

Bibliotekarstudentens nettleksikon om litteratur og medier

Av Helge Ridderstrøm (førsteamanuensis ved OsloMet – storbyuniversitetet)

Sist oppdatert 04.12.20

Dekadansen

(_kunstretning) Fra latin for “cadere”: “falle”. På fransk “décadence” (“forfall”, “sammenbrudd”). En kunstretning og mentalitet preget av åndelig, moralsk forfall. En opplevelse av at hele den moderne kultur er under avvikling, trettehet i det som oppfattes som en senmoderne nedgangstid – og kunstneriske uttrykk for denne opplevelsen.

Litteratur og annen kunst skapt mot slutten av 1800-tallet og som er preget av livstrettehet, utmattelse, normoppløsning, forfall, amoralsk nytelse, overforfinelse, estetisisme og ulike former for overdrivelse og perversjon. Mange kunstnere har en sterk undergangsfornemmelse og skriver ut fra sin erfaring med livstrettehet, livsangst og fordervelse.

Dekadansen er spesielt knyttet til det siste tiåret av 1800-tallet, på fransk kalt “fin de siècle” (“århundrets slutt”). Fin de siècle kunne også oppfattes som “fin du globe” (Fletcher 1980 s. 7) fordi det i noen miljøer rådet en følelse av forfall og undergang, men også at noe radikalt nytt var i ferd med å bli til. 1890-tallet var en periode for å “discern an apocalypse, or begin a secular ‘new age’ [...] Hence another type-casting of the period, which has been stabilized as ‘an age of transition’: the closing phase of the Victorian synthesis, the opening phase in those tendencies we call for convenience ‘modernism’.” (Fletcher 1980 s. 9)

Forskere har fokusert på “the essential transactions of the 1890s – those between scientific positivism and the role of subjective consciousness, for example [...] Certainly veils trembled, and apocalyptic had a vogue. [...] Transitions, then, mattered profoundly to the 1890s: evanescence, instability, failure, the enterprise of internalizing history and manifesting it as style, a historical and personal sense of decline and fall, are, of course, primary motifs.” (Fletcher 1980 s. 8)

“[T]he crucial distinguishing feature of the Decadent is the nature of his retreat from reality. There is a superficial retreat from reality in the lack of intensity in his grasp on life, the effete casualness, the languid withdrawal – ‘as for living, our servants will do that for us’ [skrev Auguste Villiers de l’Isle-Adam i et skuespill] – and there is the subtler retreat which accepts only those realities which can be heightened and transformed into spiritualities, particularly those which art creates.” (Fletcher 1980 s. 28)

Det var en tendens innen dekadansen å koble det infernalske med sanselig lyst (Reichel 1991 s. 377-378). Det forbudte, grusomme, perverse og på andre måter moralsk grense-overskridende fascinerte noen forfattere. Noen personer i deres tekster opplever “personlig oppløsning og forfall, fremmedfølelse, solipsisme, regresjon – eller [begår] selvmord” (Andersen 1992 s. 19). Andre lever som stolte dandyer, søker tilbake til en religiøs forankring eller finner andre utveier. Kunsten kan gi et alternativ og en slag frelse. “[The] desire to force fresh order out of chaos through the despotic authority of art is a key motif in the decadence.” (Birkett 1986 s. 23)

Britten Arthur Symons skrev i boka *The Symbolist Movement in Literature* (1899) at dekadansen er “the frank pursuit of artificial sensation in the cult of personality” (siteret fra Fletcher 1980 s. 170). “By the late 1880s, the terms Decadent and Symbolist were nearly synonymous, both referring to a high degree of individuality and a disregard for aesthetic norms, the latter, though, specifically designating a sensibility associated with “le rêve” (dream) or “l’idée” (the idea). The Decadence and Symbolism of the last fifteen years of the nineteenth century may be viewed as two different emphases within the same movement.” (Olds 2006)

“Decadent artists sell their own desires to the populace as the image of a common dream, building on a thin foundation of historical facts the edifice of outrageous but seductive lies which is their own private fantasy.” (Birkett 1986 s. 4) Flere av hovedpersonene i dekadansens romaner er “stripped of the power to struggle, consciously embracing a morbid image of Love to acknowledge their guilt and their impotence” (Birkett 1986 s. 27). Mange av dekadansens tekster er preget av morbide gleder og sataniske drømmer (Birkett 1986 s. 215). Det erotiske er også et gjennomgangstema. “Pornography, in a sense, is the ultimate form of decadent literature, with so much energy locked away and deliberately withheld.” (Birkett 1986 s. 235)

“Ultimately, the decadent generation confronts two choices. The hero-artist can walk deeper into the labyrinth, the forest, the high-walled garden, or the temple, losing all sense of time and self and locking himself into the guilty pleasures of repression. Or he can set fire to the palaces and pull down the temples [...], turning the weaknesses of the rulers to their destruction and opening the gates to his own dream of a ‘natural’, ‘barbarian’ unknown.” (Birkett 1986 s. 225)

“Decadent literature is a literature of failure, but its exploration of that failure helped to create the new modes of dealing with experience.” (Fletcher 1980 s. 29)

Dekadansen på slutten av 1800-tallet produserer litteratur som “direkte tematiserer jegets desorientering og reaksjonsmønster når de konstitutive verdiene svikter.” (Andersen 1992 s. 16) Noen har den aristokratiske holdningen til selvmord at bare slaver kjemper for å leve (Birkett 1986 s. 54) Kjernerverdiene i samfunnet (f.eks.

kristen moral) oppleves som i forfall, dømt til å tape sin mening. Mennesket trenger å finne måter å leve på i den nye tid når “Gud er død”: “Det prinsipielle spørsmål som stilles i dekadanselitteraturen er: Hvordan leve uten verdier?” (Andersen 1992 s. 18). Svaret må mennesket finne i seg selv, men dikteren kan sette en kunstnerisk standard for hva et godt og meningsfullt liv er. Den amerikanske filosofen Ralph Waldo Emerson hadde en teori om at verden går opp i jeget og dikteren som representant for menneskeheten (Fischer 1978 s. 42). Den østerrikske fysikeren og filosofen Ernst Machs “jeg-filosofi” (“Ich-Philosophie”) (Fischer 1978 s. 23) passet inn med dekadent jeg-sentrering. Mach hevdet at sansningene danner verden og at skillene mellom jeget og verden ikke finnes. Den franske forfatteren Paul Bourget framstilte i romanen *Cosmopolis* (1892), med personen Dorsenne, en slags dilettantisme-psykologi for den nye tid (Fischer 1978 s. 32).

“The gap between ambition and ability [hos kunstneren/forfatteren] spawns neurosis, in all its forms. [...] Intense self-consciousness is coupled with an insistence that the self is a mystery, and motives irrational and unknowable.” (Birkett 1986 s. 4) Eksotiske land og landskaper fungerer som kunstige paradiser og “fluktrom” ut av det borgerlige samfunnet (Pfister og Schulte-Middelich 1983 s. 19).

“If every aesthetic pilgrimage is doomed to failure either because of the isolating nature of the quest, or because every search for cohabitation with Ideal Beauty turns out to be only a sophisticated self-projection, then self-integration is an ephemeral goal. In either case the artist is a victim of mirrors of the self; a conventional notion of self-development is forever denied. The aesthetic voyager becomes a voyeur; unable to encounter the real world” (Fletcher 1980 s. 33). “In so many Art Nouveau pubs, what appear to be windows are, on second glance, seen to be mirrors which, contrary to providing an opening to nature, reflect the space where we viewers are at the locus of an Imaginary Portrait. It de-natures the world while simultaneously multiplying the self – an allegory of post-romanticism. And of course it prevents the drinker from drinking alone.” (Fletcher 1980 s. 53)

Dikterne søkte “aesthetic refinement: that ‘perpetual weaving and unweaving’ of the self by which the fibres of existence and the tapestry of art are made interchangeable. [...] It is, to be sure, a process not without its hazards. A life or work of art that is a ‘condition’ has, in effect, a symptomatology. That is, it remains vulnerable to physical deterioration or to neurosis.” (Fletcher 1980 s. 45)

“In George Moore’s *Evelyn Innes* [1898], a singer in Tristan comes to live her tragedy. She sees herself projected in every man, and this is indistinguishable from self-love: ‘it was like living in a room where there was nothing but mirrors.’ Unable to enjoy a mature sexual relationship, and tiring of the sensual intensity of Paris life, the girl enters a convent – and becomes enthralled with the confession, which enables the release of subjectivity to a lecherous Monsignor, as an art form. She elects, not suicide, but a literary analogue: the martyrdom of an

autobiographical confession that undoes her previous sensual absorption.” (Fletcher 1980 s. 50)

“Stories which commenced as accounts of one’s life’s development can conclude only in an act of renunciation which converts the chamber of mirrors to the monk’s cell, creating an uneasy alliance between criminal, artist, and saint. All three possess an alias; all deny the world; perhaps most importantly, all three imagine themselves martyrs.” (Fletcher 1980 s. 50)

Dekadente kom ofte med kraftige angrep på sine egne fedres borgerlig-nedarvete konservative verdier. De hatet forløyetheten i en byråkratisk og militaristisk mumifisert klassestat (Fischer 1978 s. 50) og de kritiserte materialismen og positivismen (Fischer 1978 s. 51). “As Elaine Showalter demonstrates in *Sexual Anarchy*, the nineties [dvs. 1890-tallet] were a time when a number of groups – women, decadent artists, homosexuals, intellectual radicals – launched an attack on the patriarchy” (Kooistra 1995 s. 129). Kristendommen stod også i skuddlinjen. Den ble oppfattet som en tro for de svake og feige. I den irske forfatteren George Moores roman *Mike Fletcher* (1889) blir kristendommen omtalt som svak og livsfiendtlig: “Christ, that most perfect symbol of the denial of the will to live”.

Kvinner tenderer til å reduseres til mor, hore eller drøm (Maria, Salomé eller Beatrice) (Birkett 1986 s. 181). I noen av verkene i dekadansen er kvinnetypen femme fatale representert. En slik “fair-haired demon” er allerede med i Elizabeth Braddons roman *Lady Audley’s Secret* (1862). Kvinnen innen dekadanselitteraturen er ofte en “belle dame sans merci”, en vakker sfinks, demonisk og vellystig. Kvinnebildet er utspent mellom “femme fragile” og “femme fatale” (Fischer 1978 s. 59). En “femme fragile” er ofte sykelig og dør ung. Hun lever ofte et aristokratisk liv og tenderer til aseksualitet (Fischer 1978 s. 62), hun har en uendelig rik sjel i et skjørt kroppslig hylster (s. 74). Den norske forfatteren Ragnhild Jølsen skriver noen steder om det som har vært kalt en “*l’homme fatal*-figur i selvstendig og nyskapende kontrast til den etablerte *femme fatal*-figuren.” (*Morgenbladet* 9.–15. oktober 2009 s. 33) Kvinnene står nærmere livets gåter enn mennene gjør og de opplever verden mer intenst.

Noen forskere mener at dekadansen strekker seg fra Baudelaire midt på 1800-tallet og helt fram til 1. verdenskrig. Baudelaire skrev til den belgiske kunstneren Félicien Rops og roste kunstnerens omslagsbilde til samlingen *Vrakrestene* (1866; *Les Épaves*) (Védrine 2002 s. 35). Bildet har et skjelett i midten som strekker grenete armer mot himmelen. Også Mallarmé korresponderte med Rops og beundret tegningene til den belgiske kunstneren (Védrine 2002 s. 82). Rops anses som en typisk dekadent bildekunstner, og hans produksjon inkluderer mange erotiske bilder. Rops’ “erotiske kult” har blitt beskrevet som ekstrem inntil det patologiske (Buvik 1989 s. 39).

To kjente dekadente verk er franskmannen Joris-Karl Huysmans' roman *Mot strømmen* (1884) og irlenderen Oscar Wildes roman *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1891). I Storbritannia "it is difficult to isolate any purely decadent novel other than *The Picture of Dorian Gray* or George Moore's *Mike Fletcher*." (Fletcher 1980 s. 12)

Tyskeren Karl Robert Eduard von Hartmanns pessimistiske filosofi begynte å bli kjent i Frankrike på 1870-tallet. En samling aforismer og fragmenter av Schopenhauer ble oversatt til fransk i 1880. Den franske psykologen Theodule-Armand Ribots bok *Schopenhauers filosofi* (1874) kom i flere opplag fram til århundreskiftet. Schopenhauers hovedverk *Verden som vilje og forestilling* (1818-19) ble oversatt til fransk i 1886 (Court-Perez 1987 s. 16). Schopenhauers oppfattet livets grunnmodus som en blanding skuffet kjedsomhet og bitter lengsel. Han skrev resignert av menneskets liv pendler mellom sorg og kjedsomhet (her gjengitt fra Baguley 1990 s. 133). Hans filosofi ble av Huysmans oppfattet som en ureduserbar pessimisme (Court-Perez 1987 s. 30).

Huysmans interesserte seg for esoterisk litteratur. Franskmannen Édouard Schurés bok *De store invidde: Utkast til religionenes hemmelige historie* ble publisert i 1889. Den kjente kvinnen Berthe de Courrière skal i 1889 ha innvidd Huysmans i okkultisme (Court-Perez 1987 s. 20 og 25). "In 1889, Huysmans also met Rémy de Gourmont's mistress Berthe Courrière, 'a cabbalist and occultist, learned in the history of Asiatic religions and philosophies, fascinated by the veil of Isis, initiated by dangerous personal experiences into the most redoubtable mysteries of the Black Art' " (Birkett 1986 s. 91). Huysmans hevdet at mang en tilsynelatende vanlig borger med et "banalt" liv skjuler et svart mysterium (Birkett 1986 s. 92)

Huysmans oppsøkte i 1890 den gamle presten Joseph-Antoine Boullan, som hadde blitt anklaget for satanisme og sittet i fengsel i tre år, og fikk av han forklaringer om blant annet svarte messer og eksorsisme (Court-Perez 1987 s. 20 og 25). "Joseph-Antoine Boullan, the unfrocked priest who became one of his major sources of information of occult practices and who was instrumental in his conversion to Catholicism. Boullan's activities as an exorcist in connection with his Société pour la réparation des âmes, encouraging unwary clients into intercourse with Christ and the saints, had led to his being thrown out of the Church in 1875. Immediately he made contact with Pierre-Eugène-Michel Vintras, 'a devout labourer, with an excitable but weak brain' (Eliphas Lévy, *The History of Magic* [...])" (Birkett 1986 s. 91). Des Esseintes i Huysmans' roman *Mot strømmen* leser sveitseren Jakob Sprengers bok *Malleus maleficarum* (1487; også kalt *Heksehammeren*), og også andre steder i forfatterskapet nevner Huysmans tilsvarende litteratur om det djevlelske (Buvik 1989 s. 63). Hos Huysmans er satanismen en form for hysteri eller nevrose (Buvik 1989 s. 203).

Den franske presten Joseph-Antoine Boullan publiserte teksten *Satans tempel* (1891). "On the night of 4 January 1893, Joseph-Antoine Boullan was beaten by

the invisible hands of fearsome hidden forces. He wrote about his presentiments to the author Joris-Karl Huysmans, who had just finished his book “Là-Bas”, which was something like a history of satanism... [...] The mysterious death of Abbé Boullan was the occasion for a lively polemic between writers and occultists: Jules Bois and J.K. Huysmans on the one hand, Stanislas de Guaita on the other. Jules Bois formally accused Guaita and his colleagues of the Rose-Croix that they had bewitched Father Boullan.” (<http://thelostdutchman.hubpages.com/hub/The-War-of-the-Magicians-Part-2>; lesedato 30.03.12) I Huysmans roman *Der nede* (1891) er en av personene Gilles de Rais, en seriemorder fra 1400-tallet (Buvik 1989 s. 201).

“Perhaps the most famous Satanist in the 19th century was the Abbé Boullan of France, who became the head of an offshoot of the church of Carmel and allegedly practiced black magic and infant sacrifice. [...] Boullan's group was infiltrated by two Rosicrucians, Oswald Wirth and Stanislas de Guaita, who wrote an exposé, *The Temple of Satan*. Boullan and de Guaita supposedly engaged in magical warfare. Boullan and his friend, the novelist J.K. Huysmans, claimed to be attacked by demons. When Boullan collapsed and died of a heart attack on January 3, 1893, Huysmans believed it was due to an evil spell cast by de Guaita, and said so in print. De Guaita challenged him to a duel, but Huysmans declined and apologized.” (<http://www.satanic-kindred.org/history.htm>; lesedato 30.03.12) Jules Bois' bok *Satanismen og magien* (1895) er en gjennomgang av fenomenet både historisk og som samtidsfenomen.

“It was Villiers de l’Isle-Adam who first took him [Huysmans] to Edmond Bailly’s bookshop, rue de la Chaussée d’Antin, where he met the poet Edouard Dubus, ‘addicted to magic and morphine’, Stanislas de Guaita, Paul Adam and Papus (Gérard Encausse).” (Birkett 1986 s. 90) Stanislas de Guaita skrev et trebindsverk kalt *Essays om forbudte vitenskaper*, som bestod av bindene *På terskelen til mysteriet* (1886), *Satans tempel* (1891) og *Nøkkelen til den svarte magi* (1897).

“In the Christian contradiction of Purity and Lust, Huysmans sees a new source of vitality for art. [...] Huysmans dreams of extremes of pleasure and pain that only mystics can know.” (Birkett 1986 s. 84) “The contradictions of decadent sensibility, oscillating, since Baudelaire, between frenzy and torpor, cruelty and remorse, rebellion and submission, find a home in the dramatic doctrines and reparation and redemption on which the romantic Catholicism of the late nineteenth century is founded.” (Birkett 1986 s. 88)

Den franske forfatteren Barbey d’Aurevilly blandet sadisme og mystikk i romanen *En gift prest* (1864) og novellesamlingen *De diaboliske* (1874). I skildringen av en svart messe var han påvirket av den sveitsiske middelaldermunken Jacob Sprengers *Heksehammeren* (1487; originaltittel *Malleus maleficarum*) (Birkett 1986 s. 77).

