of the early modernist method of using "allusion and juxtaposition [to] emphasize the fragmentariness, contingency, and unreality of the city scene" (Sloan ix). Like Eliot later, Davidson and the other Decadents saw something "horrible and non-human, something savage" (ix) in the city.

Arthur Symons was a poet and critic who believed strongly that poetry could save the world. He speaks in both "The Decadent Movement in Literature" and later in

The Symbolist Movement in Literature of the soul, but he means it differently than its characteristic usage. He refers to the soul as the human ability to perceive "a finer sense of things unseen, the deeper meaning of things evident" ("The Decadent Movement…" 859). This version of the soul found its perfect expression in poetry, and though Symons was torn between this higher goal of poetry and his desire for the earthly pursuit of pleasure, he "yearned, through art, for aesthetic, and ultimately spiritual, transcendence" (Beckson *Arthur Symons: A Life* 3). He believed that art could reconcile for him the pressures of his religious upbringing and his infatuation with dancers and actresses. In fact, he suggests that poetry can take the place of religion, because literature speaks "so intimately , so solemnly, as only religion had hitherto spoken to us, [that] it becomes itself a kind of religion" (*Symbolist Movement...* 9). Yet by the time Symons was writing his truly decadent verse, he was so caught up in his wanderings through the London music halls that his theory got little practise. The poetry of *Silhouettes* and *London Nights* focuses almost entirely on his various infatuations with performers and prostitutes. As a result, his critical perspective of the importance of poetry in the cold modern world must come from the work he did at the end of the 1880s. There, poems like "Venus of Melos" describe the longevity of art compared to the ephemeral nature of human creation in "sceptre, sword and throne" (43). In the face of "man's busy pain/ And his small dust of memory" (39-40) "art alone,/ Changeless among the changing made,/ Lasts ever, and her workmen build/ On sites that fallen temples filled" (44-48). The prologue poem to *Days and Nights* is perhaps his clearest verse expression of his ideology of poetry. Art is personified in the piece, and Symons encourages the reader to search for her not, as "they say, withdrawn on some far peak" (1) but where "cities pour/

Their turbid human stream through street and mart" (13-14). There, Art watches and reports on all things human, regardless of good or bad, and lives in "pity of the little lives we lead" (68). Art and poetry, for Symons, were the chroniclers of human life and death. The value of art for Decadent poets as a salve for the modern condition of humanity found expression in Symons' and other Decadent poetry, and that value continued into the work of the Modernists.

Ezra Pound's 1920 poem "Hugh Selwyn Mauberley" traces the stages of the Decadent and Modernist difficulty in miniature, following a process of alienation from and disgust with a world lost its way, and the search for an answer to the void left behind. Throughout the course of the long poem, the speaker identifies the difficulties for a poet who "strove to resuscitate the dead art/ Of poetry" ("E.P. Ode pour l'Election de Son Sepulchre" 2-3) in a "half savage country" (6). After initial failure to produce high poetic art in a world more desirous of art as "a mould in plaster" ("II" 9) where fashion and cheap entertainment replace historically valid and beautiful art forms, the speaker finds some solace in newer poetry and the discovery of his own unpopular but genuine art. The speaker finally comes to the conclusion that even though commerce has overcome culture as "the sale of half-hose has/ Long since superseded the cultivation/ of Pieran roses" ("XII" 26-28), the only real survivors are art and beauty, which can never be broken down as all else can. Pound is openly critical of the role of the middle-class audience consuming art that is easily replicable, but also implicates artists in the commercialization of poetry. He accuses the last generation of poets of hiding from the "pressures of the age in hedonistic aestheticism" (Witemeyer 55).

