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Translating Decadence

edited by
Bénédicte Coste and Jane Desmarais

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Introduction

Translating Decadence

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Translation and decadence share a fascinating intersection in the realm of literature and cultural discourse. As the art of conveying meaning from one language to another, translation serves as a bridge between cultures, facilitating the circulation of ideas and literature across borders. On the other hand, decadence, simply defined as an aesthetic and philosophical tradition that emerged in the 19th century, is usually described by its exploration of themes of excess, decline, and moral decay. This unlikely pairing finds common ground in their exploration of the nuances of language, and the transformative power of words in conveying the subtleties of human experience. The following articles explore how translation and decadence intertwine, shedding light on the impact both have had on the evolution of literature. Our assumptions are that decadence in all its complex nuances may help us rethink translation, itself no longer conceivable as linguistic equivalence. Another assumption widely shared by scholars over the last decade is that decadence must be approached as a transnational phenomenon (see Potolsky 2012). Recent publications acknowledge the centrality of Anglo-French relations but explore its literary expression in Latin America, North America, Russia, and Central Europe (Murray 2020), or in Belgium, Ireland, Italy, Germany, Northern Europe, Eastern Europe, Turkey, and Japan (see Desmarais and Weir 2022; Creasy and Evangelista 2023). Our own selection enlarges that wide cultural geography with an essay on Davíð Stefánsson, an Icelandic poet, and arguably, one of the first proponents of Nordic literary decadence. All the following articles envisage translation as a seminal aspect of decadence with a special emphasis on translation's flexible forms, and on what might be described as a specific aesthetic of translation likely to revise and broaden over-reductive contemporary meanings of translation.

In her study of *Sensations détraquées* by the Swede August Strindberg, Corinne François-Denève discusses one of the only three literary texts written directly in French by the playwright

then living in France and going through a personal crisis as evidenced by his life story. When the text appeared in the "Supplément littéraire" of the *Figaro* on 17 November 1894, and on 26 January and 19 February 1895, readers were not confronted with Strindberg's version but that of Georges Loiseau, who does not translate from French to French but

> rectifies Strindberg's 'interlanguage' […] [and] seems to want to invent a 'deranged' French, or the discourse of a 'deranged person' […] [he] removes the clumsiness that denotes the author's xenity but precisely makes up his style, and adds here and there other 'strangenesses' […], which gives it another 'turn', seemingly 'decadent', modern or unhinged. (Our translation)

Loiseau rewrites an ambiguous text, perhaps pastiching prose writings of the time, into a text intended to express Strindberg's foreignness. Replacing Strindberg's expression of his inner troubles, he adopts a lexicon that contemporaries could recognize as decadent and eventually transforms intimate writing into sensational prose. Linguistically, Loiseau adapts Strindberg's text, culturally, he translates it into a decadent narrative, facilitating but also framing Strindberg's reception and recognition in France.

Loiseau also betrays Strindberg's text, and his act of betrayal raises the question of the translator's ethical standpoint which was not a widely debated issue at the end of the 19th century. This was a period when more recognized translators appropriated the work of lesser-known peers. Oscar Wilde's *Salome*, also written in French and slightly corrected by Pierre Louÿs, was translated into English by Lord Alfred Douglas, assisted and corrected by Wilde who was dissatisfied with his companion's English. The names of Louÿs and Wilde do not appear on either version. However, Loiseau, C. François-Denève notes, considered associating his name with that of Strindberg whose original text would be translated into Swedish in 2016 under the title *Crazy Sensations* (*Förvirrade Sinnesintryck*).

Ilze Kačāne studies the translation of the decadent aspects of *The Picture of Dorian Gray* into Latvian through two examples: the first by the author and translator Jānis Ezeriņš (1920) in the daily newspaper *Latvia's Guard* (*Latvijas Sargs*), one of the first press organs of independent Latvia, and the second by the translator and drama critic Roberts Kroders (1933). Considered to be decisive for Latvian literature, the former became a model of modern, even modernist, writing, while the latter displays a translation strategy that obliterates the abundant intertextuality of the Wildean text. Kačāne offers a detailed comparative analysis showing the extent to which the two translators, both fascinated by Aestheticism and decadence, respectively chose opposite strategies, Ezeriņš foreignizing Wilde's text and creating new vistas for Latvian literature, Kroders domesticating the very same text and insisting on Latvian appropriation of decadence.