I den franske forfatteren Octave Mirbeaus dekadente egoisme “the politics of murder is made to seem the natural way of life” (Birkett 1986 s. 127). Mirbeau

skrev en bitter satire om dekadanse, *Torturhagen* (1899; fransk tittel *Le Jardin de supplices*) (Birkett 1986 s. 159). Mirbeaus roman er antakelig “the most seductive account of sadism produced in the decadent era, the novel is also the most precise analysis of how power works in society. It discloses the patterns of cruelty and dominance on which relationships between individuals and between individuals and State are founded, and shows how individual imagination and instinct are drafted into the service of collective oppression. [...] the madness of decadent egoism become the way of life, plausible and seductive” (Birkett 1986 s. 248). “It was characteristic of the *fin de siècle* writers to want to stand apart from the common life and live only in the imagination.” (Wilson 1979 s. 33) Mirbeau skrev: “Nothing exalts lust like a nun’s disguise; a hairshirt, properly worn, is a marvellous prop for accursed passions” (siteret fra Birkett 1986 s. 247).

Octave Mirbeaus roman *L’Abbé Jules* (1888; oversatt til norsk i 1919 med tittelen *Abbed Julius*) er preget av “sombre violence, disappointed idealism and frustrated eroticism” (Birkett 1986 s. 192). Hovedpersonen Jules “is the neurotic, who oscillates between desires to cause pain to others as a mark of his revolt, and equally inexplicable fits of sick remorse. He enjoys evil. His decision to become a priest, at the end of a libertine adolescence, scandalizes his mother [...] He torments his colleagues by threatening to reveal their thefts and debauch; every one has guilty secrets to hide. He steals from his bishop to buy books. But his greatest sins are those of the flesh. He humiliates and assaults a peasant girl, pressing her to confess incest and bestiality, urging her to blasphemy” (Birkett 1986 s. 243). “His bishop was too sleepy to hear him confess to trying to rape the peasant girl.” (Birkett 1986 s. 245) I et av kapitlene heter det: “On all sides, society is cracking, religion collapsing, everything falling apart. At the top, on the throne, lolls shameless orgy, orgy made law ... below, the starving beast howls, greedy for blood ... You have charge of souls ... and souls need to be upheld in their faith, encouraged in the struggle, reassured in danger ...” (sitter fra Birkett 1986 s. 245).

Jules i Mirbeaus roman forklarer: “Instead of keeping love as it should be in Nature, a normal, calm, noble act ... simply, an organic function ... we introduced dream ... dream brought us dissatisfaction ... and dissatisfaction, debauch ... Religions – especially Catholicism – have become the chief pimps for love ... they have developed its perverse, unhealthy side, invoking the sensuality of music and perfumes, the mysticism of prayers, and the moral onanism of worship ... they knew that was the best and surest way to turn man into an animal, and keep him in chains ... Love has dominion over life, like the whip has dominion over the back of the slave it tears to pieces, or the murderer’s knife has dominion over the breast where it digs!” (Birkett 1986 s. 245) Jules testamenterer sine penger til den første presten i hans bispedømme som går ut av Kirken.

Mirbeau likestiller “melancholy, Hamletism, pessimism and the absence of love” (Birkett 1986 s. 246).

“The Baron Jacques d’Adelsward Fersen, dabbler in royalist politics, Satanism and paganism, organized Neronic orgies in his flat in the avenue Friedland, beginning with processions of children in Greek costume, dramatizing Baudelaire’s poetry, and ending in the ‘regrettable excesses’ that filled the newspapers in the second half of 1893.” (Birkett 1986 s. 196) “In 1903, there was a scandal which ended Fersen's marriage plans. The scandal involved alleged 'Black Masses' held in Fersen's house at 18 Avenue de Friedland, in Paris. 'Orgiastic feasts' were said to have been attended by Parisian schoolboys. Reportedly there had been sexual activity between the Baron and the boys. Many prominent ladies and gentlemen came to gape at these exhibitionist tableaux vivants and poses plastiques, and some of the observers actually participated in them. The much admired courtesan Liane de Pougy, for example, posed as the Callipygian Venus. But scandal erupted following a failed blackmail attempt by Jacques' former valet, Pierre G. who demanded 100,000 francs in return for his silence. Fersens' mother refused to pay. The blackmailer went to the police. A number of schoolboys were shadowed and their activities observed, after which the police stepped in. Fersen was arrested together with another aristocrat, Hamelin de Warren. The schoolboys came from 'good' families and attended 'good' schools. When it turned out that a number of top people had attended the 'orgies', the court decided to drop some charges. The so-called 'Black Masses' seem to have involved poetry readings and the acting out of mythological scenes involving semi-naked lads. Fersen was sent to jail for six months.” (<http://pierrejoubert.blogspot.no/2005/07/baron-jacques-dadelsward-fersen.html>; lesedato 31.08.12)

“Satanism is also made respectable by an appeal to science. Charcot’s accounts of the behaviour of hysterical women are uncannily like traditional accounts of demonic possession. The newly discovered world of microbes hints at the possible existence of an equally unfamiliar world of spirits. Brown-Séguard’s work on drugs, which has provided a miraculous cure for impotence, could be said to vindicate the old spells.” (Birkett 1986 s. 86)

“Woman still exists to make pain a pleasure. [...] the fourteenth-century Saint Lydwina of Schiedam (to whom Huysmans, in 1901, devoted a whole book), [...] offered her physical sufferings in atonement for the sins of others.” (Birkett 1986 s. 94) I 1892 ble det i Frankrike utgitt en samling dikt kalt *Den mystiske latin*, med lyrikk fra den tidlige kristne perioden i Vesten, bl.a. “sequences of the eleventh-century monk Goddeschalk [som] rehabilitate female carnality” (Birkett 1986 s. 107).

Den engelske dikteren Algernon Charles Swinburnes lyrikk uttrykte “the irresistible, tormenting appeals of pleasure beyond reach, and the unspeakable desire, with no precise form, for an impossible reality, that haunts the truly sensual soul” (Guy de Maupassant sitert fra Birkett 1986 s. 47). Allerede hans diktsamling *Poems and Ballads* (1866) vakte forargelse på grunn av sanseligheten i tekstene. En kvinne kunne hos Swinburne beskrives som å ha “flanks [that] enfold whole worlds

of lust” (sitert fra Birkett 1986 s. 46). Slike dekadente tekster gjennomfører en “aestheticization of sexuality” (Birkett 1986 s. 112).

Swinburne “the means to divine immediacy is erotic desire.” (Fletcher 1980 s. 67-68). “[I]n Swinburne’s early poems [...] the hero-lover who ‘invades the sacred’ through erotic desire becomes himself a sanctified figure. Paradoxically, by flagrantly violating the false God’s taboos, the hero’s erotic passion reconstitutes and once again makes immediately present the sacred ‘centre’.” (Fletcher 1980 s. 68-69)

Swinburne “champions transgression over Christian asceticism precisely because transgression reveals what Christianity (and Swinburne’s Urizen-God) conceals: that the sacred and the forbidden are one, and that the sacred can be reached – in fact, can only be reached – not through ‘mediation’ and sublimation, but through the violence of broken taboos, through heroic criminality. But in effect, the dynamics of Swinburne’s ‘holy insurrection’ reduplicate the circular and paradoxical relationship between transgression and taboo: taboos both attract and repel, representing not only means for the recovery of the sacred but also malicious tools available to a false Creator-God who wishes to suppress man’s divine destiny, to displace the sacred ‘presence’ man seeks.” (Fletcher 1980 s. 72)

“Swinburne’s hero-lovers are quite literally defined by their desire (the ontological value of the lovers being measured by the intensity of their passion). But clearly what they actually desire is not some pale earthly refraction of the divine but the totality of the sacred itself. They perceive themselves to be missing their divine ‘other self’, their essence; they strive constantly for ‘completion’, fulfilment, validation, ‘place’. The Swinburnean hero’s beloveds – Venus, Dolores, Faustine – are generally not earthbound beings with individualized human characteristics, but cosmic figures, emblems of pure Desire, incarnations of sacred space.” (Fletcher 1980 s. 77)

“Swinburne’s hero, like Kierkegaard’s, experiences a fundamental ‘dread of being’, sensing that, as Swinburne implies in ‘Hymn to Proserpine’, man’s soul is a ‘rock’ whose ‘ground’ is not a mainland but a chaotic sea” (Fletcher 1980 s. 80). Swinburnes dikt “Hymn to Proserpine” (1866) beklager at kristendommen representert ved Jesus (en blek galileer) fortrenger de antikke gudene og blant dem den romerske dødgudinnen Proserpina. “Even in ‘Hymn to Proserpine’, where passionate intensity has been lost, the poet-hero still seeks to affirm the true sacred and renounce any allegiance to ‘the pale Galilean’.” (Fletcher 1980 s. 71)

“As A. J. L. Busst has pointed out, the supreme emblem in the nineteenth century for this imprisoning, oxymoronic loss of difference is the figure of the hermaphrodite. It came to represent in the *fin de siècle* not only the incorporation and confusion of male and female, spirit and flesh, good and evil, and other contraries, but also self-reflective, incestuous desire. We have witnessed already

the highly incestuous nature of the Swinburnean hero's quest for the sacred; and incest – with its correlate, homosexuality – is, of course, the paramount sexual symbol for 'loss of difference'. The hermaphrodite reflects perfectly the paradoxical nature of Swinburnean sacred space: it represents both completion and sterility, unified totality and imprisoning stasis. Swinburne found the figure especially appealing; he remarked that Simeon Solomon's androgyne figures were representative of the 'intermixture of spiritual forces' characteristic of truly beautiful art, 'the same profound suggestion of unity between opposites, the same recognition of the identity of contraries'. Yet later in the same essay Swinburne applies to this 'identity of contraries' a more disconcerting hue; it becomes a 'mystery of beauty' that is both 'great' and 'terrible': "In the features of these groups and figures ... we see the latent relations of pain and pleasure, the subtle conspiracies of good with evil, the deep alliances of death and life, of love and hate, of attraction and abhorrence. Whether suffering or enjoyment be the master expression of a face, and whether that enjoyment or that suffering be merely or mainly spiritual or sensual, it is often hard to say – hard often to make sure whether the look of loveliest features be the look of a cruel or a pitiful soul." This paradoxical 'centre' also reveals itself in Swinburne's 'Hermaphroditus'. The hermaphrodite is depicted not as an emblem of peaceful union, but as a figure embracing the endless struggle of 'Blind love that comes by night and casts out rest' (ll. 1-10). The androgynous figure involves everyone in the circular double bind it exemplifies: the poet explains that

... whosoever hath seen thee, being so fair,

Two things turn all his life and blood to fire;

A strong desire begot on great despair,

A great despair cast out by strong desire.

(ll. 11-14)" (Fletcher 1980 s. 82-83).

"In a fascinating footnote to *William Blake* (1868), Swinburne – or rather, an anonymous source which Swinburne refers to as 'a modern pagan philosopher' – discusses a crisis in many ways analogous to that of his hero-lover: "But what evil is here for us to do, where the whole body of things is evil? The day's spider kills the day's fly, and calls it a crime? Nay, could we thwart nature, then might crime become possible and sin an actual thing. ... Nay, and not then: for nature would fain have it so, that she might create a world of new things; ... she would fain create afresh, and cannot, except it be by destroying: in all her energies she is athirst for mortal food, and with all her forces she labours in desire of death." (*William Blake*, p. 203)" (Fletcher 1980 s. 86).

Oscar Wildes skuespill *Salomé* (1893) avviker i handlingen mye fra Bibelens fortelling. I Bibelen er det Salomes mor som får datteren til å be sin stefar Herodes om Johannes Døperens hode. I Wildes versjon elsker Salome lidenskapelig Johannes Døperen, blir avvist og forlanger av hat å få hans hode på et fat. Herodes oppfyller hennes ønske, men er så rystet av hennes grusomhet at han til slutt henretter henne også. Herodes elsker sin stedatter Salome, slik at det ligger nær opp til et incestmotiv. Det er dessuten et nekrofilt innslag i stykket da Salome kysser det avhugde hodet. Å få oppført stykket etter at det var ferdigskrevet var ikke mulig, det ble stoppet av sensuren. Opprinnelig var planen at Sarah Bernhardt skulle spille tittelrollen i London. Richard Strauss brukte senere Wildes tekst som grunnlag for sin opera *Salomé* (1905).

“Bibelens karrige beretning, om Herodias’ datter som danset for kongen og forlangte døperen Johannes’ hode på et fat, gikk som en farsott gjennom europeisk kulturliv før forrige århundreskifte. Stoffet ble av Oscar Wilde løftet til en teaterspråklig lekkerbissen om begjær og vold, makt, religiøs ekstase og perversjon. Da Strauss fikk stykket omarbeidet til libretto, betonte han det morbide ved tenåringsprinsessens lyster så håret reiste seg i benkeradene. [...] Wildes tekst og Strauss’ partitur løfter profeten frem som en overjordisk seer og en hellig mann” (*Morgenbladet* 31. mai–6. juni 2013 s. 28).

I en anmeldelse av en filmatisering av Wildes drama *An Ideal Husband* (regissert av Oliver Parker i 1999) skrev Sverre V. Sand: “Intrigen, med sine velanrettede koblinger av ekteskapelige og politiske, familiære og andre (la oss like godt si:) sosietære renker, er vel selve innbegrepet av nettopp det: intrige, med det ene mål for øye å uteske de sosiale friksjoner, påkalle et snappy understatement, et hevet øyenbryn, etc.” (*Morgenbladet* 24. september 1999 s. 13)

Wildes lange dikt *The Sphinx* “seems to be just another sensational work of art taking advantage of the fin-de-siecle predilection for the grotesque, the monstrous and the gothic. The sphinx, like the vampire and many other chimerical creatures, can be counted among the stock-in-trade motifs of late nineteenth century literature and art invented to transgress the Victorian notions of reason and decorum. Thus the reader is led to believe that Wilde, in accordance with many decadent writers and artists, caters to the bizarre neo-Romantic taste for sensational images of misogyny. Up to now the few essays dealing with “The Sphinx” – according to Isobel Murray, “Wilde's best Decadent poem” – have tended to concentrate on images of decadent morbidity while hardly any critic has acknowledged that Wilde's poem must be accorded a much more prominent, if not a key position in the writer's oeuvre. Focusing on the basic contradictions nineteenth-century aestheticism struggled to solve, it gives the attentive reader a shattering insight into the utopian impracticability of dandyish life and is thus, more than any other piece of decadent art, a revealing comment on the illusoriness and deceptiveness of fin-de-siecle facades and masks. Published in 1894, only one year prior to Wilde’s downfall as a dandy, in a slim volume of forty-four unnumbered pages, with

elaborate art nouveau illustrations by Charles Ricketts and a dedication to the French symbolist poet Marcel Schwob, the poem itself with its exquisite binding of white vellum stamped with gold leaf was to be more than just an exceptional and attention-riveting book: like the famous “Preface” to *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, it was meant to be a kind of self-sufficient manifesto against Victorian didacticism and utilitarian instruction. The additional fact that “*The Sphinx*” was published in a very limited edition corroborates Wilde’s intention that the booklet should be seen as a literary gem for the sensual delight of the splendid few and not for vulgar eyes. “My first idea,” Wilde is reported to have said, “was to print only three copies: one for myself, one for the British Museum, and one for Heaven. I had some doubt about the British Museum.” ” (Norbert Lennartz i <http://www.highbeam.com/doc/1G1-159330068.html>; lesedato 18.04.13)

“Far from leaving the trodden paths of his culture behind and, like Mallarmé, venturing into the new territory of a poésie pure, in his 174 iambic lines [i *The Sphinx*] he almost blasphemously makes use of and clings to the metrical peculiarities of one of the most popular poems of the Victorian age: Tennyson’s elegiac poem on the death of Arthur Hallam *In Memoriam* (1850) – an affirmative poem which was highly esteemed by his contemporaries, and especially by Queen Victoria, who derived consolation from it after the untimely death of the Prince Consort in 1861. Hence, the Victorian substratum of the poem, its firm rooting in nineteenth century literary history and thought ought not to be ignored as it has been in the few critical works which emphasize its quaint singularity and simply characterize it as “nonsense poetry of the purest verbal music of rhythm and rhyme.” The first thought that comes to the reader’s mind is the striking affinity “*The Sphinx*” has with Edgar Allan Poe’s poem “*The Raven*”: both poems deal with the monologues of highly-strung students who suddenly cannot help being exposed to the intrusion of the fantastic and uncanny into their secluded world of prosaic life. But while the speaker in Poe’s “*The Raven*” is essentially preoccupied with questions concerning metaphysical doubts (“is there balm in Gilead?”) and the possibility of meeting his deceased beloved in another world – all of which are answered with the devastating and reverberating “*Nevermore*” – the persona in Wilde’s poem finds himself faced with the sphinx as a silent sexual challenge. Much more in accordance with both Walter Pater’s interpretation of the *Gioconda* and Dante Gabriel Rossetti’s *Lady Lilith*, the sphinx is depicted as an invincible erotic antagonist which, unlike the many loquacious “sphinxes without a secret” in the late Victorian drawing rooms, baffles and arouses the speaker on account of its mysterious immobility and timeless beauty.” (Norbert Lennartz i <http://www.highbeam.com/doc/1G1-159330068.html>; lesedato 18.04.13)

Wilde var redaktør for motebladet *The Woman’s World* fra 1887. Slike blader dreier seg om det nye, eleganse, estetikk osv. “*The fin de siècle* was fascinated by cosmetics because they symbolized the barriers between spectator and object, art and life.” (Fletcher 1980 s. 160).

“[T]he *fin-de-siècle* artist was [...] interested in transforming himself into a work of art or some aesthetic instrument, as a way of overcoming the gap between the history of art and the history of one’s life. When Lord Henry Wotton suggests to Dorian Gray that he should ‘set his days to sonnets’, he is in effect suggesting the same thing as the Oscar Wilde who desired to place statues of Apollo in London’s maternity wards: life should commence by imitating and thereby embodying the patterned structure of a work of art, rather than the reverse.” (Fletcher 1980 s. 37-38).