In his criticism of aestheticism as not far enough along a path of hard imagistic verse without the unwanted tempering of emotion or the restriction of form, Pound sets formal imagism as redemptive, rather than the mimetic literature of the past. Pound's use of allusion is formidable in all his work, and in "Hugh Selwyn Mauberley," Pound refers to historical and literary precursors to do several things: to stitch together the content and context of the piece, which otherwise would suffer from a lack of consistent voice; to identify and pay homage to the sources of inspiration for his work, as in the Mauberley character's deference to Gautier whose quatrain verse inspired the form of the poem itself; and, to satirize the public taste of modern London. In a section of "Hugh Selwyn Mauberley" titled "Siena Mi Fe'; Disfecemi Maremma" (Siena Made Me; Maremma Unmade Me), the speaker alludes to a section of Dante's *Inferno* in which a murdered noble woman pleads with Dante to remember her and her light. In Pound's stanzas, the speaker meets with a chronicler of Decadent poetry and figures, all of whom died strange and tragic deaths, and whose memories are tinged with the very stories they created. Here Pound is deliberately hearkening to the Decadent poetry that came before the Modernists, while gently dismissing the mythos that surrounds the figures of the era. What he also does, however, is draw a direct link thematically between the attitude of anti-modernity of the Decadents and his own work.

The search for authentic poetic representation was not limited to the arenas of religion and art. For many poets of both the Decadent and the Modern era, the natural place to search was in the past. The reaching back into history as inspiration for poetic subject matter makes sense for artists unhappy with the utilitarian and consumption-driven modern Britain. For answers, many "turned to myth or mystery to counteract the

rationalism of science" (Pittock 11). Inherent in a definition of Decadence is the natural desire for a historical grounding in a transitional historical phase. Similarly, the upheaval of the continuing march of modernity and events like the First World War led the Modernist poets to search for stability in the past. For the poets of both eras, this search backwards to bring classical themes and styles forward seems to run counter to the mantras of novelty and innovation that guided their aesthetic philosophies, which Calinescu captures as "tradition is rejected with increasing violence and the artistic imagination starts priding itself on exploring and mapping the realm of the 'not yet'" (5). The reason for this tension existing and flourishing, however, is that in spite of the desire to break with the artistic intentions of the past, for many poets history and myth become "effective device[s] for imposing order of a symbolic, even poetic, kind on the chaos" (McFarlane 82). The need for structure and meaning in a vertiginous milieu meant that bringing the past forward through imitation, allusion, and tribute provided a sense of stability.

Looking to the past is a defining characteristic of Decadence. Matthew Potolsky challenges the general understanding of Decadent style as one of imitation, which is usually attached to ideas of sterility and weakness (235), instead suggesting that rather than simple imitation as a sign of creative deficiency, historical imitation – in the "varied forms of allusion, citation, parody, translation, and tribute" (235) – is the very stuff of Decadent writing. In fact, the Decadents go further than simply drawing on classical models, thematizing them as a process of glorifying artifice. They attended to the ways that texts make use of history in a way that expressly predicted the work of the Modernists.

Decadent poets used allusion, translation, and historical images to capture the appeal of the past. Oscar Wilde was a student of literary history and in addition to using allusions freely in his work, he wrote explicitly of the allure of history. In "Athanasia," he writes of an ancient Egyptian flower that is sown in the English ground, and which puts to shame the contemporary images of beauty. The image from "some heavenly Arcady" (18) never feels decay or age, but "is the child of all eternity" (60). For Arthur Symons, the only way to make sense of his complicated love for a woman who possesses paradoxical qualities of holiness (via the allusion to the Virgin Mary of the title) and sordidness in "Stella Maris" is to draw comparisons to Juliet, a Nereid, and the addressee of Marvell's "To His Coy Mistress." Ernest Dowson, in his most famous poem "Non Sum Qualis Eram Bonae sub Regno Cynara," illustrates not only many Decadents' use of Latin in their work – sometimes writing entire poems in the language – but also hearkens to the Horatian ode whence the title comes. The Cynara in Dowson's poem modernises the theme of lost love from the ode of Horace. In another poem from a Horatian ode, "Vita summa brevis spem nos vetat incohare longam," Dowson writes a piece very closely related to the original, serving as an almost-translation of its musings on the brevity of life. All of the poets mentioned here, and many others, looked to the past for both metaphor and symbol and subject matter to impose some sense of the mythic and the eternal on a time characterised by upheaval. They believed that contrasting the storied past with its honourable heroes and great figures could show the relative weakness and misery of the modern condition, and also lend power through association with their own work.