Elisa Bizzotto uses another notion pertaining to translation studies to qualify and justify her recent translation of G.B. Shaw's *Widowers' Houses* into Italian (2022). Admittedly, Shaw is not an author whom critics naturally associate with decadence and whose writings are far removed from introspection and self-centeredness in the face of a society perceived as characteristics of decadent productions. His friendship with Oscar Wilde did not bring him close to the Wildean plays of the 1890s, except for his discreet parodies. However, Bizzotto demonstrates that the notion of the cultureme enables a retranslation of Shaw for contemporary readership while preserving the historical anchoring of his dramaturgy. Defining the cultureme as

> the smallest unit carrying cultural (and culture-specific) information, a concept […] related to extralinguistic, social and cultural contexts, denoting a social phenomenon that is specific to a certain culture which, however, emerges as such only by comparison to another culture which lacks that phenomenon, (Coman and Selejan 2019, 303)

she justifies the value of transnational decadent cultures for translation. She identifies several decadent culturemes ("the cultureme of the slums – one of the most recognizable symbols of fin-de-siècle London", "Cockney London", "Francophilia" and "the New Woman") and the contextual analysis she provides enables her to propose not only a modern and accurate translation, but also a reflection on the cultural dimension of any translation: "Applying culturemes to decadent literature helps to throw new light at oblique angles on both source and target texts, thus pointing at diverse ways to face translation issues".

Karólína Rós Ólafsdóttir provides an original translation of some poems by Davíð Stefánsson (1895-1964), together with an introduction to the first Icelandic poet likely to be described as decadent. Providing a careful presentation of the historical and cultural context in which the collection *Black Feathers* (*Svartar Fjaðrir*) appeared in 1919, she defines it as marked by neo-romantic, symbolist, gothic, and folkloric elements. The poems display a hybridity characteristic of Nordic decadence; they also express the budding poet's encounter with this same Nordic decadence (see Lyytikäinen *et al.* 2019). Here, the translation is as much a reception of *fin-de-siècle* poetry by an Icelander (whose island was colonized by Denmark at the time) as it is a translation from Icelandic into English accompanied by substantial explanations.

The last two articles testify to the richness of the term translation when applied to decadent productions, recalling their intermedial and inter-art dimension.

Jane Desmarais presents some rarely commented-upon translations of Cyril Scott (1879-1970) of certain Baudelairean poems from *Les Fleurs du mal*. A provincial poet and musician living between Liverpool and Germany at the turn of the century, Scott met Stefan George, himself the translator of Baudelaire's poetry into German, who would have a decisive influence on his artistic activities. From *Les Fleurs du mal*, Scott chose poems belonging to "Spleen et idéal" which he translated in an archaizing and sometimes erroneous manner, but one that was widely practised in the 19th century. J. Desmarais compares his practice to that of F.P. Sturm and J.C. Squire who already display a more modern manner of translating through their adoption of "more prosaic" words that "affor[d] the reader no comfort". Scott is, of course, best known as a composer, and Desmarais turns to his setting of Ernest Dowson's poems into song and music as a form of translation. The latter is arguably one of the best-known English decadent poets whom George discovered through German and Dutch translations by the Dutch poet Albert Verwey. George translated some of Dowson's poems in turn and suggested to Scott the idea of translating them into music. As Desmarais notes, Dowson's "delicate decadent lyricism had enormous appeal to musicians, singers, and composers in the early twentieth century" (see Desmarais 2019). In his adaptations, Scott privileges "an interstitial state of being" characteristic of Dowson's poetry along with his reliance on and mastery of silence which he brings out more convincingly than in his translations of translated Baudelaire. His musical adaptations and songs create what Desmarais describes as "music that works a passage between quasi-medieval, romantic/decadent and modernist tendencies, often requiring significant accomplishment on the part of his performers to convey the distinctive moods". Technically, Scott adapts Dowson's poetry but arguably, he translates the poet's words into notes. His translation of poetry into art transfigures the latter's essential qualities.

Scott's archaizing translation of Baudelaire's poetry conforms to the reader's expectations at a time when it enjoyed considerable renown in Britain, stirring some competition among poets and translators with modern poetry being instantly translated into a plurality of languages. For all its defects and outmodedness, it underscores the extent to which contemporary critics need to adopt a multilinguistic approach to better approach literary exchanges within the *fin-de-siècle* cosmopolitan context and the place of translation in these exchanges.