Wilde skrev i *A Few Maxims for the Instruction of the Over-Educated* (1894): “What is abnormal in Life stands in normal relations to Art. It is the only thing in Life that stands in normal relations to Art.” (her sitert fra Fletcher 1980 s. 31) “Life in fact is the mirror, and Art the reality” skrev Wilde i *The Decay of Lying*.

I et brev som har fått tittelen “De Profundis” (publisert posthumt i 1905) skrev Wilde: “Pain, unlike Pleasure, wears no mask. Truth in Art is not any correspondence between the actual idea and the accidental existence; it is not the resemblance of shape to shadow, or of the form mirrored in the crystal to the form itself: it is no Echo coming from a hollow hill, anymore than it is the well of silver water in the valley that shows the Moon to the Moon and Narcissus to Narcissus. Truth in Art is the unity of a thing with itself: the outward rendered expressive of the inward: the soul made incarnate: the body instinct with spirit. For this reason there is no truth comparable to Sorrow.” (her sitert fra Fletcher 1980 s. 55)

Wilde ble arrestert for å ha praktisert homoseksualitet. “National Observer skrev at endelig var “Dekadensens yppersteprest satt på plass” og News of the World gledet seg over at det var satt en stopper for “den vemmelige estetiske kultus”. Bare Reynold’s News og Daily Chronicle uttrykte sympati med tidens største dramatiker.” (Otto Nes i *Bokvennen* nr. 3 i 1995 s. 28)

“If it existed, the Decadent Movement in England was given a fatal blow on 25 May, 1895, when Oscar Wilde was found guilty of acts of gross indecency with other males and sentenced to two years’ imprisonment with hard labour. On the streets outside the Old Bailey, we are told, prostitutes danced in professional delight at the decision. But it was not only Wilde’s homosexual behaviour which was being tried – and not only Wilde. A whole body of ideas, moral, literary, and aesthetic, and the relationship between them, were on trial – a fact which newspapers were eager to point out both before and after the sentence.” (Fletcher 1980 s. 15) Avisen *National Observer* skrev 6. april 1895 at “of the Decadents, of their hideous conceptions of the meaning of Art, of their worse than Eleusinian mysteries, there must be an absolute end.” “After the sentence had been announced, the *Daily Telegraph* continued this note of criticism, writing that ‘No sterner rebuke could well have been inflicted on some of the artistic tendencies of the time than the condemnation of Oscar Wilde at the Central Criminal Court,’ and insisting on ‘the terrible warning of his fate. Young men at the universities, silly women

who lend an ear to any chatter which is petulant and vivacious, novelists who have sought to imitate the style of paradox and unreality, poets who have lisped the language of nerveless and effeminate libertinage – these are the persons who should ponder with themselves the doctrines and career of the man who now has to undergo the righteous sentence of the law.’ The *Evening News*, in like vein, called Wilde ‘one of the high priests of a school which attacks all the wholesome, manly, simple ideals of English life, and sets up false gods of decadent culture and intellectual debauchery’. Writers in the last years of the century undoubtedly felt the cold wind of conventional morality blowing into their hothouse pages; the increasing freedom which they had been winning seemed to be in danger, and Decadence as a term to focus their ideas became so loaded as to be worse than useless.” (Fletcher 1980 s. 16)

Den britiske forfatteren Arthur Symons, “who must always be at the centre of a discussion of Decadence, stood valiantly by its theoretical positions in his Prefaces to the second editions of *Silhouettes* (1896) and *London Nights* (1897); but he abandoned any hopes of continuing under the old name” etter rettssaken mot Oscar Wilde i 1895 (Fletcher 1980 s. 16).

“Love, especially with an actress or a dancer or a highly made-up woman, or a woman untouchable because of her youth or self-involvement, becomes a favourite symbol of the attempt to escape the bonds of the real world, especially since it also relates to the striving for freedom of subject matter. Symons in ‘Idealism’ loves a woman as if she were artificial” (Fletcher 1980 s. 29).

“In *Amoris Victima* (1897) Symons, with a fine Yeatsian burst, reflects the Decadent dilemma and the escape through love or self-denial:

The world is made for dutiful restraint.

Its martyrs are the lover and the saint,

All whom a fine and solitary rage

Urges on some ecstatic pilgrimage

In search of any Holy Sepulchre.” (Fletcher 1980 s. 29)

Den franske forfatteren Edmond de Goncourts bok *En kunstners hus* (1881; 2 bind) er en slags katalog over kunstverk han samlet gjennom livet. Goncourt reflekterer også over hvordan kunst kan bevares i en periode med masseproduksjon og -konsum. Alle kunstverkene befinner seg i Goncourts hus mens boka skrives, og forfatteren geleider så å si leseren rundt i huset sitt, rom for rom. Blant kunstverkene er også bøker, manuskripter og håndskrevne brev. De to bindene i verket er på ca. 500 sider og Goncourt har en forkjærlighet for å beskrive detaljer

og nyanser, f.eks. farger. Forfatteren har en uhemmet sans for det spesielle og for luksus.

Innen nordisk litteratur er viktige representanter for dekadanselitteraturen Herman Bangs *Haabløse Slægter* (1880), Ola Hanssons *Sensitiva amorosa* (1887), Arne Garborgs *Trætte Mænd* (1891) og Tryggve Andersens *Mot kvæld* (1900) (jamfør Andersen 1992). Svensk dekadanselitteratur har blitt analysert grundig i Claes Ahlunds *Medusas huvud: Dekadansens tematik i svensk sekelskiftetprosa* (1994).

I *Trætte Mænd* er fortelleren “en av hovedstadens intellektuelle bohemtyper, Gabriel Gram. Han beveger seg i et miljø av forsofne og kverulerende kafeslaver, skeptikere som snakker med ironisk brodd og livstretthet om tidas trender innen moral, tenkning og politikk. Han vakler mellom tre kvinner, en madonna, en hore og en midt imellom. [...] Gabriel Gram “er som fastklemt mellem livsangst og dødsangst”, som Garborg-biografen Erik Lie uttrykker det. [...] tomheten som oppstår etter at hovedpersonene forkaster alle verdier og retningslinjer. Gud er død. Moralen er i oppløsning. Hvordan skal man kunne leve i et slikt vakuum? [...] Språket har et enormt trøkk og sug, replikkene fyker som flaskekorker fram og tilbake i rommet. Gram og hans suicidale, sexhungrige og forfyllede venner legger ikke papp imellom. De håner sin samtid med utstuderte ord og uttrykk. [...] Til slutt blir bristen på mening likevel for mye for Gram. På slutten av boka blir han kristen. I Kristianias kunstnerkretser vakte denne vendingen en nesten skandalelignende oppsikt. Hadde Garborg vendt seg til Jesus? [...] “Trætte mænd” rommer tvil, melankoli, Nietzsche-fascinasjon og anarkisme. Uttrykt gjennom aforistiske blinkskudd, svart latter og sviende selvironi.” (Fredrik Wandrup i *Dagbladet* 13. mai 2017 s. 59)

Bruken av monokkel ble et symbol eller sosialt kjennetegn på dekadanse, og dessuten ulike former for normoverskridende lek og eksperimentering. “For the *fin-de-siècle* decadent, the love of beauty for beauty’s sake, art for art’s sake, or the moment for the moment’s sake, could also be the love of sex for sex’s sake, and one reason for Salome’s ubiquity in this period [f.eks. i et skuespill av Oscar Wilde] is that the dancer and her dance came to symbolize just this interfusion of art and sex – or textuality and sexuality – in aesthetic representation.” (Kooistra 1995 s. 135) Noen dadaister brukte monokkel for å provosere. Kroppslig skjørhet er et annet ytre kjennetegn ved de dekadente. Den amerikanske forfatteren Audrey Niffenegger sa i et intervju: “Jeg har lenge vært interessert i symbolismen og i de dekadente kunstnerklykkene fra den tiden, [...] Det er mye romantikk der. Men når du ser på kvinneportrettene, er det noe usunt ved dem. Kunsten er full av tynne, bleke kvinner som hoster blod inn i lommeørklærne sine. Det er sterk romantisering av tuberkulose, som egentlig er helt sprøtt.” (*Dagbladet* 30. april 2010 s. 56)

Den ungarske forfatteren Max Nordau stemplet i sin bok *Forfall* (1892) samtidskunsten (både bildekunst, musikk og litteratur) som degenerert og viste en

tydelig engstelse for noen trekk ved moderniteten, som f.eks. urbanisering. “[T]he German author and philosopher Max Nordau lamented the decay of the world as he knew it, while the radical psychologist and ‘sexologist’ Henry Havelock Ellis charted with delight the signs of energy and regeneration.” (Birkett 1986 s. 6) Max Nordau hevdet at dekadansen gjaldt bare et lite sjikt av overklassen: “only the upper ten thousand ... I assert only the decay of the rich inhabitants of great cities and the leading classes” (sitert fra Birkett 1986 s. 8).

Den britiske legen og psykologien Henry Havelock Ellis publiserte bindsterke verk om seksualpsykologi og -patologi, bl.a. *Studies in the Psychology of Sex* (7 bd., 1897-1928; 7 bind), *Love and Pain: The Sexual Impulse in Women* (1903) og *Sexual Selection in Man* (1905). Uvanlig seksuell legning var fascinerende, men kunne også kreve forklaring. “Many writers are in no doubt that lesbianism is a response to some cruelty inflicted by lover, family or society at large.” (Birkett 1986 s. 40) I 1895 ga de to franske legene V. Magnan og P. M. Legrain ut boka *De degenererte*, og to år senere publiserte Émile Laurent verket *Den dekadente poesien i relasjon til den psykiatriske vitenskap* (Buvik 1989 s. 15).

“In 1895, in *La Revue Blanche*, Paul Adam was to inveigh against the illogicality of a society that attacked homosexuality while condoning adultery. Illogical or not, the lines were firmly drawn. Though scientific studies of homosexuality were on the increase, even these considered it as a form of disease. (J. Chevalier, for example, *De l'inversion*, 1885, and *L'Inversion sexuelle*, 1892; E. Laurent, *L'Amour morbide*, 1891). Marc-André Raffalovich's study of *Uranisme et unisexualité* (1896) challenged Krafft-Ebing's thesis that homosexuals were degenerates (*Jahrbücher für Psychiatrie und Neurologie*, 1894) with a list of major men of letters and politicians who had been homosexuals, ranging from William Rufus [dvs. den engelske middelalderkongen William 2.] to Michelangelo and Walt Whitman.” (Birkett 1986 s. 38-39)

Den franske forfatteren Henri d'Argis ga blant annet ut romanene *Sodoma* (1888) og *Gomorra* (1889). *Sodoma* var den første franske romanen som direkte tematiserte homoseksualitet. Tidligere hadde det kun vært antydninger, mens i Argis' tekst er det en scene med fysisk ømhet mellom to menn. Det er dessuten en tvekjønnet person i boka (<http://bibliotheque-gay.blogspot.no/2009/03/sodome-par-henr-dargis-1888-avec-une.html>; lesedato 08.09.17).

Den franske filosofen Gilles Deleuze skrev på 1900-tallet om “how [den østerrikske forfatteren Leopold von] Sacher-Masoch's style displaces real anguish with fetishes and employs techniques to freeze and aestheticize violence, turning pain into art and torture into tableau. Rebellion is enclosed in the safety of a frame, which may be the cool image of the mirror, the reflection of a work of art, or the cold logic of contract. ‘Disavowal, suspense, waiting, fetishism and phantasy together make up the specific constellation of masochism’ (p. 63 [i Deleuzes bok *Sacher-Masoch: An Interpretation*, på engelsk 1971]); and all these are

characteristic features of decadent art. [...] Masoch presents three female types: Aphrodite, who is warm chaotic sensuality; the Oedipal Mother, a sadist in league with male authority; and the preferred type, who combines both, 'the oral mother ... who nurtures and brings death' " (Birkett 1986 s. 33).

De franske forfatterne og brødrene Goncourt "visited the English sadist Henkey, son of a rich London banker, lodging in the Paris home of Lord Hertford, with his rich collection of erotic books and trinkets, waiting impatiently for a new binding of tanned female skin. In a nightmare, they imagined themselves taking part in the activities of Henkey's world", beskrevet i deres dagbok (*Journal*, 7. og 8. april 1862) (Birkett 1986 s. 21). Dekadansens sadisme innen litteraturen er likevel ikke den samme som de Sades på 1700-tallet: "Two things, however, divide de Sade from his heirs. Where he places power in male monsters, they conjure up female ogres, disguising their own rebellion. And where his is an active rage against the limits of a world that seeks to enclose and restrain him, their violence, with a few exceptions, is febrile and inward-turned. When it entered the 1880s, the Sadean tradition found itself much debased." (Birkett 1986 s. 20) "Though writers set themselves within the Sadean tradition, most of them are incapable of exerting that regenerative sadistic violence that expresses itself in negations, denials and anarchic revolt. What Sacher-Masoch makes plain is how much, unknown to itself, the national sensibility has changed between 1789 and 1870." (Birkett 1986 s. 34)

"To reproduce and fix, in art, the process of decomposition, reconciling the desire for chaos and the desire for order, is the purpose of both Baudelaire and de Sade. The wild orgies of tangled bodies in de Sade are careful theatrical productions, organized and harmonized by their libertine directors. They have their analogy in Baudelaire's poetry, where decayed and rotting flesh and disintegrating mind and spirit are gradually refined and fixed into the abstractions of art. [...] This desire to force fresh order out of chaos through the despotic authority of art is a key motif in the decadence. [...] For de Sade, Baudelaire and their decadent heirs, the desire is to enjoy the anarchy of Nature, the chaotic energy of matter, without letting that anarchy run its natural course. Art traps an image of freedom, to stand substitute for the reality." (Birkett 1986 s. 23-24)

Italieneren Gabriele D'Annunzio diktet ofte om sanselighet, grusomhet og abnormitet (Wittschier 1985 s. 162), heltedyrking, erotisme og sadisme (Arrighi 1956 s. 98), som et korrektiv til det normale og likegyldige. Perioden er også preget av reaksjonære kulturkritikere som tyskerne Julius Langbehn og Paul de Lagarde.

Den tyske kunsthistorikeren Julius Langbehns bok *Rembrandt som oppdrager* (1890; utgitt anonymt) ble en bestselger i Tyskland. Langbehns mål var at tyskerne skulle slutte å streve etter materiell velstand og heller bli en nasjon av kunstnere. Livet bør følge kunsten, hinsides konvensjonell moral. Tyskernes moralske kvaliteter i samtiden ble av Langbehn oppfattet som basert på en steril borgerlig liberalisme (Eksteins 1990 s. 125). *Rembrandt som oppdrager* oser av

kulturpessimisme, forakt for rasjonalitet, vitenskap og materialisme og andre kjennetegn ved moderniteten, opphøyelse av mystisk-romantisk nasjonalisme og tendenser til antisemittisme. Rembrandt blir et symbol på alt det forfatteren anser som moderne og usunt. Boka fikk betydning både for konservative katolikker og senere for nasjonalsosialistene. *Rembrandt som oppdrager* fikk stor betydning for Houston Stewart Chamberlains bok *Grunnlaget for det 19. århundre* (1899), et verk preget av drømmende narsissisme og prefascisme (Eksteins 1990 s. 125).

Ønsket om å fjerne jødene fra makt og innflytelse i samfunnet ble av noen oppfattet som en mulig “renselse”. “Anti-Semitism, never long dormant, revived in the eighties to unite a new coalition of the Right. Edouard Drumont’s *La France juive* (1886), went into 200 editions in fifteen years.” (Birkett 1986 s. 14) En annen sakprosa bok fra dekadansen i Tyskland på slutten av 1800-tallet, Wilhelm Bölsches *Kjærlighetslivet i naturen* (1898), er et forsvar for “naturlig” kjærlighet, som kilde til sunnhet.

“Socialist and feminist movements producing ‘disorder’ within the nation – the ‘mob’ and Medusa – are the major source of terror or, occasionally, excitement within the decadent text.” (Birkett 1986 s. 11) Franskmannen Catulle Mendès, “who became one of the best-selling writers of decadent fiction, soon abandoned his initial sympathy for Communards [franske revolusjonære rundt 1870]. For him, it was the Commune, not defeat by Prussia [dvd. Tyskland], that marked the collapse of France: ‘It was Rome under Tiberius, Rome after the Barbarians!’ (*Les 73 Journées de la Commune*, 1871, p. 327).” (Birkett 1986 s. 12) *Kommunens 73 dager (fra 18 mars til 29 mai 1871)* er et langt essay som beskriver mange av hendelsene i stor detalj. Den amerikanske forfatteren Henry James’ roman *The Princess Casamassima* (1886) “show a comically idealistic Communard in exile in London, a charming little man, who is also a key figure in a revolutionary cell whose doctrines catch the imagination of thoughtful working-class men and foolishly romantic aristocratic women. The Commune was a dangerous and a fascinating disease, whose capacity to spread disorder had no limits.” (Birkett 1986 s. 12)

Catulle Mendès’ roman *Zo’Har* (1886) handler om “oppslukende feminitet” og om incest. Léopold og Stéphanie de la Roquebrussane er bror og søster, men møtes først som voksne, og forelsker seg i hverandre. *Zo’Har* er en by som brenner opp av samme grunn som Sodoma og Gomorra i 1. Mosebok (https://www.fabula.org/actualites/catulle-mendes-zo-har_12921.php; lesedato 07.09.17).

I Wildes *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1890) Dorian er en typisk dekadent helt med “tainted aristocratic inheritance (‘the monstrous maladies of the dead’) and his dread of the decay to come – the passing of time, which, Lord Henry had warned him, would steal his youth and beauty. [...] Aristocratic logic upholds the right to rebel. Crime is only the lower classes’ version of the freedom the elite demand in

art” (Birkett 1986 s. 41). Dorian Gray har psykopatiske trekk (Benecke 2013 s. 325).