The Modernists shared this impulse, and took to the utmost the work of allusion that the Decadents did so well. H.D., like many others, "turned to epic form and to myth, religious tradition, and the dream as a way of giving meaning to the cataclysms and fragmentation of the twentieth century" (Friedman 47). She rejected the "mechanistic, materialist conceptions of reality that formed the faith of the empirical modern age… and reach[ed] out to confront the questions of history, tradition, and myth" (47). In her 1921 collection *Hymen*, all of the poems are reflections of ancient mythological figures and what they can offer to the Modern world. The constructs of marriage from the titular poem, the ideas of worship and reverence from "Demeter," and love and longing in "The Islands" are all examples of how H.D. brings mythic stories and figures to offer insight into the modern situation. She perceived that the modern world saw love and relationships much too coldly and practically, and like the Decadents hoped to hold up the classical portrayals of love as contrasts to the spiritually-empty business world. She used the figures of ancient story to illustrate values that she felt would offer solace and solution to the empty modernity of her own time.

T.S. Eliot also looked to the past to illumine the present, and his stylistic qualities "derive from his fusion of the new and old, interpreting one by the other, revealing the continuity of human experience, defining contemporaneity and tradition" (Williamson 18). This was his perspective and his goal for much of his literary career, and it can be seen early in "Tradition and the Individual Talent," which, for all its work on constructing canon and offering the Modernist perspective, was certainly about Eliot's belief that looking to the past for motivation and inspiration could go a long way to ameliorating the cultural and intellectual crisis in Europe after the War. In "Gerontion"

as in most of his other work, Eliot superimposes the past on the present, as the aged speaker of the poem relates and compares things he sees around himself in the world to various historical figures and events. This particular version of allusion as a system of overlays rather than simple metaphor appears frequently in Eliot's work. In the world of "Gerontion," the dismal present is overlaid with the past, holding up for comparison the hollowness of the world in the absence of faith. He also speaks specifically about history in this poem, warning that "history has many cunning passages, contrived corridors/ and issues, deceives with whispering ambitions,/ guides us by vanities" (34-36). This is part of his critique of how the world got to where it was just after the First World War: the ambitions and vanities of those attempting to make a place for themselves in the story of history led inexorably to disaster.

In all of their work, Pound and Eliot use allusions to literary and historical figures as contrasts: the speakers or characters in these poems are figures who were philosophical and intelligent. They were active in disseminating the tenets of their respective disciplines, and they offered readers and viewers challenging texts that asked the audience to consider the depth of their response to art objects. These and other Modernist poets took up the practice of historical injection into modern poetry from the Decadents, and used it to offer solace and inspiration.

The poets of both the Decadent and the Modernist eras were linked by their exasperation with a materialistic and soulless modern Britain. Whether they searched for alternatives to the cold world of scientism and profit through a renewed involvement with faith and the Church, through a deeper consideration of the art object and art theory, or through the attempt to bring forward powerful figures from the past to stand in

contrast to simple humans, poets of both eras stated their unwillingness to allow the

ennui created by modernity to be the final word. In this way, the poets of both eras draw

more closely together than anywhere else in the connective themes I've suggested: the

search for solace that drove both Decadent and Modernist poets speaks powerfully to

how fundamentally similar the goals of both groups were. In this way, the increased

success of the Modernists was not particularly dependent on a refinement of Decadent

goals – the greater skill at making use of controversy and finding more outlets for poetry

simply made the message of hope more easily shared.

Chapter Five: Conclusion – Yeats' Out-Worn Heart

The discussion of many poets of both the Decadent and the Modernist movement has separated them in an attempt to identify the qualities and goals they shared while being two distinct movements. There is one poet who is noticeably absent from this conversation so far, and that is W.B. Yeats. He hasn't been left out because he provides difficulty in analysis or because he problematizes the process of classification that is at the heart of my work here. Instead, I have left the discussion of Yeats to this conclusion because in reality he epitomizes my argument. To trace the path and literary career of Yeats is to trace the path of my argument in the transition of Decadence to Modernism in miniature. The themes that link these two movements were ever-present in Yeats' life and work. He was temporally and stylistically of both movements, and yet firmly ingrained in neither.