This cosmopolitan context, itself the subject of recent scholarly work (see Robbins and Lemos Horta 2021), is not confined to Europe and the United States: Japan has also benefitted from a translation of literary decadence through an emblematic work: *The Golden Death* (*Konjiki no shi* 金色の死, 1914) by Tanizaki Jun'ichirō. I. Amano recalls that the novel has often been approached as the result of its author's fascination with Edgar Allan Poe's short stories: "The Domain of Arnheim" (1847) and "Landor's Cottage" (1849). However, this vision is reductive, and Amano suggests reading *The Golden Death* as a literary translation of decadent tropes, objects, and themes underpinned by a desire to westernize Japanese literature by borrowing an aesthetic then perceived as modern. Okamura, the hero of *The Golden Death*, sets out to build an earthly paradise in which he becomes an object destined to perish as soon as he loses what made him human. If the end of the narrative is tragicomic, the fact remains that this "chaotic bricolage of European and Asian artifacts and literary masterpieces" refers to "the author's inability to formulate a clearly defined aesthetic belief through borrowing Western counterparts". Here, the appropriation of decadent elements only displays the impasse of borrowing strategies intended to revive Japanese literature perceived as declining. But at the same time, *The Golden Death* shows how this appropriation verging on translation destabilizes current understandings of translation as linguistic equivalence. Tanizaki Jun'ichirō's novel is also a fine example of translating and adapting Western decadence to its other.

Decadence and translation thus appear to be correlated, intrinsically linked, and constantly redefining each other against transnational backgrounds. The fluidity of decadent productions echoes the fluidity and the scope of translation practices at the turn of the century. Far from conceiving translation as a textual equivalent, the decadent aesthetics of translation explored here cuts across the arts, mediums, and accepted normative languages. Preconceived ideas about translation are turned on their head. The new translations of decadent or *fin-de-siècle* texts by Bizzotto and Ólafsdóttir in this issue stand out as good examples of a flexible and creative translation practice that takes into account both traditional and contemporary approaches.

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Les *Sensations détraquées* de Strindberg "Perdre le Nord"?

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Abstract

The text *Sensations détraquées* by August Strindberg, written directly in French, seems to embody all the characteristics of a "decadent" text. It was published in three instalments in the literary supplement of *Le Figaro* on 17 November 1894, and then on 26 January and 9 February 1895. It was reissued in 2016. However, *Sensations détraquées* is not a text by Strindberg, but rather an intralingual translation by Georges Loiseau. Loiseau removes what he likely considers stylistic awkwardness but adds linguistic affectations that could rightly be considered decadent. This article proposes a journey between the two French versions of the text (Loiseau's and Strindberg's), ending with an overview of the Swedish translations of *Sensations détraquées*.

Keywords: Strindberg, *Sensations détraquées*, *Förvirrade sinnesintryck*, Scandinavian Decadence, Bilingualism, Self-translation

Consacrer un article à *Sensations détraquées* de Strindberg, au sein d'un volume dédié à la décadence et à la traduction, semble relever de la gageure.

Sensations détraquées a été en effet écrit en français par Strindberg, et si des versions existent en suédois, elles ne sont pas le fait de leur auteur. Impossible ici de parler d'auto-traduction, à moins de penser que Strindberg, Suédois écrivant en français, pratiquait une sorte d'auto-traduction dont nous n'aurions pas le texte-source. Comme dans tous les cas d'un auteur faisant le choix de la langue autre, de la langue de l'autre, les mêmes questions se posent: Strindberg pensait-il d'abord "en suédois" ou immédiatement en français? A moins d'un témoignage précis sur les circonstances de la rédaction, ces questions demeurent difficiles à trancher. Parmi les spécialistes de Strindberg, Gunnar Brandell penche pour la première hypothèse, arguant d'un certain nombre d'erreurs commises par Strindberg, dont il estime qu'elles viennent du suédois. Cette opinion est depuis battue en brèche, et on se demande désormais si ces "imperfections" ne font pas précisément le *style* de Strindberg en français (cité par

Künzli et Engwall 2016a, 150). Le manuscrit de *Sensations détraquées*[1] comporte des ratures, et pourrait apporter quelques éléments de réponse quant aux corrections et rectifications que Strindberg a lui-même apportées à son texte – ce ne sera pas notre objet ici.