The Picture of Dorian Gray fikk mye negativ kritikk da den ble utgitt første gang. “Ord som “korrump”, “giftig”, “spedalsk” og “kvalmende” ble tatt i bruk og Wilde ble anklaget for umoral. “Både utskeielser og forsakelse straffer seg”, skrev Wilde i et tilsvarende svar. “For det er en grufull moral i ‘Dorian Gray’. En moral som vil være vanskelig å se for de perverterte, men som vil avdekke seg selv for alle med rent sinn”. Wilde anklaget altså sine kritikere for å lese hans roman som Fanden leser Bibelen.” (*Dagbladet* 12. april 2010 s. 44)

“So if that art is most perfect ‘which mirrors man in all his infinite variety’, as Wilde alleges in ‘The Critic as Artist’, then a sort of reversal takes place. The ‘natural’ or objective world is the most subjective; it is the personal or subjective autobiography that becomes an objective nature. This permutation of the mirror-effect is at the heart of *The Picture of Dorian Gray*: as the effete Dorian comes to live in the static, immutable kingdom of art, the picture becomes ever more life-like. If our very existence has a certain reversible quality, then every subject/object relationship is potentially interchangeable. The aestheticization of the human and the coming to life of a work of art – standard nineties’ pygmalionism – also means that history, the lives and deeds of men, is aestheticized.” (Fletcher 1980 s. 39)

I *The Soul of Man under Socialism* (1891) skriver Wilde: “Art is Individualism, and Individualism is a disturbing and disintegrating force. Therein lies its immense value. For what it seeks to disturb is monotony of type, slavery of custom, tyranny of habit and the reduction of man to the level of a machine.”. “If Art fails, mass violence is a legitimate answer” ifølge Wilde (Birkett 1986 s. 42). Wilde skriver også i *The Soul of Man under Socialism*: “The very violence of a revolution may make the public grand and splendid for a moment.”

Franskmannen Villiers de l’Isle-Adams roman *Akëdysséiril* (1886) “has an explicit political message. The stability of the country, according to the Queen, required the death of the lovers, as its greatness required the death of her adoring warriors. Order demands sacrifice – the death of the young, and the death of Love. Villiers’ two symbols, the Lady and the dead lovers, give seductive force to an ugly statement of the sadistic and repressive nature of power.” (Birkett 1986 s. 31)

“Economically and politically, this was a generation conscious of its dependence, and it is this dependence that fills its work with those morbid, vengeful images of frustrated adolescent eroticism. Decadents, Symbolists, Rosicrucians, Occultists shuffle the same motifs, with the same motives. Part of the desire for change, they are also part of a tenacious establishment, whose traditions they ransack for forms to contain their vitality. [...] Joris-Karl Huysmans and Joséphin Péladan turned to Catholicism and the occult. Remy the Gourmont mixed indiscriminately pagan, Cabbalist and Christian myth. Rachilde (Marguerite Eymery) played eighteenth-

century marquise of Messalina. Jean Lorrain blended folktale and medieval legend with the criminal drama of modern Paris and the Riviera, while Pierre Louÿs retreated into the temples and forests of Ancient Greece – or pornographic fantasy, which is a tradition of its own. Pagan revivals, mediaeval revivals, aristocratic revivals, Occultism, Catholicism are so many dead bodies to which these writers give new life. The vampires and ghouls in their texts are a dead culture feeding on its own children.” (Birkett 1986 s. 15)

Pierre Louÿs ga i 1986 ut *Afrodite*, en historisk roman fra ptolomeernes tid om en prostituert kvinne, en roman som hadde stor suksess på det litterære markedet (Birkett 1986 s. 192). Louÿs “tries to re-create a pagan ideal of unself-conscious sensuality” (Birkett 1986 s. 226). I hans forfatterskap er verden en forførerisk labyrint, noe vi blant annet opplever i Cottyto-tempelet, sentrum i hagen med høye gjerder rundt i *Afrodite* (1986). Om dette tempelet fortelles det at “thirty-six courtesans lived there, so sought after by rich lovers that they never gave themselves for less than two *minae*: they were the Baptes of Alexandria. Once a month, at full moon, they came together in the compound by the temple, crazed with aphrodisiac draughts and wearing ritual phalluses. The oldest of the thirty-six had to take a deadly dose of a fearsome love philtre. The certainty of a speedy death enabled her to experiment fearlessly with all the dangerous pleasures living women would shy from. Her foam-covered body became the centre and the pattern of the whirling orgy; amid wailing shrieks, cries, tears and dances the other naked women would embrace her, trail their hair in her sweat, rub themselves against her burning skin and draw fresh ardour from the uninterrupted spasms of her raging agony. For three years these women lived in this way and after the thirty-sixth month this was their ecstatic end” (Louÿs sitert fra Birkett 1986 s. 225-226).

Louÿs’ bok *Bilitis’ sanger* (1895) “declared itself 'the first translation from the Greek' of texts discovered in the tomb of Bilitis, a woman born at the beginning of the sixth century BC. Until the hoax was discovered, the reader enjoyed the additional pleasure of seeing all the sensualist’s dream-versions of woman apparently confirmed as historical truth. Bilitis’ poems were found in her tomb, along with her perfume and eye-pencil, a statue of Astarte and her golden jewellery, decorating bones that fell into dust when the lid was opened. The four cycles begin with the Bucolics of her childhood, flirting with the nymphs and Aphrodite. Her Elegies at Mytilene, capital of Lesbos, where she knew Sappho, are descreetly sadistic” (Birkett 1986 s. 232). Louÿs skrev også tekster om nymfer (f.eks. *Nymfenes skumring*, 1925) der de representerer drømmens makt (Birkett 1986 s. 233).

Den franske forfatteren Jean Lorrain ga ut *Madame Baringhel* (1899). “Rampant snobbery leads Madame Baringhel into the worst excesses of japoniserie, chinoiserie and diablerie. She scatters her salon with copies of Jules Boissière’s *Fumeurs d’opium* and Edmond de Goncourt’s *Hokusai*. She buys every engraving described in her favourite novels.” (Birkett 1986 s. 193)

Jean Lorrains novellesamling *Sjeledrikkere* (1893) er et dekadent verk med symbolske kvinneskikkelser: “Flaubert’s Ennoia, the eternal enemy, the dancer drinking the blood of prophets, Salome, Herodias, the impure creature, the Beast. When she kills our bodies, we call her Debauch; when she murders our souls we call her Hate, or sometimes Love.” (Lorrain sitert fra Birkett 1986 s. 197) I en av novellene “La Barnarina, the Wagnerian opera star, watches at her window for her stepdaughter, Rosario, whose life she is sucking dry with her kisses, and from whose lips she takes the daily glass of blood prescribed by her doctor.” (Birkett 1986 s. 197-198)

I historien “Magisk lanterne” i Lorrains novellesamling *Historier om masker* (1900) klager fortelleren til en fysiker at vitenskapen “has killed the Fantastic, and with it, Poetry, which is also Fantasy! ... You’re destroying Madness, Madness, the last citadel where an intellectual, at the end of his patience, could still retreat! [...] we walk in a world of witchcraft, surrounded by the Fantastic; it’s invasive, pervasive, obsessive, only the blind and prejudiced could refuse to see it [...] every day we rub shoulders with ghouls and vampires” (sitert fra Birkett 1986 s. 211).

En av fortellingene som Lorrain samlet i *Prinsesser av elfenben og salig rus* (1902), “Sabbat-prinsessen”, handler om en kvinne med et palass “filled with ugly frog statues, grotesque intimations of the degrading reality of female sexuality. [...] As the Sabbath builds to its climax, she becomes the helpless focus of the onslaught of carnal instinct in all its humiliating ugliness: “Young and old, fat and skinny, ugly and pretty, naked forms buck and leap, swirl down screaming, dishevelled, swoop on to the forest; creatures flutter down through the air ... Princess Ilsée is dying: a swarm of turkeys covers her, puffing out their plumage, a rat’s tail caresses her, a fox sniffs her, a viper with cock’s wings whips her; nipped by claws, embraced, bitten, licked, ridden by a thousand invisible beasts, the princess Ilsée wakes with a great shriek.” Her painful wakening shatters the mirrors and breaks her frog statues to pieces.” (Birkett 1986 s. 218-219)

“Lorrain’s writing lingers with horrified delight over its own perversity, in a tone of cautious sensuality [...] If there is an underlying pattern to the criminal acts that are the substance of Lorrain’s world, it is that figured here in childhood corrupted, innocence thrust into guilty knowledge by treacherous elders, or in the parallel image of the couple, where Eve, mother turned temptress, lures an innocent lover to destruction. The dominant partner is condemned, for preying on weakness. But the victim is also guilty. The erotic nature of these criminal relationships stresses the victims’ active desire for complicity.” (Birkett 1986 s. 199) Lorrains hovedperson Phocas i romanen *Herr de Phocas* (1901) avslører om seg selv: “Whores for me have never been anything but flesh for experiment, not even for enjoyment. Greedy for sensations and analyses, I used them for documentation, like anatomical objects, and none of them gave me the thrill I expected; because I was on the lookout for such a thrill, lurking in ambush in the undergrowth of my neuroses, and

there is no self-conscious pleasure, only unconscious, healthy joy, and I lavishly wasted my life contriving it, instead of living it; and because all refinement and quest for rarity leads fatally to decomposition and the Void” (Lorrain sitert fra Birkett 1986 s. 203).

Herr de Phocas “begins with an unnamed narrator, who receives an unusual visitor to his salon – the titular Monsieur de Phocas. While the name rings no particular bells, some of the jewelry the strange, somewhat aloof guest sports marks him as the Duc du Freneuse, a dandy about town marked with a somewhat unsavory reputation and beset by some unspoken scandal which prompts both the adoptive pseudonym and a departure from the region. Delivering a manuscript and apology into the hands of said narrator, he departs, and the tale within a tale begins... The remainder of the novel consists solely of Freneuse/Phocas’ manuscript [...] The narrative follows Freneuse through his Gautieresque obsession with a self-conjured phantom image. But where Gautier’s hallucinatory sirens were of Romantic ideals, the perfect women suggested by fine art and the imagination of youthful aestheticism, Lorrain’s are sickly, diseased, indicative of personal destruction and dissolution and leading to death. Haunted by this vision of a green eyed death goddess (Astarte by name, who is later depicted as an idol sporting a grinning skull in place of vaginal pubis) and repulsed by the culture and society around him (whose forced artificiality and propriety he projects onto a literal terror of masks), Freneuse seeks a cure for his obsessions by consulting a fellow sufferer of said fears and fixations, the expatriate Englishman Claudius Ethal.” (<https://thirdeye.cinema.wordpress.com/2013/02/25/journal-of-decadence-monsieur-de-phocas-by-jean-lorrain/>; lesedato 14.09.17)

Freneuse i Lorraines roman “allows himself to be led by the nose through some pointedly staged events aimed at pulling him ever further into a sort of physically unrequited S&M relationship, with Ethal the jaded father/instructor figure exposing and enslaving Freneuse to the depths of his own inner depravity and lusts in the name of an ostensible “cure”. A dark yet oily-suave personage, Ethal proves both charming and fascinating, despite (or perhaps due to) his vile and poisonous nature and impact on the life and bearing of his young disciple. [...] Exposed to a world of ever increasing darkness and vice and a new circle of amoral and jaded aesthetes such as the incestuous brother-sister pairing of Maud and Reginald White, Freneuse continues to cleave to the side of the sinister Ethal until he is driven to his ultimate denouement. After a chapter entitled *Lasciate Ogni Speranza*, or “abandon all hope...” which describes a failed attempt at returning to his countryside estate and place of birth in the hopes of freeing himself from his vices and obsessions, Freneuse returns to find some letters and packages from his sinister mentor, as always calculated towards driving Freneuse ever closer to the edge and limitations of his own self control. In the end, advised by both Ethal and, perhaps unintentionally, his would-be savior [Thomas] Welcome to visit a museum dedicated to the works of Decadent artist Gustave Moreau, Freneuse discovers what he believes to be the source and meaning of the green eyes that haunt

him. This discovery ultimately drives him, ironically enough, to the cold blooded murder of the very person who led him to the state of utter anomie that allows and advises him to so do.” (<https://thirdeyecinema.wordpress.com/2013/02/25/journal-of-decadence-monsieur-de-phocas-by-jean-lorraine/>; lesedato 14.09.17)

Freneuse, alias monsieur de Phocas, er estetiker og elitist, med forakt for folket og dets “vulgaritet”. Noen sitater fra boka: “I have always had some defect which makes me suffer from the ugliness of people encountered in the street, especially... laborers going to work, clerks in their offices, housekeepers and servants. The ugliness of a sad and miserable clown is further aggravated by the vulgarities of modern life, (with its) degrading promiscuities... the poor downcast faces of aged artisans and shopkeepers display all the everyday cares of menial work: the burdens of petty preoccupations and the anxiety of the unpaid bills which make the end of every month fearful.

The lassitude of the penniless at odds with life – a soured life without foresight – and all the unhappiness of simply existing, without a single elevated thought in their heads, has created those flat and mournful horrors... and only sees the light of money and theft glimmering in their eyes... each one in his secret thoughts dreams of nothing but the means to cheat and rob others.

Modern life – luxurious, pitiless and sceptical, has formed the souls of these men, and their women likewise, into those of prison guards or bandits. It has given them the flattened heads of venomous snakes, the pointed and twisted muzzles of rodents, the jaws of sharks and the snouts of pigs. Envy, desperation, hatred, egoism and avarice have re-created humanity as a bestiary in which every low instinct is imprinted with animal traits...

[...] to depart towards the sun and sea... to rediscover oneself in lands... where faith still endures, and which have not been tamed by our bleak civilization... to liberate oneself from all those conventions, futile attachments, relations and prejudices that are so many burdens weighing us down, and so many dreadful prison walls erected between ourselves and the reality of the universe; to live at last the life of the soul and instincts, far from the artificial, overheated and hysterical existence of Paris and London, far from the whole of Europe...

[...] I have always sought to fill up the illimitable void which is within me by recourse to the atrocious and the monstrous. Lust has been my damnation. It has deformed my sight and depraved my dreams, multiplying tenfold all the horrors of ugliness and transforming all the beauty of nature, so cleverly that only the repugnant side of persons and things is apparent to me... I subsist in the punishment of my sterile depravity.” (sitert fra <https://thirdeyecinema.wordpress.com/2013/02/25/journal-of-decadence-monsieur-de-phocas-by-jean-lorraine/>; lesedato 14.09.17)

“Art reinforces the corruption of his instincts” skriver Jennifer Birkett om Phocas-skikkelsen (1986 s. 203). Den fiktive engelske maleren Claudius Ethal har en samling av japanske masker som leder Phocas til “the exquisite, artistic forms of vice [...] Ethal – a more vicious version of the Lord Henry who destroyed [Oscar Wildes] Dorian Gray – exploits Phocas’ sexual insecurity. He sends him paintings. From Jan Toorop’s ‘Les Trois Fiancées.’ the eyes of the Bride of Hell stare threateningly; Goya’s ‘Dream of Reason’ fills his sleep with nightmares; he is haunted by Ensor’s mask of Lust.” (Birkett 1986 s. 204)

“Phocas struggles against Ethal’s definition: ‘Am I a lover of death?’ (p. 151). He shrinks from Ethal’s own sculptures (the head of a dying child), a wax Infanta with decomposing flesh, modelled on a dying marquise) and from his preference for art over reality: ‘artistic emotions ... which are the most intense, and the richest in complex sensations’. He struggles against Ethal’s suggestion that he too could find pleasure in murder and crime, watching the poor and the prostitute suffer in ‘the rotten civilization of a big city, Paris, or London ... what you’re looking for is the gaze of torment’ (p. 153). With Ethal’s friends, grotesque, ageing decadents, Phocas for the first time tastes opium. He experiences the pleasure of absolute degradation, and the double pleasure of being both observer and observed, dominant subject and passive object. As the opium takes effect, the naked Javanese dancers at the orgy vanish in a swirling cloud, to be replaced by a dark lamplit street where two thieves carefully saw at a woman’s throat with a delicate knifeblade. From this cruel vision, Phocas soars into dizzy flight from which, suddenly, he plunges to destruction, into oozing depths where clinging vampires suck his blood, until he almost swoons into spasm. Suddenly, ‘something hairy, limp, cold entering my mouth’ turns out to be the antidote (p. 205). The mysterious, vicious, double is on the threshold of existence; Phocas sees himself as Gilles de Retz in the forest of Tiffauges, haunted by obscene desires.” (Birkett 1986 s. 204-205)

“Ethal sends Phocas a new icon, an image of Astarte as the destroyer, Kali, with a Death’s Head and crudely displayed genitals. Phocas must choose between two selves and two ways of life: desperate, evasive idealism or the murderous pleasures of instinct. In the end, his decision is not his own, but is imposed on him by the force of art. The genius of Gustave Moreau has pre-empted every solution to the decadent dilemma. Both Ethal and [hans venn] Welcôme press him to see the ‘Triumph of Alexander’, the apotheosis of the new life of Benares. Ethal wants him to look into the eyes of Moreau’s portraits. Phocas has his own preconceptions of Moreau’s work. It is perverse religion revived, a mysticism of cruelty and sexual excess conceived for the bankers and shareholders of modern times, depicting the force that moves the modern world, which is murder. For Phocas, his name evokes the enmity of body and spirit and the malaise of nostalgia for dead days: ‘the dangerous love of dead women and their long, staring, empty eyes, the hallucinatory dead women of long ago, whom he brings back to life in the mirror of time’ (p. 350). His white coral ‘Sirènes’, with their living branches, restate the

paradox of death-in-life, and life-in-death, which confronts the decadent generation.” (Birkett 1986 s. 205)

“Phocas suddenly finds his own answer in the painting of ‘Les Prétendants’, one of Ethal’s recommendations. Ulysses, returned from his wanderings, is an obscure figure in the background, aiming his arrows through the hall. At the centre is the flaming image of Athene, guiding his aim. Death is inevitable. The suitors are caught at the height of an orgy of flowers, jewels and naked flesh. Moreau has consciously heightened the effect, Phocas notes, by making all his male figures adolescents, giving his picture a cruel, Neronic sensuality. The foreground displays the different ways in which these heroes of decadence meet their inevitable end. A group in the centre sits stoically drinking, oblivious to the carnage. On the far right, a would-be martyr bares his breast to the arrows; on the far left, one proud individual takes poison before the arrows can reach him.” (Birkett 1986 s. 206)

I *Herr de Phocas* arrangerer Noronsoffs elskerinne en fest der en hage blir til en orgie av roser og fakkellys rundt Bacchus. Bacchus blir spilt av en av elskerinnens unge sønner, og festen “builds into an intensely sensuous moment of perfume, light, shouts and music, all caught and focused in the costume of the child, a web of Noronsoff’s jewels that completely masks the human flesh: “a mad [costume], defying description, like that of Salammbô in Gustave Flaubert, or Heliogabalus in Jean Lombard’s *L’Agonie*; Gustave Moreau does the same thing. He is dressed in a kind of ash, ash shivering with the reflections of watery gems. The material of his robe is woven of nothing but moonstones, opals and sards; a pectoral of amethysts clasps his torso, and he wears a massive wreath of huge purple poppies – shadowy poppies with ruby pistils, monstrous, crazed and adorable, an emperor’s dream, a poet’s invention, the apotheosis of a god!” ” (Birkett 1986 s. 209-210). Noronsoff klarer å transformere festens opptog til et bilde av sitt eget begjær.