Yeats' work in Decadence is subject to revival and revision constantly. He wrote poems that, during the 1890s in particular, were very similar to those of Dowson, Symons, and others; however, he also saw the finite possibilities of the decadent project as it has been outlined earlier, and so began withdrawing himself from the ranks as early as 1897. His relationship with Arthur Symons in the latter years of the 1890s was important enough for Symons that Yeats helped him move his ideas of the Decadence outlined in his earlier essays to the more obviously pre-Modernist concept of Symbolism. In Yeats' attempts to find a particularly individual style by moving the themes of myth and story into the realm of lyric poetry, he felt himself out of step with the recursive and self-absorbed subject matter and style of the Decadent poets. His search for inspiration and literary role models were early marks of what would become

his Modernist style, as he cited Muses both ancient and Romantic in an effort to remake tradition entirely. Even later, in the early 1920s, Yeats spoke of the Decadents from the position of an objective viewer, and it is in a section of his autobiographical work *The Trembling of the Veil* that he characterises the other poets of the Decadence as the Tragic Generation, lamenting the shameful loss of talent to such a questionable lifestyle, even though some of those poets lived long and successful lives after the turn of the century. Beckson suggests the two very deliberate effects of this characterisation of Decadence as doomed were to have "invested the Rhymers with tragic grandeur to dramatize the stifling, destructive Victorian world as well as his own capacity for survival" (*London in the 1890s: A Cultural History* 71). Yeats, as the lone survivor who was able to grow and mature stylistically, carried the mantle of the survivor into the rest of his career.

Yeats' transition to a Modernist poet, indeed a progenitor of the movement, was as tenuous and halting as his relationship with the Decadent movement. His collection *Responsibilities*, published in 1914, marks a distinct drive towards the hallmarks of poetic Modernism, and this is at least in part due to his relationship with Ezra Pound. Yeats was already making stylistic and thematic inroads towards what would become Modernism, but three winters spent with Pound in a cottage between 1913 and 1916 contributed to the development of the updated lyric style that would define Yeats' later work. Pound often credited himself with the creation of the Modern Yeats during this period, but it is clear from Pound's own work that the process of Modernisation was reciprocal. One of the hallmarks of Modernism as I have presented it is the increased awareness of publication, and this is another thing that Yeats learned from Pound. Even

something as simple as releasing a new edition of his work with revisions made was a publication skill to increase sales.

It is interesting to note the role that symbolism plays in the transition between Decadent and Modernist poetry. It is writ large in Yeats' work, in the transition from a misty and vague use of colour and sound imagery, to the harder symbolism of his later work. Yeats' tireless introspection and revision of his craft characterized his work. Longenbach suggests that "Yeats would remake his style over and over again throughout his career, but his pristine syntax, fulfilling the formal demands of the poem effortlessly, would remain constant" (*Stone Cottage: Pound, Yeats, and Modernism* 104). This structural basis allowed Yeats to harden and clarify the Symbolist verse he wrote in the 1890s and construct a leaner poem, full of what C.K. Stead calls aggregations, cuts, and juxtapositions (42), while always retaining elements of the ancient Irish mythology and history that Yeats loved dearly. The results were lyric poems that are often distinctly modern in their subject and language, but traditional in their form. The Romantic-inspired lyrics full of music and gesture of his early career gave way to a tautness and energy in his later work. Haskell goes so far as to call his poetry of the early 1890s "limpid, deliquescent, and world weary" (169) like the work of the Decadents I have discussed previously.

The primary reason for his inclusion here is that Yeats was always as concerned about the pressures facing artists as any of the other poets discussed in the preceding pages. In fact, he may have felt the pressures of Victorian England even more strongly than others through his passionate involvement in the Irish independence movement. Yeats' sense of alienation while living in London was constant – he missed Ireland, but

felt he could do good work on behalf of the movement from London. He gathered around him other Irish nationals and brought them to the Rhymer's Club meetings, but their attendance waxed and waned. He felt out of place in modern London. He loved the history and myth of his homeland, and was disgusted by the materialist modern era. In the 1893 collection *The Rose,* which was dedicated to Lionel Johnson, several poems express the tension between the old and the new which reminded Yeats that he didn't really fit. In "To Some I Have Talked with by the Fire" for example, his heart "brim[s] with dreams about the times/ When we bent down above the fading coals/ And talked…of passionate men" (2-4) who are unhappy because "their blossoming dreams have never bent/ Under the fruit of evil and of good" (8-9). The edenic vision of "The Lake Isle of Innisfree" presents an image of escape that is both intensely personal and yet somehow universal. The alienation Yeats felt came at least partly from his unwillingness to accept the loss of the mystic and the mythic from the world – it seemed to anchor him in the past to a certain degree and insulated him from what Haskell calls the "materialism and the bursts…of cynicism of the twentieth century" (169). These qualities of the twentieth century were issues for all of the poets I have discussed, and Yeats was no different.