“[W]hat Lorrain has given us is something of a cross between Wilde’s Dorian Gray (in the sense of recording the decline and fall of the titular character), Camus’ *The Stranger* (in regards to treating murder as a cold hearted experiment and the detached, flattened affect that allows such a horrific act to be executed in cold blood), Gautier (but a perverted version thereof – perhaps a more apt comparison would be Guy de Maupassant’s “*La Horla*”, or even Poe, with their imagined phantoms leading an obsessive drive towards self destruction) and even perhaps Mirbeau or Sade, who traded regularly in sinister characters who initiate their charges into ever increasing perversities. [...] This somewhat homoerotic tale of dissolution and being led astray by evil father figures pursues its phantom obsessions to your door” (<https://thirdeyecinema.wordpress.com/2013/02/25/journal-of-decadence-monsieur-de-phocas-by-jean-lorrain/>; lesedato 14.09.17).

“In [den franske maleren] Gustave Moreau’s epic canvas ‘Les Prétendants’ (1852; [“Tronpretendentene”]), tellingly chosen by Jean Lorrain in *Monsieur de Phocas: Astarté* (1901) as one of the keys to the period, contradictions are at their most

intense, and the political implications of decadence are clearest. A group of aspirants eager for power are the object of an unknown threat. They are defenceless, and they die. The painting is an expression of insecurity, but first and foremost a glamorization of submission. The dazzling figure of Athene, cool Greek goddess of Reason, hovering in an aura of light and coiling serpents, presides over the death-throes of Penelope's suitors, falling before the arrows of a near-invisible Ulysses. The violence is contained between her aura and the heavy stone walls of the ancestral hall to which the wandering King has returned." (Birkett 1986 s. 5) Bildet kan tolkes som en moralsk dom over Penelopes dekadente friere, med fornuften snarere enn Odyssevs' list som den seirende kraft. Moreau er kjent for sine mystiske, mytologiske og symbolistiske motiver. Han har blant annet malt Salomé. I bildet "Tronpretendentene" har friernes ønske om makt og nytelse "collapsed into violence and chaos. Failure to take the queen, the symbol of the right power, leaves only the ambition for death. This is the romanticized version of fear and failure that decadent art sells the public, eroticizing the urge for power and the failure to seize it – the source of that archetypal decadent identification of Love and Death" (Birkett 1986 s. 6).

"Moreau's charms work because his ancient legends embody insights into modern neuroses, stressing, like Flaubert, the cruel and sinister side of myth." Flauberts Salammbô er "sister to Moreau's Helen, standing on the pile of bodies at Troy, or to Salome" (Birkett 1986 s. 215). En annen fransk dekadansemaler er Gustav Adolphe Mossa, som i bildet "Eva-Pandora" (1907) kombinerer to mytiske skikkelser i samme kvinnefigur.

Den franske dekadansforfatteren Remy de Gourmont skrev i "Kjærlighetens moral" (1900): "Every attack against freedom of love encourages vice. When you dam a river, it overflows; when you repress a passion, it goes off the rails. [...] Everything is connected, and intellectual freedom is certainly linked to the freedom of the senses." (siteret fra Birkett 1986 s. 101)

Remy de Gourmonts roman *Sixtine* (1890) har blitt oppfattet som en feiring av den dekadente hovedpersonens manglende evne til å leve i annet enn sin egen drøm (Birkett 1986 s. 103). I likhet med Huysmans *Mot strømmen* "it claims to mock its own hero for his failure to secure the object of his desire. [...] But what the novel argues is that willed incapacity coupled with imagination is more satisfying than anything the real world can offer. Unlike des Esseintes [i *Mot strømmen*], who foolishly thought he could improve on reality, des Entragues [hovedpersonen i *Sixtine* er Hubert des Entragues] knows that the function of the creative imagination is to find devices to delay the disappointing moment of possession. The function of woman is to be the vehicle of the ever-changing images and ambitions which incarnate man's dream. As long as she remains silent and mysterious, the game goes on." (Birkett 1986 s. 103)

I Remy de Gourmonts skuespill *Lilith* (1892) “is in every sense a blasphemous drama, using the backdrop of the Garden of Eden to set out the entire gamut of sexual perversions, and in the process challenging the authority of the Father-Creator, for whom Creation is only a ‘short-lived toy’, a mirror for his vanity, and whose chief concern is to keep it subjugated (Birkett 1986 s. 108). Med et slikt gudssyn som Gourmonts, blir enhver opprørsk handling som truer eller overskrider kristen etikk, en heroisk handling. Gud fortjener ikke vår lydighet.

På slutten av 1800-tallet var det innen de dekadente miljøene en kult knyttet til androgynitet. Joséphin Péladan ga ut romanen *Androgynen* (1891), med en “priestess of sexuality, shameless, triumphant” (Birkett 1986 s. 143; et sitat fra romanen). “The first volume of Péladan’s cycle, *Le Vice suprême* [*Den ytterste fordervelse*] (1884), investigates two androgyne images, the princess and the actress, each a soured version of the ideal – ‘a living allegory of the Latin decadence’ (p. 83). Pale, flat-chested and perverse, both are destroyers of men. But one is an authentic perversion and the other a cheap copy. The monstrous Léonora d’Este is devoted to an aristocratic dream of old heroic values, for the sake of which Péladan would willingly forgive all her sins. La Nine belongs to the modern, materialistic world, acting the androgyne because it pays, cash. In these two women, Péladan opposes aristocratic and democratic values – the one, for him redeemable, the other hopelessly corrupt.” (Birkett 1986 s. 145-146) “Too weak to whip men, she [Léonora] finds subtler forms of revenge, arousing desires she has no intention of satisfying, driving men to duels and suicide or the diseased embrace of prostitutes. The ‘supreme vice’ is her ‘satanic’ delight in the havoc she wreaks, seeking out all the perverse pleasures that the theologians condemn. [...] La Nine is her demonic caricature, the modern Parisienne, straight out of [bilder av den belgiske tegneren Félicien] Rops. She has no haunches or breasts; all maternal softness is replaced by a ‘she-cat’s charm and feline grace’ (p. 185); she shaves her head and wears men’s clothes: ‘She was consciously the pale androgyne, the supreme vampire of ageing civilizations, the last monster before the fire from heaven.’ ” (Birkett 1986 s. 147)

Péladans roman *Den ytterste dyd* (1900) “makes a last forlorn attempt to urge the middle classes back to mediaeval values. A new ally, Maître Baucens, modelled on [den britiske designeren og forfatteren] William Morris, has a project to restore the guild system and the pride of the individual artisan. But the market is already too powerful. It is publicity, not genius or craftsmanship, that sells a work of art.” (Birkett 1986 s. 155).

Péladan hadde som kunstnerisk mål å “recuperate the pleasures of masochism, turning the masochist into a new, heroic model” (Birkett 1986 s. 134).

Den franske forfatteren Marguerite Eymery brukte psevdonymet Rachilde. “Rachilde is considered an important figure in the fin-de-siècle French Decadent movement. Characterized in public life by her male dress, and habit of calling

herself a “man of letters,” Rachilde titillated readers with frequent depictions of unconventional sexuality, including gender inversion, androgyny, and homoeroticism. Her most well-known novel, *Monsieur Vénus* (1884), is a meditation on the nature of sexual desire from the female perspective. [...] The vast majority of Rachilde’s writings were novels in the Decadent style. Among her early novels, *Monsieur Vénus* is typical in its emphasis on passion and sexuality from a female point of view. In this work Rachilde inverts the gender roles of master and mistress by allowing its heroine, Raoule de Vénérande, to take a working-class man as her lover. After his violent death in a duel, however, she withdraws from society and succumbs to a pathological depression. Several works that followed dramatized similar themes. *La Marquise de Sade* (1887) is a psychological study of Mary Barbe and her burgeoning sadism. Androgyny and gender ambiguity are the motifs of *Madame Adonis* (1888), in which the recently married Louise Bartau falls in love with an enigmatic woman whom she believes to be a man. The heroine of *Le Jongleuse* (1900) forsakes all men, choosing instead a Greek vase as the object of her amorous desires. The varied manifestations of sexual deviance are evident in a host of Rachilde’s later novels, including studies of incest (*Les hors nature*, 1897), erotic obsession (*L’heure sexuelle*, 1898), and pedophilia (*La souris japonaise*, 1921). In her dramatic works Rachilde often employed symbolism to explore deeply hidden emotions or to develop a social critique.” (<http://www.enotes.com/rachilde-criticism/rachilde>; lesedato 30.08.12)

Rachilde “is considered an important figure in the fin-de-siècle French Decadent movement. Characterized in public life by her male dress, and habit of calling herself a “man of letters,” Rachilde titillated readers with frequent depictions of unconventional sexuality, including gender inversion, androgyny, and homoeroticism. Her most well-known novel, *Monsieur Vénus* (1884), is a meditation on the nature of sexual desire from the female perspective. [...] In 1884 she won immediate notoriety with the publication of her fifth book *Monsieur Vénus*. The work, because of its frank and iconoclastic depiction of sexuality, was almost immediately banned in neighboring Belgium under charges of pornography, quickly earning her the appellation “Mademoiselle Baudelaire.” [...] The vast majority of Rachilde’s writings were novels in the Decadent style. Among her early novels, *Monsieur Vénus* is typical in its emphasis on passion and sexuality from a female point of view. In this work Rachilde inverts the gender roles of master and mistress by allowing its heroine, Raoule de Vénérande, to take a working-class man as her lover. After his violent death in a duel, however, she withdraws from society and succumbs to a pathological depression. Several works that followed dramatized similar themes. *La Marquise de Sade* (1887) is a psychological study of Mary Barbe and her burgeoning sadism. Androgyny and gender ambiguity are the motifs of *Madame Adonis* (1888), in which the recently married Louise Bartau falls in love with an enigmatic woman whom she believes to be a man. The heroine of *Le Jongleuse* (1900) forsakes all men, choosing instead a Greek vase as the object of her amorous desires. The varied manifestations of sexual deviance are evident in a host of Rachilde’s later novels, including studies of incest (*Les hors nature*, 1897),

erotic obsession (*L'heure sexuelle*, 1898), and pedophilia (*La souris japonaise*, 1921).” (<https://www.enotes.com/topics/rachilde>; lesedato 14.09.17)

For *Herr Venus* ble Rachilde dømt til bøter og fengselsstraff (Birkett 1986 s. 163) Kvinnen Raoule og mannen Jacques i romanen har et spesielt forhold: “She gives him hashish, watches him under the influence of the drug, and makes love to him while he lies powerless, 'arousing terrifying ecstasies, with such exquisite skill that pleasure constantly rekindled at the moment of exhaustion' (p. 60). He becomes the mistress, referred to as 'she', and she visits him in men's clothing. She confides her experiment to de Raittolbe, one of her suiters, declaring modern women have no intention of reproducing an aristocracy whose time is done, and see no point in giving pleasure they don't share to men who don't know how to make love. De Raittolbe, who should have been shocked, is simply entertained.” (Birkett 1986 s. 164)

I Rachildes *Herr Venus* “Jacques is gradually reduced to a passivity which he learns to enjoy, Raoule beats him, demands increasingly effeminate behaviour, and imposes on him 'degrading habits'. De Raittolbe too thrashes him, irritated eventually by such flagrant betrayal of masculine authority. Raoule, rightly suspecting the beginnings of homosexual attraction, falls furiously on Jacques' bleeding body, tearing off his bandages: “... she bit his marbled flesh, squeezed it in handfuls, scratched it with her sharp nails. She ruthlessly deflowered all those wonderful charms that had once given her mystical, ecstatic happiness. Jacques writhed and squirmed, his blood flowing out through the deep gashes that Raoule pulled wider, in a refinement of sadistic pleasure” (p. 138).” (Birkett 1986 s. 164)

I *De kvinnelige marki de Sade* (1887) har Rachilde skrevet “a detailed analysis of the domestic, social and political circumstances that construct the female sadist” (Birkett 1986 s. 165). Hennes roman *Den blødende ironi* (1891) har “a hero faced with a choice between Life, the Whore who deceives and cheats, and Death, the cold, consoling Mother” (Birkett 1986 s. 169).

Den franske journalisten og forfatteren Léo Taxil kom på 1890-tallet med voldsomme angrep på den katolske kirken. Han latterliggjorde Bibelen i mange av sine bøker. Boka *Korrupsjonen i fin-de-siècle* (1891) er en slags sosiologisk undersøkelse av prostitusjonen i Paris.

Noen opplevde storbyen som et kaos i undergang, med “death-throes, suburbs destroyed by Industry and Capital, howling crowds living under a pall of smoke and over the stench of sewers. An age devoted to money and material satisfactions is captured in the image of the female idol that presides over this vision of decay ('the flesh holds sway'), her breasts rotten inside, laughing through a toothless mouth, her belly a gaping hole, a mass of purulence under her fine brocades.” (Birkett 1986 s. 18) En slik bildebruk finnes i den franske forfatteren Jean Lombards prosadikt “Adel: Framtidens revolt” (1888). Undergangsstemming er

også tydelig i Lombards romaner: “The most impressive evocation of the potential new life in the turmoil of falling Empire comes from Jean Lombard, in his two historical novels, *L’Agonie* (1888) and *Byzance* (1890). Both draw the confusion of a time when established order is threatened by enemies without and within, and usurpers and rightful inheritors of power are hard to tell apart. While elites struggle for political power, religions, philosophies and moral values are thrown into the melting-plot. Eros and violence reign; the animal is liberated in individual and mob.” (Birkett 1986 s. 15-16) “The violent instincts of the crowd are the reality of which erotic power is a mere image. Lombard shows the danger of attempts to conceal political intentions with sexual tricks. Aroused by selfish desire, the crowd is the destructive element that swallows enemies and friends alike, returning hard-won humanity to chaos.” (Birkett 1986 s. 17)

Det ble mobilisert mot dekadansens normoppløsning og svakhet, f.eks. i den unge “villmarksnasjonen” USA. “Another factor in the sensibility shift that occurred among the 1890s’ generation was the widespread concern that, like the rest of the Western civilization, the United States was suffering from a loss of virility and moral fibre – a cultural sickness known in Europe as *la maladie de fin de siècle* [= århundrets-slutt-sykdommen]. This supposed feebleness was blamed on the dominant position of women in religion, education, and the arts, as well as the decadent “overcivilization” of modern society which threatened to sap the strength of the people and weaken the national will. The result was a turn-of-the-century virility cult whose “doctrine of the strenuous life” (Theodore Roosevelt’s phrase) prescribed wilderness recreation, athletic endeavor (especially football and boxing), and male bonding. Cowboy life and the open range were admired as healthy antidotes to the artificiality and effeminacy of urban life. The restoration of the nation’s masculine potency was to be further buttressed through imperialist military adventure and a vigorous defence of America’s superior “Anglo-Saxon” heritage. Underlying these currents was a perception that life was a tooth-and-claw struggle and that modern civilization had become decadent, pale, and anemic. Most of the literary insurgents coming on the scene in the 1890s subscribed to such notions. Stephen Crane, Frank Norris, Jack London, and Theodore Dreiser all pleaded for a life of action, greater manliness, and the virtues of the hunt, blood and muscle sports, and even of war. Life being a “battle” and a “world full of fists,” wrote Crane, “in the name of God, let us have virility,” while Norris and London both called for robust men to purge the race of its moral weakness and sickly sentimentality.” (Ro 1997 s. 108-109)

Den franske maleren Thomas Coutures bilde “Dekadansens romere” (1847) innledet et syn på slutten av Romerriket som ble stadig mer vanlig i siste halvdel av 1800-tallet. Romerske keisere som Tiberius, Caligula, Nero og Heliogabalus, og keiserinne Messalina, ble forbilder for nevrotikere og dandyer (Fischer 1978 s. 127). Også renessansen ble reaktualisert. Den engelske forfatteren Walter Paters bok *The Renaissance* (1873) var “ostensibly a overview of art and culture in that

period, but in effect a manifesto for aesthetic existence that was to profoundly influence the artistic temperament of the fin-de-siècle” (Boxall 2006 s. 192).

Walter Pater publiserte blant annet den historiske romanen *Marius the Epicurean: his sensations and ideas* (1885). I en annen tekst av Pater er Florian Deleal fortelleren. Florian “sees himself increasingly drawn ‘to play pain-fugues on the delicate nerve work of living creatures’. Marcus Aurelius seems incredibly detached from the gratuitous slaughter at a Roman amphitheatre and, for Fronto, the other tutor in *Marius the Epicurean*, the disinvolvement from evil is revealed as an aesthetic response: ‘there were the evils, the vices, which he avoided as ... a failure in good taste.’ ” (Fletcher 1980 s. 47)

Pater ønsket seg “a religion of art through which the aesthete might hope to escape the randomness of a world without a centre.” (Fletcher 1980 s. 46) Pater mente at “the end of life is not action but contemplation – being as distinct from doing – a certain disposition of mind is, in some shape or other, the principle of all the higher morality. ... To treat life in the spirit of art, is to make life a thing in which means and ends are identified: to encourage such treatment, [is] the true moral significance of art and poetry.” (sitert fra Fletcher 1980 s. 42)

Dekadanselitteraturen er (i likhet med den symbolistiske/nyromantiske litteraturen) en forløper for modernismen: “[D]ekadanselitteraturen [fortoner seg] som begynnelsen på selve individualitetens avvikling, kjernepersonlighetens forfall og sinnets [dvs. menneskesinnets] punktering” (Andersen 1992 s. 21). Identitetstematikk står sentralt i den modernistiske litteraturen på 1900-tallet.

Dekadansforfatterne hadde en dyp skepsis overfor statlig godkjent religionsutøvelse, med derav følgende “erstatningsreligiøse bestrebelser” (Fischer 1978 s. 87). De gled inn i ulike “stemningskult”-fenomener (Fischer 1978 s. 77).

Den russiske kvinnen Helena Blavatsky grunnlag moderne teosofi med boka *Isis unveiled* (1877), en tro på panteistiske krefter i tilværelsen. Blavatsky ble mye diskutert og lest i tiden etter. Den tyske nevrologen Wilhelm Erb ga i 1893 ut boka *Om den voksende nervøsiteten i vår tid*. Det ligger grusomme sannheter i kunsten mente noen kunstkritikere og forfattere. Den franske forfatteren Édouard Dujardin skrev på 1920-tallet at det han hadde opplevd i en framførelse av Richard Wagners opera *Tannhäuser* på 1880-tallet var en Venus som representerte “Sodomita Libido” (sitert fra Kahane og Wild 1983 s. 59). Også Huysmans skrev at han i Wagners musikk fant representert Venus som “Sodomita Libido” (sitert fra Buvik 1989 s. 89).

“With its complex blend of radical and conservative elements, giving voice simultaneously to nationalist and internationalist aspirations, Wagner’s music spoke directly to the restlessness, insecurities and idealism of the decadent generation. [...] For the decadents, ransacking his work for the building materials of

their own fantasies, Wagner spoke of their inner confusion, figured in the Christian division of flesh and spirit, in which carnal desire and pleasure is never separated from guilt, nor spiritual ambition from fear of failure. He had images for the chaotic forces threatening to overwhelm the divided individual from ‘outside’: the insurgent crowds created by the great city, or the threat from other nations. He had a language that could express vital chaos, with all its terrors and its fascination, and could also appear to control it, diverting its discordant energies into familiar, reassuring artistic and religious evasions.” (Birkett 1986 s. 50)

“In the 8 November issue, the occultist Edouard Schuré expounded the lurid mixture of lyricism and exacerbated sensuality which is *Parsifal*, paying special attention to a different female image, Kundry, accomplice of the wizard Klingsor, sworn enemy of the Knights of the Grail. Kundry symbolizes the fatal double attraction identified by Baudelaire. ‘Ghoul, enchantress, lustful vampire’, conjured up by the wizard from the black gulf, she oscillates between two moods: demonic lust that ensnares men and self-abasing remorse that craves their forgiveness. With the coming of Parsifal, she is transformed into a Magdalene by the sign of the Cross and finally released, like Sara, into death. Schuré points to her acolytes, the thirty flower maidens who surround Parsifal, ‘man besieged by a heady, entrapping vegetation’. Like Kundry, the image of Nature’s ambivalence, they represent both heady fascination and fearsome threat. (They will be seized on with delight by the Wagnerian painters: ‘Les Filles-fleurs’, of Fantin-Latour’s celebrated lithograph, and Georges Rochegrosse’s ‘Le Chevalier en fleurs’.)” (Birkett 1986 s. 55)

Elémir Bourges’ roman *Gudenes tasmørke* (1884) er en “hymn to the decay of Latin culture, [and] the novel traces against a background of Wagnerian music and through Wagnerian motifs the fall of the ancient house of d’Este (riddled with inherited neuroses, weakened by perversions, divided by illegitimacy) which is displaced by the stronger power of imperially ambitious Prussia. Degeneracy in private life and political failure are linked. The novel opens in June 1866, with Wagner himself summoned to entertain the Duc d’Este, conducting fragments of the *Ring* and the overture to *Tannhäuser* that flatter the Duke’s family pride, and the Siegmund-Sieglinde duet that hints at the incest and corruption hovering about his household. The concert is interrupted by news of the Prussians’ attack on the Duchy, and the audience and musicians all take flight. The story closes ten years later in Bayreuth, with the Duke, a revolting, decayed tyrant, despised and snubbed by his peers, in attendance at the première of *Götterdämmerung*. The Duke has fallen; Wagner is the last bastion of order in Europe.” (Birkett 1986 s. 56-57)

“Catulle Mendès gave his account of the Ring cycle, closer to the original than Péladan’s or Barthélemy’s versions – ‘guilty God saved by innocent Man’ (14 March 1885). Brünnhilde was the Goddess announcing with her own death the transfer of power, and end of the old Gods and the coming glory of Man who would ascend in an ecstasy of Love. Odilon Redon’s lithograph of the Valkyrie in triumph appeared on 8 August.” (Birkett 1986 s. 55) Franskmannen Redon har malt

bilder med “the nostalgic landscapes of Celtic, Gaul, of Arthurian or Wagnerian legend, settings for Merlin, Parsifal, and the flower-maidens.” (Birkett 1986 s. 216)

Den italienske forfatteren Gabriele d’Annunzios forhold til Wagner varsler om framtiden: “The temple of art and the cult of the hero, aestheticism and victory, death-intoxication and triumph: a disturbing synthesis seems here to prepare the way for that ‘aestheticizing of politics’ which Walter Benjamin would later associate with fascism” (ifølge R. Furness’ bok *Wagner and Literature*, 1983, sitert fra Birkett 1986 s. 51).

I Péladans skuespill *Det kvinnelige mannfolket* (1891) “Wagner’s music appears again in the triumphant finale [...] to mark the victory of the androgyne ideal” (Birkett 1986 s. 153).

Den tyske forfatteren Frank Wedekinds drama *Vårløsning: En barnetragedie* (1891; på norsk 1983) framstiller den gryende seksualiteten som en vår – like naturlig som den og hinsides alle verdivurderinger. Men voksensamfunnet skaper dette naturlige om til noe heslig og forbrytersk, og dermed går de unge til grunne (Wagener 1991 s. 149). Offisielt skulle ikke barn og unge på 1890-tallet ha noen erotiske behov, og slike frambrakte derfor mye kval hos dem som oppdaget “lystens mysterium” i seg (Wagener 1991 s. 151). “Kyskhetspedanter” påførte de unge en unødvendig skamfølelse (s. 151). Wedekinds idealer var aktelse for naturens renhet, kraft, storhet og frihet (Wagener 1991 s. 153).

Den østerrikske komponisten Alban Bergs opera *Lulu* (1935) er basert på to skuespill av Wedekind: *Jordånden* (1895, utgitt med tittelen *Lulu* i 1903) og *Pandoras eske* (1903). Wedekinds tekster er “skapt i en periode med nærmest manisk mystifisering av kvinnen som *femme fatale*, fristerinne og demon. [...] Kanskje er hun et vesen uten sjel, hevet over død og kjærlighet, slik regissøren Chéreau foreslo i 1979, kanskje er hun et dyr eller en slange, slik regissøren Falckenberg mente i 1928. I Wedekinds første Luluskuespill er hun en jordånd (*Erdgeist*), i det andre er hun den mytiske kvinnen som bærer med seg Pandoras eske (*Die Büchse der Pandora*). Esken rommer all verdens plager, og Lulu slipper dem uforvarende løs. [...] Lulu koketterer intelligent med kropp og koloratursang og er kraftsenteret i en krets av tilbedere som forblir forbausende stabil. Den innerste sirkelen fylles av Dr. Schön, Alwa, Schigolch og den lesbiske grevinnen Geschwitz, som er mer trofast og får mindre igjen enn noen. I neste krets finnes medisinalråden, maleren, atleten og gymnasiasten, samt markien, prinsen, bankieren og kammertjeneren, som alle er på knærne etter Lulu og bare tåler de andres nærvær så lenge de kanskje kan utplyndres. [...] Bergs opera har trekk av drama og melodrama, farse, sirkus, operette, tragedie og varieté. Musikken rommer et mylder av sitater og kryssreferanser, drysset ut mellom smektende strykertemaer, ledemotiv, kabarettaktig musikk og atonal tolvtonemusikk.” (*Morgenbladet* 18.–24. februar 2011 s. 30-31)

“Seksualitet forblir noe ustyrlig og sammensatt, den utfordrer og kan drive oss langt over hva vi trodde var våre grenser. Vi er i våre drifters vold, som det heter. Seksualiteten uroer menneskelige forbindelser, gjør mennesker sjalu og eiesyke, og er i stand til å få nær sagt en hvilken som helst sosial situasjon til å bryte sammen. Alt dette får sine scener i “Lulu”, som i så måte mer påminner om Freuds ubehag i kulturen, enn om moderne seksologisk kundeorienterte råd om behovstilfredsstillelse. Den forblir utemmet, og kan slå ned som lyn fra klar himmel. [...] det ukontrollerte og kaotiske som er verkets kjerne” (*Dagbladet* 3. november 2011 s. 61).

Gerhard Ouckama-Knoops roman *De dekadente* (1898) inneholder en beskrivelse av et besøk hos et spiritistisk medium (Fischer 1978 s. 68). I Kurt Martens’ *Roman fra dekadansen* står det om hovedpersonen: “Gjerne forvirret jeg meg inn i de forskjellige teoriene om okkulte gåter, av avsky for alt levende. Der fantes det uoppdagete land, der jeg kanskje kunne finne tilflukt fra den hellige virkeligheten og egen fordervelse” (siteret fra Fischer 1978 s. 68-69).

Franskmennene Gabriel Vicaire et Henri Beauclair ga i 1885 anonymt ut diktsamlingen *Oppløsningene: Dekadente dikt av Adoré Floupette* (1885), som inneholder satiriske dikt og dikt som parodierer lyrikk innen symbolismen og dekadansen.

“As was said in ‘1894’, a *Punch* parody of Max Beerbohm’s essay ‘1880’, which had appeared in the fourth volume of the *Yellow Book*, ‘we may learn from the Caricatures of the day what the *Decadents* were in outward semblance; from the Lampoons what was their mode of life’. *Punch* indeed drew a good deal of copy from the *Decadents* from 1892 to 1895 – satirizing effeminate long hair, the world-weary attitude of the Decadent, the infantile nature of impressionist pictures (Flipbutt [...] mistakes a child’s drawing for an impressionist work), the lack of enthusiasm for exercise, and the expected love of the ugly. It is not difficult to see the target of ‘Disenchantment’ and ‘Abasement’, two items from ‘Select Passages from a Coming Poet’:

My love has sicklied unto Loath

And foul seems all that fair I fancied –

The lily’s sheen a leprous growth,

The very buttercups are rancid!

or:

With matted head a-dabble in the dust,

And eyes tear-sealèd in a saline crust,

I lie all loathly in my rags and rust –

Yet learn that strange delight may lurk in self-disgust.” (Fletcher 1980 s. 21)

En fransk forfatter som skrev under psevdonymet Jacques Plowert ga i 1888 ut *Den lille ordboka til tjeneste for dekadente og symbolistiske forfattere forstand (Le Petit Glossaire pour Servir à l'Intelligence des Auteurs Decadents et Symbolistes)*. Forfatteren var antakelig Paul Adam (Rieger 2002 s. 366) “Published in 1888, this glossary is the only work of its kind produced by Decadent and Symbolist writers themselves, and is full of “definitions” as mystifying as the words they claim to define. It offers both a scholarly and humorous examination of linguistic innovation, and shows how literary language remains subtler and more alive than any of the instruments designed to explain it. It includes such luminaries as Mallarmé, Rimbaud, Laforgue and Verlaine, as well as such writers as Feneon, Moreas and Rene Ghil.” (<http://www.abebooks.co.uk/>; lesedato 11.04.13).

Den polske forfatteren Stanislaw Przybyszewski og den franske forfatteren Joris-Karl Huysmans var begge fascinert av satanisme (Fischer 1978 s. 81). Huysmans’ roman *Der nede* (1891) inneholder beskrivelser av svart magi og en svart messe.

Yeats skrev i sin *Autobiographies* (1938): “I think that had we been challenged we might have argued something after this fashion: ‘Science through much ridicule and some persecution has won its right to explore whatever passes before its corporeal eye, and merely because it passes, to set as it were upon an equality the beetle and the whale, though Ben Jonson could find no justification for the entomologist in *The New Inn*, but that he had been crossed in love. Literature now demands the same right of exploration of all that passes before the mind’s eye, and merely because it passes.’ [...] there is no such thing as a moral or an immoral work of art.” (sitert fra Fletcher 1980 s. 27)

Noen diktere lengtet etter “to produce a bisexual art that had the perfection of each partner without voiding the identity of the other: ‘measureless consummation’. Yeats usually associated these rare periods of Unity of Being with perpetual childhood – with the polymorphous perversity bespeaking a certain doomed perfection.” (Fletcher 1980 s. 34)

“The denial of all categories but the *a priori* sensibilities means that the aesthete is a close ally of the perpetual child in theory long before Wilde made the equation practical, in his appearance. The significance of this alliance between the infinite potential of the child and that of the aesthete’s confrontation with the phenomenal world may help to account for the fascination of the *fin de siècle* with vicarious participation in childhood via the genre of the children’s story or fairytale: William

Morris, George Macdonald, Andrew Lang, Oscar Wilde, and others.” (Fletcher 1980 s. 43).

“Realism is created for the common people and was always their peculiar delight, and it is the delight today of all those whose minds, educated alone by schoolmasters and newspapers, are without the memory of beauty and emotional subtlety.” (T. S. Eliot sitert fra Fletcher 1980 s. 167)

Paul Bourget ble katolikk i 1903, Gabriele d’Annunzio ble fascist og støttespiller for Mussolini (Fischer 1978 s. 90).

Amerikaneren Cullen Murphy gir i boka *Are we Rome?: The Fall of an Empire and the Fate of America* (2007) et bilde av USA som en dekadent supermakt, men også med noen av de styrkene som kjennetegnet makten i Romerriket.

Den amerikanske feministiske forfatteren Camille Paglia studerer i boka *Sexual Personae: Art and Decadence from Nefertiti to Emily Dickinson* (1990) et aspekt ved dekadanse fra faraoenes Egypt og framover. "Ifølge Paglia tilhører mannen den apollinske sfæren, mens kvinnen hører til hos det dionysiske. Det vil i bunn og grunn si at kvinnen tilhører naturen, mens menn tilhører sivilisasjonen. Det vil også si at mannen frykter kvinnen og det dionysiske kaoset som hører henne til. *Ktonisk* er et annet ord ofte brukt i *Sexual Personae* ..., og begrepet er knyttet til det dionysiske. Det ktoniske er koblet til underverden. Det er den ktoniske virkelighet vi må fortrenge for å beholde vår apollinske integritet som menneske. For Paglia handler den ktoniske realitet om dehumanisert brutalitet, både biologisk og geologisk, det skitne, det råtnende og naturens blinde og malende krefter. Og det ktoniske er koblet spesielt til kvinnekjønn. [...] Kvinnen som ødelegger av sivilisasjoner er ikke det eneste provoserende aspektet ved Paglia." (Norunn Ottersen Seip i <http://bibliotekeroglabyrinter.wordpress.com/tag/art-and-decadence-from-nefertiti-to-emily-dickinson/>; lesedato 31.08.12)

Begrepshistorikk

Richard Gilman (1979) viser at begrepet “dekadanse” er kameleon-aktig. Ordet har blitt brukt i ulike historiske perioder og på ulike kulturelle tilfeller. Ordet har vært brukt om overdådigheten, luksusen og undergangsstemningen i Roma i de siste hundreårene før Romerriket falt, om Paris under La belle époque (og Offenbach-perioden), om London i the Yellow Nineties, om Berlin i 1920-årene og om etterkrigstidens Hollywood. Fellestrekket synes å være at det dreier seg om storbyer der det eksisterer andre og mer frigjorte levemåter enn i landet for øvrig, der mennesker kan sies å leve mindre tradisjonelt, mindre moralsk forankret og mer utsvevende enn ellers i landets befolkning. Moralene må vike for estetikken, for “skjønnheten” i kunsten og i livet.

“Dekadanse” kan oppfattes som forholdsvis synonymt med ganske forskjellige ord som “forfinelse”, “livstretthet”, “fråtseri”, “raffinement”, “fordervelse”, “nervøsitet”, “overdådighet”, “lastefullhet”, “degenerering”, “overmetthet”, “utlevdhet”, “verditomhet” og “ruin”. Slike valører eller konnotasjoner ved ordet “dekadanse” er ikke spesielt fokusert på det kunstneriske (noe f.eks. “ekstrem estetisisme” som karakteristikk er). Ordet gir anelser om utspekulerte sensuelle praksiser og f.eks. gastronomiske utskielser, opptatthet av manér og form framfor betydning og innhold, “intensive og raffinerte opphisselser” (Pfister og Schulte-Middelich 1983 s. 19). En kan også assosiere ordet til dandyisme, til rusmidler, med parfymen og juveler til astronomiske priser, med orientalsk luksus osv. Resonansrommet er stort.

Under den romerske antikken brukte romerske historikere og kronikører ordet “vacillatio” for å betegne forfallet. Ordet suggerer noe vaklende, som et tårn med sprekk i fundamentet. Spesielt den romerske keiseren Nero ble kjent for sine ville utskielser. Han drepte blant annet både sin mor og sin kone. Han likte å opptre som sanger og musiker, og tolererte ikke annet enn nesegrus beundring fra sine tilhørere. En general ble landsforvist fordi han hadde sovnet under en av Neros forestillinger. Nero ønsket en grenseløs keiserdyrkelse (slik også keiser Caligula gjorde). Av folket ble Nero betraktet som umoralsk, grusom og urettferdig. Selv var han full av forakt for de som ikke delte hans holdninger og kunstsyn, og det kan ha vært en slags protest i det at han begikk selvmord.