The dissatisfaction with the modern world that plagued the Decadents and Modernists was a topic of Yeats' work in both eras. The additional stress of watching Ireland suffer as it tried to break free from England caused Yeats' work in the 1890s to carry an additional tone of misery. In *The Wind among the Reeds* (1899), there are many poems like "Into The Twilight," which lament an "Out-worn heart, in a time out-worn" (1). The second stanza shows the importance of Ireland's plight in Yeats' understanding

of the perils of modernity, as "Your mother Eire is always young,/ Dew ever shining and twilight gray;/ Though hope fall from you and love decay,/ Burning in fires of a slanderous tongue" (4-8). The cruel history of the struggle for Irish nationalism may have in some ways spurred the Modernism of Yeats. As the allure of the Celtic Twilight waned in the face of intractable British rule, Yeats' style hardened along with his heart. In *The Green Helmet* in 1910, Yeats attempts to capture the struggle for independence and its transition from mythical battle for the soul of the nation to a much grimier religious and class-based conflict. In 1914, with the publication of *Responsibilities*, mentioned earlier as the significant turning point of Yeats' Modernism, he turns to a satirical mode which Anne Fogarty claims "evinces a new sense of alienation from, and disaffection with, contemporary reality" (134). In 1919, after the close of the First World War, Yeats attempts to capture the disintegration of civilisation in "The Second Coming." The shambling harbinger of the brutal modern era captures his fear of the unknown inheritor of western European civilisation. *The Tower* features the long poem "Nineteen Hundred and Nineteen," which hauntingly describes how "Many ingenious lovely things are gone" (1). The War seems an inevitable result of modernity, and "days are dragon-ridden, the nightmare/ Rides upon sleep" (25-6). The hardened images of the poem match the brutal nature of the fallen world it describes.

Yeats' attempts to bring order back to his world changed with the passing of the decades. In the 1890s, he believed strongly that nationalism could be the answer. In "To Ireland in the Coming Times," Yeats equates a sense of Irish pride to a utopian vision of the world, and sees himself as a spokesperson. He wanted very much to be accounted "true brother of a company/ That sang, to sweeten Ireland's wrong,/ Ballad and story,

rann and song" (2-4). He believed that a return to the power of Ireland's mythic past could heal its present, and he felt literature had a significant part to play. Later, he struggled with the reality that the struggle for Irish independence was marked by significant failure and frustration. He also watched people like John MacBride that he recognized as integral to the movement be destroyed, sometimes literally, by the struggle for independence, and that reinforced the difficulty of work that offered respite from the cold modern world he sought to transform.

Much later, after his Modernist work of the 1920s, Yeats turned somewhat unexpectedly to a movement that Pound turned to around the same time: Fascism. The ideological allure of certainty in a world torn apart by war and greed must have been too much to resist for both men. Stan Smith contends that Yeats' late work speaks to the negation of human agency in the modern world and the collision of modern and ancient destructive forces ("The Living World…" 83). Yeats also sought faith as an anchor, but it was in neither the Catholic Church nor the Church of England, but in the occult and mystical groups that so appealed to his love of the ancient and mythic. His vision of the interpenetrating gyres of human history instilled in him both fear and hope, that there was never an end, only a flux, a wax and a wane, and that while the tragedy of his time was powerful, it would eventually end and a new era would take its place.