Charles Baudelaire prøvde å snu “dekadanse” om fra et negativt til et positivt begrep, og et instrument for selvforståelse, i sin tekst “Nye notater om Edgar Allan Poe” (1867) (Fischer 1978 s. 79). Men mange følte at dekadansen var et eksistensielt problem, selv om det var noe frigjørende i å kunne se sitt liv i et nytt perspektiv og skape sine egne verdier. Den tyske forfatteren Hermann Broch hevdet at det på 1890-tallet var et “verdivakuum” i Europa (gjengitt etter Fischer 1978 s. 28). Et vakuum må fylles – men med hva?

Nietzsche og dekadansen

Den tyske filosofen Friedrich Nietzsche ville på 1800-tallet stille diagnosen for den europeiske kulturen og dens dekadanse. Ifølge Nietzsche er verden underlagt en total perspektivisme. Alt er avhengig av øynene som ser og viljen som vil. Mennesket er et mylder av tilbøyeligheter og drifter som det i forskjellig grad forneker og undertrykker. Da Nietzsche – i likhet med mange forfattere i perioden – undersøkte det underbevisste (sjelen, vår instinktive undergrunn), oppdaget han frigjørende dimensjoner der. Knyttet til to greske gudenavn (Nietzsche kunne lese greske originaltekster) poengterte han forskjellene mellom det apollinske og det dionysiske. Det apollinske er det fornuftig-rasjonelle, disiplinerte og asketiske prinsipp i vår vestlige kultur. Det dionysiske prinsipp står for det å la kroppen råde over intellektet og gripe fluktmulighetene fra alt undertrykkende. Det dionysiske er rusen, musikken, seksualiteten, drømmen, mystikken – det overdådige, tøylesløse

og orgiastiske. Det dionysiske er altså det som er utenfor kontroll, en formløs vitalitet, et overveldende kaos av rikdom der livet oppleves som åpent og uavsluttet, yrende fullt av utfoldelsesmuligheter, med sanselighet og ekstase. I den dionysiske dimensjon er livet en feiring av livet.

For Nietzsche kan verden kun rettferdiggjøres hvis den oppfattes som et estetisk fenomen (Heller 1963 s. 123). Han skrev at “vi har kunsten for at vi ikke skal bli ødelagt av sannheten”.

I 1894 publiserte Remy de Gourmont et essay med tittelen “Siste konsekvens av idealismen” der han hevder at Narcissus ikke kan kjenne seg selv unntatt i de speilene som utgjør de andres selv-erkjennelse. Problemet er at alle disse speilene truer Narcissus’ med uønskete bilder. Én av løsningene er, slik Nietzsche ville, å bøye de andre etter sin egen vilje, en annen er å dø (Birkett 1986 s. 113). Nietzsche ville motvirke både dekadanse og kristent livshat med en aristokratisk kroppsfoldelse: “De ridderlig-aristokratiske verdidommene har som forutsetning en mektig kroppslighet, en blomstrende og rik sunnhet som skummer over, samt det som betinger sunnhetsens bevarelse: krig, eventyr, jakt, dans, kampøvelser og overhodet alt som innebærer sterk, fri og gladlynt handling.” Nietzsche så “viljen til makt som livsprinsipp” som motsetning til dekadansen (Asendorf 1989 s. 55). Han framhevet kunstnerens rett til å overskride virkeligheten og skape skinn og løgn. Nietzsche hevdet at det finnes mange “sannheter” og følgelig ingen Sannhet (Müller 1995 s. 212). I en fase var vitalisme hans frelsesbudskap. Selvmotsigelser, lystig mistenksomhet, sidesprang og raljering er ifølge Nietzsche sunnhetstegn.

For Nietzsche er livet en stor estetisk utfordring, et spill med roller, masker og perspektiver (Köhnen 2001 s. 296).

Nietzsche oppfattet kristendommens dyder, f.eks. askese, ydmykhet og medlidenhet som en “slavemoral”, en undertrykkelse og en slags hevn over livskreftene (Müller 1995 s. 90). Kristendommen er en type vampyrisme, fordi den utsuger livet. I boka *Ecce Homo* (1888) skrev Nietzsche: “The teachers and leaders of mankind – including the theologians – have been every one of them decadents: hence their revaluation of all values into a hostility towards life; hence morality. The definition of morality: Morality is the idiosyncrasy of decadents having the hidden desire to revenge themselves upon life – and being successful.” (siteret fra <http://www.lexido.com/>; lesedato 11.03.16).

“Viljen til system er en mangel på rettskaffenhet”, skrev Nietzsche. Én type system er religioner, og særlig foraktet han den kristne religion. Nietzsche hevder at selv om “Gud er død” i det sekulariserte Vesten, så er de kristne ydmykhetsidealene fortsatt levende. Denne selvfornektelsen og livsfiendtligheten må opphøre. Mennesket må si ja til det berusende, dionysiske i livet. Og siden det himmelske livet har forsvunnet, har det jordiske livet blitt hellig (Safranski 1999 s. 261). Alle de håpene, lengslene og andre følelsene som før ble rettet mot livet etter døden, må

nå rettes seg mot det jordiske, dennesidige livet. Overleverte moralske regler og etiske normer hemmer derimot livskraften (Safranski 1999 s. 264). Menneskets oppgave er nå å være “trofast mot jorden”, å omfavne det jordiske livet som det eneste saliggjørende. Og denne saligheten opplever vi ikke minst i kunst, i geniale kunstneres grenseoverskridelser. Nietzsche ønsket å være en ny Dionysos, med forførende, henrivende, overstrømmende egenskaper (Köhnen 2001 s. 117).

“Kristendommen er livsfiendtlig og kjønnsfiendtlig: Med sitt eget begrep for den svake og hevnjerrige forakten som ønsker å ramme enhver genuin styrke tillegger Nietzsche kristendommen ressentiment – mot “forutsetningen for våre liv”.” (Espen Grønlie i *Morgenbladet* 27. februar–5. mars 2009 s. 38)

Nietzsches bok *Den glade vitenskap* (1882) kritiserer vitenskapsfolk for å drive med for mye pirk og ubetydeligheter, og oppfordrer til mer vitalitet, kreativitet og flere spennende hypoteser.

“In the notes posthumously collected to form the book *The Will to Power*, Nietzsche frequently equates intoxication as the artcreating state with sexuality and suggests that ‘art reminds us of states of animal vigour’. In an association not untypical for the nineteenth century, he directly compared creativity with sexual potency and went as far as to correlate ‘the creative instinct of the artist and the distribution of semen in his blood’ (Nietzsche, 1968a, (805), p. 424). As mentioned in the introduction, statements such as this have been taken as the source for our image of the Nietzschean artist as the incarnation of a virile force of nature.” (Michael White i Smith og Wilde 2002 s. 187)

“Nietzsche’s analysis extended to characterize two types of artist–actor. The first [...] simulates in an affirmative way seeking no obvious gain or utility but revelling in playing a part. The second follows the corruption of style and indulges in histrionics. This, for Nietzsche, was the malady of the ‘modern artist’ who ‘in his physiology next-of-kin to the hysteric is also distinguished by this morbidity as a character’ (Nietzsche, 1968a, (813), p. 430). His diagnosis of the modern artist finds the love of lying perverted into a self-contempt which is ultimately nihilistic rather than life-affirming. While this analysis would appear extremely applicable to Expressionism, the excesses of which seem surprisingly similar to the second rather than the first category, the critique was developed by Nietzsche for a specific target, that of Richard Wagner. After *The Birth of Tragedy*, which contained a preface to Wagner full of hope and praise for his renewal of German culture, the two had a drastic falling out. In 1888 Nietzsche published *The Case of Wagner* (after Wagner’s death) in which he accused the latter of ‘making music sick’. In fact he questioned whether Wagner was a musician at all and instead characterized him as an actor who had hypnotized the audience and bowled them over with cheap effects. Although Wagner seems a character of great power and influence, he was not an authentic artist in Nietzsche’s eyes. His music did not express will to power because there was nothing in the exchange between himself and the audience who

were left passive receivers rather than active listeners (Nietzsche, 1967b, §6, pp. 167-9). Also to be found in the critique of Wagner is a gendered qualification which describes the appeal of his music to women (Nietzsche, 1967b, §5, p. 166). As Derrida notes, Nietzsche's writing around creativity operates with ancient distinctions between 'active, informative productivity and virility on the one hand, and material, unproductive passivity and femininity on the other' (Derrida, 1979, p. 79)." (Michael White i Smith og Wilde 2002 s. 191)

I noen faser av sitt forfatterskapet framstod Nietzsche som en moralsk revolusjonær filosof, mens han i andre faser ironiserte over en slik posisjon og oppfattet dens patos som en positur og maske (Safranski 1999 s. 265). "Alt som er dypt, elsker masken" skrev han. Bak masken var en filosof som utforsket et mangfold av masker og perspektiver. Nietzsche ville oppleve "lysten i spillet", utenfor en "tenkningens vold" som forflater det subtile, fornemme, spesielle og usammenlignbare (Safranski 1999 s. 265). Om seg selv og sin filosofi skrev han: "Det er slett *ikke* nødvendig, ikke engang *ønskelig*, å være enig med meg: tvert imot er det mye mer *intelligent* med en dose nysgjerrighet, som foran en ukjent plante, med ironisk motstand" (siteret fra Safranski 1999 s. 266).

Nietzsche utviklet en filosofisk idé om "evig gjenkomst", som for han var et middel til å velge ut de "åndelig sterkeste" og mest livsdugelige menneskene, nemlig de som kunne bestå "den store prøven": Hvem kan holde ut tanken om evig gjenkomst? Livet i all sin meningsløshet kommer igjen og igjen med samme meningstomhet. De som består prøven, blir ikke fortvilet, men blir etter Nietzsches idé til overmennesker, fordi de klarer å utvinne en dionysisk glede fra lidelse og gru (Heller 1963 s. 19-20). Overmenneskene skaper selv det meningsfulle i tilværelsen, de transformerer tomhet til fylde, og sorg til glede.

Dekadanseforfatterens "utsvevende liv" (som de ble anklaget for) og kamp med fedrenes holdninger, moral og verdier, kan forstås som forsøk på å leve innen det dionysiske. De ville brenne seg selv til aske på livets ild, hinsides konvensjonell, borgerlig moral. Det går altså en vei fra fortvilet livstretthet til å bejæ underbevisste impulser og drifter. Fedrene representerte derimot lydighet, disiplin, underkastelse, orden, ytelse, flittighet, beskjedenhet, pliktoppfyllelse, troskap og patriotisme. Det er en nær kobling mellom dekadanse og hedonisme: sanselig livsnytelse, egoisme med egen lyst som hovedmål. Problemet for de dekadente var at det er umulig å holde de intense livsgledene og nytelsen ved like hele tiden. Mellomrommene er fylt av kjedsomhet, melankoli og tomhet. Et begrep som brukes om denne melankolien, er "spleen", fra det engelske ordet for milt, men et ord som har fått et omfattende idéhistorisk begrepsinnhold. Det betegner den formen for tungsinn som følger av overmetthet og som til slutt blir til en omfattende verdenssmerte. Trettheten var både personlig og med et historisk perspektiv: den vestlige kultur hadde "alderdomsproblemer" og klarte ikke å integrere det dionysiske på en vitaliserende måte.

Sanselige gleder blir ødelagt av overforbruk, erfarte de dekadente. Dekadanseforfatterne hadde ofte noe resignert og desperat ved seg, noe grublende og lidende, med livstretthet og håpløshet som kjennetegn. For utenforstående kunne de bli oppfattet som livsudugelige. Ungdommer på under 30 år følte det som om de hadde vært igjennom alt livet har å by på, og så med resignasjon eller fortvilelse mot framtiden. Mange lekte med selvmordstanker. Det virket på disse forfatterne som om hele kulturen var i ferd med å gå i oppløsning, å forfalle og råtne. Det var vanskelig for dem å finne noe å leve for. Det mest nærliggende livsmålet var Kunsten (med stor K), den velpleide estetiske finfølelse og sensuelt raffinement. Det kunne imidlertid være vanskelig å gjøre kunst til sitt levebrød, og det borgerlige samfunnet ble oppfattet som begrensende og destruktivt, stengende for de sanne verdier i livet.

Nietzsche ble mange år etter sin død – ikke uten å egne seg til det – brukt av nazistene (som kalte avantgardekunsten for dekadent) i deres ideologibyggning. Ifølge Nietzsche og andre filosofer med en naturalistisk livsholdning, er ikke det underbevisste bare stedet for kulturelt “uakseptable” drifter og sanselighet, men også for maktvilje, utemt grusomhet, villskap og brutalitet. Ved siden av glede og rus er også volden og smerten en grunnleggende del av den menneskelige helhet, hevdet Nietzsche (samt filosofen Schopenhauer, som ble gjenoppdaget i Nietzsches samtid). Dekadansen rommer i tråd med dette en paradoksal blanding av livshyllest og livsforakt. Mest forakt hadde dekadanseforfatterne på 1800-tallet for spissborgerne, for sine besteborgerlige fedre, for snusfornuft og hele det borgerlig-liberale samfunn. Men de hadde ingen klare alternativer.

Mot strømmen

Joris-Karl Huysmans' *Mot strømmen* (1884) har blitt kalt “den dekadente ånds Bibel” (gjengitt fra Buvik 1989 s. 24). Hovedpersonen Jean Des Esseintes i romanen er en sykkelig drømmer som trekker seg vekk fra det han oppfatter som et motbydelig borgerlig samfunn. Han spinner seg deretter inn i luksuriøse, livsfjerne kunstverdener. Han skaper seg et “hallusinasjonenes laboratorium” (Schmidt 1950 s. 40). Den først planlagte romantittelen var *Alene* (Rieger 2002 s. 364). I *Mot strømmen* blir nevrosen koblet både til ensomhet, kunst og elitisme; nevrosen er “de utvalgte” lidelse og en typisk “dekadanse-sykdom” (Court-Perez 1987 s. 14). Des Esseintes har en svært aristokratisk og elitistisk innstilling.

Des Esseintes vil dø bort fra verden og leve i sin egen rike og private verden. Han vil flykte fra og være totalt utenfor verdens tumulter, og heller leve i og for Kunsten. Han bygger et slags mausoleum for seg selv og sine luksuriøse særegenheter, der han etter hvert lever i “a limbo of pleasure” (Birkett 1986 s. 81). “Des Esseintes buys works of art as drugs, to savour a fantasy image of his own terrors. [...] If the place of the erotic is in his study, then the bedroom is the place for religion.” (Birkett 1986 s. 73 og 75) Romanen skildrer ulike aristokratiske perversjoner. Både Huysmans og Sigmund Freud er opptatt av perversjoner,

frustrasjoner, nevroser, fantasmer, drømmer, det ubevisste, religion, samt den kunstneriske og litterære skapelsesprosess i relasjon til seksualitet (Buvik 1989 s. 31). Begge oppfattet kunsten som et resultat av nevroser (s. 33).

Mot strømmen viser et menneske i flukt bort fra den strie, plebeiske strøm i moderniteten til middelalderen, altså en slags sjelelig regresjon bakover til en mer “harmonisk” epoke. Des Esseintes vil til syvende og sist tilbake til fosterstadiet, og prisen for dette umulige er avsky og smerte (Birkett 1986 s. 95). Han vil motta minst mulig informasjon utenfra inn i sitt elfenbeinstårn (Rieger 2002 s. 364). “All his [des Esseintes’] present negotiations with landscape are attempts to recover the womblike security of this substitute mother Nature, that unfitted him for the struggle for power in a harsh world. But when he tries to re-create his dream, all he can reproduce is the cold, decaying sterility of his real mother. His attempts are only parodies of life.” (Birkett 1986 s. 71) *Mot strømmen* viser skuffelsen over dekadansens bestrebelse (Birkett 1986 s. 253).

“He who had engaged in a self-refining process, in order to purge experience of its vulgar sensations, finds himself trapped in a maelstrom of subjectivity.” (Fletcher 1980 s. 47) “Des Esseintes, Huysmans’s anti-hero of *A Rebours*, is perhaps the ultimate expression of this ‘reversal of the flow’. The victim of ever more refined tastes, he resorts during an ultimate ‘Last Supper’ to seating himself before a plate upon which there is nothing but an enema bag, in order, clearly, to prevent the romantic ego from engaging food.” (Fletcher 1980 s. 58)

Walter Pater skrev om Des Esseintes: “the effeminate, over-civilized, deliberately abnormal creature who is the last product of our society: partly the father, partly the offspring of the perverse art that he adores.” (Fletcher 1980 s. 151)

Mot strømmen tematiserer den dekadente kulten rundt det kunstige, anti-fysiske (Court-Perez 1987 s. 86). Den dekadente kunstner har ingen grunnvoll i sitt liv, men undersøker de usikre grensene mellom sannhet og løgn, dybde og overflate (Court-Perez 1987 s. 54). Mystikk og patologi grenser her mot hverandre (s. 96). Den dekadente kultiverer både det flyktige og det ugjennomtrengelige (s. 109). Han driver utforskning for å oppnå sensualitet og nytelse (s. 112). *Mot strømmen* er en litterær undersøkelse av “amoralismens usikre soner” (s. 46). Des Esseintes går mot strømmen når det gjelder hva som er naturlig (f.eks. ved å spise “ekle” ting; Court-Perez 1987 s. 99), sosialt og rimelig. For eksempel liker han grusomheten i den nederlandske illustratøren Jan Luykens bilder fra 1600-tallet (s. 80).

Des Esseintes “seeks out the novel, the strange and the bizarre.” (Birkett 1986 s. 73) Han vil ha både sterke og subtile opplevelser (Fumaroli i Huysmans 1977 s. 40). Det han skaffer seg er ofte kostbare saker, og de preger hans eksistens. “In the end, what he [des Esseintes] is is what he has bought.” (Birkett 1986 s. 73) Han gjennomfører “orgier” i nytelsen av drikkevarer, parfymen, blomster, litteratur og billedkunst (Fumaroli i Huysmans 1977 s. 30). Han er dekoratør, samler, bibliofil,

men klarer ikke selv å være kreativ (Fumaroli i Huysmans 1977 s. 32-33). Men det kan også hevdes at den eksistensielle oppløsningen og det kaoset han synes verden er, gjør det mulig å kombinere opplevelser på nye måter (Fumaroli i Huysmans 1977 s. 44). Han feirer det kunstiges seier over naturen, også når det kunstige går i en “pervers” retning (Fumaroli i Huysmans 1977 s. 46).