The arc of Yeats' career is as much characterised by transition as it is any particular era. The qualities of Yeats' verse that would become markers of his modernism were evident as glimmers in his earlier work: the definition and uses of realism, the links between tradition and modernity, the simultaneously liberating and constricting demands of poetic form, and questions of artistic autonomy. Graham Hough

contends that there are "few poets whose lives show a long-sustained development, a perpetual recreation of the self continued into late maturity or old age. Yeats is the outstanding exception. The slow organic evolution of his poetic life is in part the reward of his own energy and tenacity, and in part a gift of fortune – the fortune that cast his lot in with that of a small country, comprehensible by individual intelligence and will" (246). There seems to be an additional quality, though, which is his impulse towards self-revision and the public's willingness to believe it. In his introduction to the 1936 *Oxford Book of Modern Verse,* Yeats gently mocks the Decadent era at a number of points, once suggesting that "in 1900 everybody got down off his stilts; henceforth nobody drank absinthe with his black coffee; nobody went mad; nobody committed suicide; nobody joined the Catholic Church…Victorianism had been defeated" (ix). Many critics long attached Yeats' name to Decadence only to show how he shaped the era and then moved on, and his attempts to memorialize the movement and its poets really only served to encourage readers to look on the era with pity or condescension. His transition to a modernist poet, however, was not solely motivated by the desire to distance himself from the Decadents, but also because he was a tireless critic of his own work and its place in the world.

Yeats' career functions as a microcosm of my larger argument throughout this work. The issues of poets' alienation from modernity was paralleled in Yeats' absence from his beloved homeland, as well as his status as just outside the dominant group in both the Decadent and Modernist eras. He was as weary of modernity and its spiritual bankruptcy as any of the poets mentioned above, and made the transition within his career from the early Decadent presentation of ennui to the later Modernist attempt to

repair rather than simply address the state of modern Britain. Finally, he looked to spirituality, art, and history to offer solutions to that bankrupt modernity, as did the poets that wrote alongside him for many decades. The critical history of Decadence as a valid and valuable precursor to Modernism, rather than a footnote or unpleasant sideshow, shows the transitions within Yeats' career to run parallel to the transitions in British poetry from the last decades of the nineteenth century into the high point of Modernism in the 1920s and 1930s. In all of these themes that link the two movements so significantly together, Yeats also revealed the relative success of Modernism through his withdrawal from the themes of the Decadents at the turn of the century and then his alignment with the aggressive publication tactics of Ezra Pound.

It is interesting to note that Yeats is truly of both era, and yet entirely of neither. He truly represents the incongruities inherent in each movement. The tension between revolution and public recognition, the desire to identify the problems with modernity while at the same time desiring nothing more than withdrawing from the world, and the attempts at stylistic innovation while remaining firmly rooted in familiar language and imagery captures the difficulty of poets from both the Decadent and the Modernist eras. He also represents the successes of the Modernists where the Decadents struggled. The poets of both movements struggled with success throughout their careers and posthumously. Success for all the poets in question can be divided into three primary categories – artistic, economic, and critical. The poets of both eras worked very hard to remain true to their aesthetic values and both succeeded largely in doing so. A primary difference that I have drawn attention to here is the difference of the two movements in the economic and critical success the poets experienced. This becomes one of the most

significant differences in the two movements, as the Modernists were better able to negotiate the much-changed publication milieu for poetry and were much more quickly recognized by academia, at least in part because they did significant work to encourage the study of English poetry as a discipline.

The ultimate goals of each movement were closely aligned. They each attempted to identify the problems of modernity and its effects on humanity, and in the exploration of their alienation from the modern world, attempted to find new sources of inspiration and personal meaning. These themes I have outlined represent the truest sense of the through-lines between the two eras, and the variations in these themes also offer insight into why the movements were considered so different previously. The overwhelming sense of the reaction to modernity for the Decadents was one of diagnosis. They attempted to identify and capture their alienation and despair, but were largely unable to or uninterested in ameliorating that despair. The Modernists, on the other hand, experienced much of the same despair, but had seen the effects of ennui on the generation of poets that preceded them, and so approached the problem of modernity from a perspective of cure. They attempted to offer the public alternatives to the mass media and heartless capitalism that the poets perceived as dangerous, and this activity set them apart and bestowed upon them the historical designation of active revolutionaries, rather than placid tragic figures. Neither an extended larger movement nor two utterly distinct eras, the Decadents and Modernists approached a similar world with similar problems, and because of a clarity of context and the work done earlier, the Modernists were able to present a more successful response to the modern world, cementing their place in the economic and critical conversation for a century to come.

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