Han er en dilettant både innen kunst og erotikk (Fumaroli i Huysmans 1977 s. 29). Han forblir en dilettant, og veksler fra den ene aktiviteten til den andre, avløst av perioder med kjedsomhet og nervesvakhet. Melankolien ødelegger alle des Esseintes gleder (Fumaroli i Huysmans 1977 s. 10). Hans hedonisme bringer han ingen varig lykke. “[T]he intensification inherent in decadent hedonism” (Fletcher 1980 s. 38) kan ikke vare.

“*A rebours* is a hymn to consumption, by which des Esseintes establishes his hold on his world. Whether he deals with food itself, with Nature, or with Art, he reviews, in all its variations, the pleasure, and the glamour, of devouring. The pleasure is also pain: maintaining the position of major consumer is not an easy task, and results, all too often, in the consumption of his own substance. [...] In the past, his eating was an imperial triumph. He held a wake for his lost virility, an all-black dinner where art and spice took precedence over nourishment. [...] In the present, demonstrating his distinction is increasingly difficult, and he is driven to increasingly strained devices. [...] His greatest success is in the recuperation of a masochistic memory with a glass of real Irish whiskey. [...] Over-indulgence in spicy pleasures finally unfits him for normal consumption.” (Birkett 1986 s. 69-70) Han har blitt kalt “den perfeksjonerte følsomhetens Don Quijote” (Fumaroli i Huysmans 1977 s. 10).

“Nature ingested in *A rebours* in the form of food is also made over as landscape. While the common run of humanity is at the mercy of the environment, the aristocrat claims the ability to transform and transcend it by force of imagination, memory, will and cash. These too are failing powers, and, as they decline, reality returns to take revenge. [...] [Des Esseintes’] preferred natural landscapes are those which seem most crudely artificial. [...] Des Esseintes’ sole attempt to beautify Nature murders its object. On the shell of his pet tortoise, he has a Japanese bouquet marked in jewels, so that the flowers will flicker with the illusion of life as the creature moves over a rich Indian carpet. But the jewel crust stifles the tortoise, leaving the bouquet an inert mass in a corner, grotesquely emphasizing the dead flesh beneath. Nature is the female, inviting defilement and degradation. Under Huysmans’s jaundiced gaze, even the flower is corrupted by its associations. [...] In Nature’s loveliest forms, he finds the pervasive corruption of feminine sexuality.” (Birkett 1986 s. 70-71)

Des Esseintes leser den tyske filosofen Schopenhauer, og er enig med filosofen i at verden er et stort torturkammer der mennesket er yndlingsofferet fordi det kan reflektere over sine lidelser (Fumaroli i Huysmans 1977 s. 38). Huysmans hevdet, i

likhet med Schopenhauer, at “menneskets liv svinger som en pendel mellom sorgen og kjedsomheten” (Huysmans sitert fra Buvik 1989 s. 297). Huysmans kjente franskmannen Jean Bourdeaus oversettelse av den tyske filosofen i boka *Tanker, maksimer og fragmenter* (1880). I *Mot strømmen* omtales Schopenhauers livspessimisme og hans forakt for kvinner som berettiget. Des Esseintes kan ikke forsone seg med det han oppfatter som det kvinnelige. Des Esseintes voldsomme kvinneforakt er et aspekt ved hans selvforakt (Fumaroli i Huysmans 1977 s. 20). Han vil gjøre miss Urania til det samme som sin skilpadde: et anti- eller psevdonaturlig vesen, et rent artefakt (Buvik 1989 s. 179). Des Esseintes kjenner naturen bare som et simulakrum (Rieger 2002 s. 363). Han lurert seg selv, omtrent som en hypokonder (Fumaroli i Huysmans 1977 s. 22). Des Esseintes’ liv er en slags tomhetens triumf og katastrofe. Han lever som i et kaldt speilkabinett, og er ikke i stand til å modnes gjennom sine lidelser (Fumaroli i Huysmans 1977 s. 37-38).

Des Esseintes følger Baudelaires ønske om “hvor som helst, bare det er ut av denne verden”, men hans eksistens i det selvskapte avlukket blir til slutt uutholdelig (Buvik 1989 s. 207). Han glir inn i en nevrose som forverrer seg (Buvik 1989 s. 185). For han er det en nær sammenheng mellom en eksistensiell krise og en pervers erotikke (s. 185). Erotismen fungerer som en slags religiøs søken etter frelse (s. 193). Gjennom sin påkledning gjør des Esseintes seg snarere til et objekt enn å skape en subjektiv identitet (Fumaroli i Huysmans 1977 s. 26).

For antihelter som des Esseintes “Decadence fixes the real with repressive and regressive ritual, religious, erotic, aesthetic, piling form on to form to stifle truth; but still, out of some residual, guilty recognition of fact, allowing glimpses of historical reality to persist. [...] draw[ing from crude reality] themes for dream and inner transcendence. [...] A neurotic, fragmented imagination constructs the world outside in its own image, obsessed with the menacing fascination of a decay it is determined to perpetuate. [...] This is the debris of a culture, made over into art” (Birkett 1986 s. 62-63). “Huysmans’ text is a vicarious enjoyment of the pleasures of sin, within the absolution of Art.” (Birkett 1986 s. 66)

“Grotesque details plucked from the whole, intensified to dreamlike disproportions, turn ugliness into a source of pleasure. In *A rebours*, the imaginative powers of the neurotic ‘artist’ des Esseintes are permanently flawed; but here, as in Baudelaire, dream and art are both effective means of escape. [...] Des Esseintes’ later experiments on his keyboard of liqueurs are a displacement of this original erotic experience [...] the artist’s struggle to snare reality in the magic of the form, the morbid threat of the real, and the vision of the threat in sexual terms. [...] Real life is ‘fluid and fantastic’, full of colours, shades and shadows, but ‘dead’, ‘dying’, amorphous and menacingly uncertain.” (Birkett 1986 s. 64-65)

Des Esseintes “can at least enjoy his neuroses in style; [...] Des Esseintes’ project is a conservative one: to maintain a personality and a tradition in decay. He gathers under his roof all he knows of instincts and intellect, mind and senses. None of it

gives the pleasure it should. Experience turns to poison as it filters through a memory that retains only degradation and pain, and an imagination geared to vice, crime and ugliness. The present is married by his own neuroses. Mind and body jaded from having known too much, and unable to control or enjoy the world that in theory he possesses, he is left with the morbid, vengeful contemplation of his own frustrations. At the edge of the text are the masses and the rising generations who will inherit his world. At the centre is des Esseintes' frenzied lament for his own fading powers, insistently expressed in sexual terms." (Birkett 1986 s. 68-69)

Des Esseintes ønsker "to escape from the ugliness of the modern city, the cult of money, the democratization of politics and the relegation of art to the marketplace, into 'the gulfs of bygone ages, into the tumultuous space of nightmare and dream'." (Birkett 1986 s. 81) "Decadence may have no answers, but it gives flattering projections of an egoist's anguish." (Birkett 1986 s. 79) "[S]elf and world are a rag-bag of experiences, tackily stuck together in a desperate attempt at order, poised between shock and surprise, terror and thrill." (Birkett 1986 s. 80) Des Esseintes blir "suddenly confronted with the fluid and formless nature of the universe, and the tentative nature of his own identity." (Birkett 1986 s. 76)

"Bokens hovedperson er en sensibel estetiker, en livstrett skjønnånd og cerebral aristokrat ved navn Jean Floressas des Esseintes: "en mager ung mann på tretti, anemisk og nervøs, med hule kinn, kalde stålblå øyne, en oppblåst men rett nese og tørre, spinkle hender". Den unge mannen kunne se tilbake på en "dyster barndom" med tuberkulose og gjenstridig feber. Moren hadde dødd av utmattelse, og når des Esseintes er 17 år dør hans far også, av en ubestemt sykdom. [...] Som den eksentrikeren han er, arrangerer des Esseintes et outrert sørgemåltid for noen litterater, i en svart spisestue med utsikt til hageganger bestrødd med kull og en dam med en fontene fylt med blekk: "Mens et skjult orkester spilte sørgemarsjer, ble middagsgjestene oppvartet av nakne negresser i tøfler og strømper av sølvstoff bestrødd med tåreformede lapper. På tallerkner med svarte kanter hadde de spist skilpaddesuppe, russisk rugbrød, modne oliven fra Tyrkia, kaviar, rogn av multeisk, røkt blodpølse fra Frankfurt, vilt i lakris- og skokremfargede sauser, trøffelgelé, kremer av ambraduftende sjokolade, puddinger, nektariner, bjørnebær og moreller. Av mørke glass hadde de drukket viner fra Limagne og Roussillon, fra Tenedos, Valdepeñas og Porto, og etter kaffen med valnøttlikør, ble det servert russisk kvass, porter og stout." " (Knut Stene-Johansen i *Morgenbladet* 19.–25. februar 2016 s. 54)

"A *rebours* charts the spiral of frustration that characterizes decadence. Powers constantly and consciously turned in on themselves are self-destructive; and the individual, turning for support to an over-heavy tradition, collapses under its weight. The decadent hero tries to eroticize his failure, deliberately pressing sensuous pleasure beyond the limits of natural endurance, and provoking from Nature an expected retaliation. Desire takes the form of masochistic anticipation of failure, or sadistic fury." (Birkett 1986 s. 78)

Huysmans skriver i romanens forord at boka bidro til å gjøre bedre kjent franske diktere som Corbière, Mallarmé og Verlaine (Huysmans 1977 s. 67). Den franske symbolistiske dikteren Paul Verlaine skrev i et av sine dikt: “I am the Empire at the end of decadence”, som ble “used as a slogan by eccentric successors.” (Burnshaw m.fl. 1964 s. 43)

“Exhausted after his debauches, the imaginative explorations of his artificial paradise, Des Esseintes, [Arthur] Symons tells us, ‘is left (as we close the book) with a brief, doubtful choice before him – madness or death, or else a return to nature, to the normal life’. [...] Symons is here presumably modifying Barbey d’Aurevilly’s famous comment that after writing *A Rebours* Huysmans would have to choose between ‘the muzzle of a pistol and the foot of the Cross’.” (Fletcher 1980 s. 151)

Huysmans skrev etter sin personlige omvendelse til katolisismen: “Jeg henvendte meg til sykehuset for sjeler, til Kirken.” (sitert fra Buvik 1989 s. 298)

“Mike Fletcher, the hero of [den irske forfatteren George] Moore’s novel of the same name, published in 1889, is very different from the des Esseintes of *A rebours*, with whom he has often been compared. Like des Esseintes, he is the failed artist, struggling to realize the forms of his own imagination, and transform Nature, by artifice, into a more acceptable style. He, too, spices his pleasures with the low-life of the city slums, and is constantly tempted to slip from modern civilization into the refuge of mediaeval mysticism. But he is more robust than des Esseintes, and though tormented by the same contradiction between carnal and spiritual desire, can still for most of the novel take pagan pleasure in his own sensuality and inspire the same pleasure in others, both men and women. In his projected poem on Schopenhauer, he gives his own version of the dilemma. The flesh’s blind, instinctive will to live is a ‘stupid’ but positive force, sustaining a luxuriant, energetic universe. It is Reason that destroys, restraining, repressing and corrupting the passions. Man’s tragedy is that he is now trapped in structures created by his own Reason, which Fletcher defines as Christianity and Comtean socialism. He is forced to destroy his carnal, vital self: ‘As time goes on reason becomes more and more complete, until at last it turns upon the will and denies it, like the scorpion, which, if surrounded by a ring of fire, will turn and sting itself to death’ ” (Birkett 1986 s. 36).

Anne Amend-Söchtings bok *Jeg-kulter* (2001) er en studie i verk av blant andre Huysmans og Paul Bourget.

“The magazine is indeed perhaps the most forceful emblem of decadent anxiety, and its small and privatized character is itself elite – an *avant garde* gesture, one heralded by a sense of lost coherence in the culture.” (Fletcher 1980 s. 202)

En av utgavene av *Mot strømmen* hadde gul innbinding, og denne utgaven skal ha gitt navn til det britiske 1890-tallstidsskriftet *The Yellow Book*. Aubrey Beardsley illustrerte mange utgaver av dette tidsskriftet. Den gule fargen ble koblet til fin-de-siècle, kanskje fordi Narcissus-blomsten ofte er gul. Hovedpersonen i Knut Hamsuns roman *Mysterier* (1892) går rundt i en norsk småby i gul dress.

Andre verk

Leopold von Sacher-Masoch: “Venus i pels” (1870)

Maurice Rollinat: *Nevrosene* (1883) – en diktsamling tydelig påvirket av Baudelaire, med dikt sentrert om døden og ubehagelige sanseinntrykk

Maurice Barrès: *Meg-kulten* (1888-91) – om nødvendigheten av å beskytte jeget fra ytre påvirkning

August Strindberg: *I havsbandet* (1890)

Felix Dörmann: *Neurotica* (1891) og *Sensasjoner* (1892) – diktsamlinger, den først forbudt på grunn av erotiske beskrivelser

Stanislaw Przybyszewski: *Om individets psykologi* (1892), *På Sjelens veier* (1896), *Satans barn* (1897)

Remy de Gourmont: *Lilith* (1892), *Fantomet* (1893), *Magiske historier* (1894) – et drama, en roman og en novellesamling med et dekadent kvinnesyn

Leopold von Andrian: *Erkjennelsens hage* (1895)

Hjalmar Söderberg: *Förvillelser* (1895)

Otto Julius Bierbaum: *Stilpe: Roman fra froskeperspektiv* (1897)

Arthur Schnitzler: *Ringdans* (1900)

Heinrich Lilienfein: *Modernus* (1903) – en roman der Wagner-kulten spiller en viktig rolle

Paterne Berrichon: *Dekadente dikt 1883-1895* (1910)

Tyskeren Thomas Manns roman *Buddenbrooks: En families forfall* (1901) har blitt oppfattet som en dekadanseroman, bl.a. fordi Mann var påvirket av dansken Herman Bangs roman *Haabløse slægter* (1880) (Borchmeyer og Žmegač 1994 s. 74). Tilsvarende undergangstematikk preger også Manns lange novelle “Døden i Venedig” (1912). Mann oppfattet 1. verdenskrig som en mulighet til å bli kvitt

råttenskapen i det tyske samfunnet, til å forlate en sivilisasjon som råtnet og stinket (Eksteins 1990 s. 185-186). Det gjaldt å unngå et sivilisasjonssammenbrudd.

Adolf Hitlers personlige utvikling har ifølge historikeren Modris Eksteins noen tydelige likheter med den franske forfatteren Maurice Barrès og den italienske forfatteren Gabriele d'Annunzio. Alle tre var frustrerte egosentrikere som utviklet seg til å tro på en "nasjonal energi" i hele det folket de tilhørte. Illusjoner knyttet til egen person ble projisert over på en hel nasjon (Eksteins 1990 s. 469).

"The autobiographical novel *Il piacere* (1889; *The Child of Pleasure*) introduces the first of D'Annunzio's passionate Nietzschean-superman heroes; another appears in *L'innocente* (1892; *The Intruder*). D'Annunzio had already become famous when his best-known novel, *Il trionfo della morte* (1894; *The Triumph of Death*), appeared. It and his next major novel, *Le vergini delle rocce* (1896; *The Maidens of the Rocks*), featured viciously self-seeking and wholly amoral Nietzschean heroes. [...] New plays and a novel followed, but these failed to finance D'Annunzio's extravagant lifestyle, and his indebtedness forced him to flee to France in 1910. When World War I broke out, he returned to Italy to passionately urge his country's entry into the war. After Italy declared war he plunged into the fighting himself, seeking out dangerous assignments in several branches of the service, finally in the air force, where he lost an eye in combat. D'Annunzio was fond of bold, individual military actions. [...] D'Annunzio's literary works are marked by their egocentric perspective, their fluent and melodious style, and an overriding emphasis on the gratification of the senses, whether through the love of women or of nature." (<http://www.britannica.com/biography/Gabriele-DAnnunzio>; lesedato 16.06.17)

D'Annunzios tekster og liv preges av en "rapt cult of sensual orgy [...] flushed heroics, sexual hysteria, and gaudy optimism" (Burnshaw m.fl. 1964 s. 292-293).

Sigurd Mathisen er "en Norges "glemte" dekadansforfattere i likhet med Herman Colditz, Gabriel Finne og anarkisten Arne Dybfest. [...] "Skjønt Sigurd Mathiesen debuterte først i begynnelsen av det 20. århundre, hører han helt og holdent til 90-årenes åndsretning, i stil, i livsfølelse, i menneskeskildring. Han er i utpreget grad dekadansens, tretthetens, oppløsningens og livsangstens dikter," konkluderer Kristian Elster d.y. i sin *Norsk Litteraturhistorie* fra 1934. Deretter understreker litteraturhistorikeren sitt poeng ved å bruke "syk", "sykelig" og "sjelesyk" ni ganger i løpet av to og en halv side tekst om Mathisen." (*Morgenbladet* 20.–26. juni 2008 s. 34-35)

"Det ville ikke være vanskelig å lese Abo Rasuls misantroper opp mot det forrige århundreskiftets dekadanslitteratur: *Macht und Rebel* som 2000-tallets *Trætte mænd*. Som den historiske dekadansen kan heller ikke denne litteraturen leses entydig: Den går ikke kritikkløst inn i uvirkeligheten, men drømmen om litt virkelig lidelse som motgift mot uvirkeligheten skildres heller ikke uten fascinert

identifikasjon med det som beskrives.” (Ane Farsethås i *Morgenbladet* 1.–7. juni 2012 s. 48)

Alle artiklene og litteraturlista til hele leksikonet er tilgjengelig på <https://www.litteraturogmedieleksikon.no>