Dans le cas de *Sensations détraquées* s'élève en effet très vite une autre difficulté: le texte paru en français, et reparu comme tel depuis, sous le seul nom fétiche d'Auguste Strindberg,[2] a été abondamment révisé par Georges Loiseau.[3] Le texte de Strindberg, ainsi, tel qu'il est donné au public français, est déjà, en un sens, une "traduction", du français au français, et non du suédois au français, comme la plupart des lecteurs et lectrices pourraient le penser; et la question se pose de savoir si Loiseau est un simple "traducteur", ou un co-auteur. Une comparaison du premier paragraphe de *Sensations détraquées* est édifiante. La version Loiseau (nous choisissons à dessein cette expression, pour distinguer les deux textes en présence) écrit en effet:

> J'arrive des monts et des vallées, de là-bas, des bords du bleu Danube. J'ai, derrière moi, laissé la cabane auprès du chemin, derrière moi les raisins non vendangés encore, les tomates, les melons avant leur maturation et les roses en bouton. (Strindberg 2016, 9)

quand la version Strindberg écrit:

> J'arrive des monts et des vaux du bleu Danube. J'ai laissé derrière moi la cabane au bord du chemin, derrière moi les raisins avant les vendanges, les tomates, les melons, avant maturation, et les roses en bourgeons. (Strindberg 2010a, 222)

Comment, dès lors, travailler? Puisque c'est le texte Strindberg *cum* Loiseau qui a été présenté au public français, et se transmet à lui, nous avons décidé de travailler sur ce texte révisé. Cela peut paraitre une aberration, et un non-sens scientifique: pourquoi travailler sur un texte qui, c'est avéré, n'est pas le texte original de l'auteur? Justement pour travailler au plus près l'idée de la traduction – qui permettra de cerner aussi celle de la "décadence", concernant Strindberg.

L'autre gageure concerne le terme même de décadence, appliqué à un auteur "du Nord". Comme l'ont montré Pirjo Lyytikäinen, Riikka Rossi, Viola Parente-Čapková et Mirjam Hinrikus dans leur ouvrage, les mouvements littéraires venus d'ailleurs (naturalisme, réalisme, décadence) se transforment, une fois arrivés en terre nordique, et sont parfois subsumés sous

[1] Le manuscrit original se trouve à la bibliothèque royale de Copenhague et est disponible en ligne: <http://www5.kb.dk/manus/vmanus/2011/dec/ha/object54458/da#kbOSD-0=page:1> (12/2023). Il y est arrivé par l'entremise de Mario Krohn (1881-1922), qui, adolescent, avait écrit à Strindberg et avait reçu en retour ce manuscrit.

[2] C'est le cas de l'édition parue aux éditions du Chemin de fer en 2016, utilisée ici pour plus de commodité.

[3] *Sensations détraquées* fait partie des trois "grands" textes rédigés en français par Strindberg. En 1887-88, Strindberg écrit en français *Le Plaidoyer d'un fou.* L'ouvrage parait en France en 1895, précisément au moment de la publication de *Sensations détraquées*: le "détraqué" renvoie au "fou". En 1897, de retour en Suède, Strindberg écrit en français *Inferno*, récit de son séjour parisien. Il semble que les récits de "folie" de Strindberg trouvent leur expression dans cette langue autre. Strindberg avait appris le français à l'école (Künzli et Engwall 2016a, 149). Georges Loiseau a également abondamment révisé *Le Plaidoyer d'un fou,* posant la question de l'auctorialité (Engwall 1980). Le manuscrit du *Plaidoyer* a été retrouvé en 1973 "dans un coffre-fort de l'Institut d'anatomie de l'université d'Oslo" (Künzli et Engwall 2016a, 147). Dans le cas du *Plaidoyer* on parle souvent d'une "adaptation" par Loiseau (Künzli et Engwall 2016a, 157). On va voir qu'il en va de même pour les *Sensations détraquées*. Dans le fonds Loiseau un document semble d'ailleurs indiquer que Loiseau avait prévu d'associer son nom à celui de Strindberg (Engwall et Stam 2016, 90). Le premier texte de Strindberg écrit en français avait été aussi "francisé" par le marquis d'Hervey de Saint-Denys (Engawall 2013, 520) Strindberg a aussi écrit en français des articles de journaux.

le terme plus large de "percée moderne"[4] (2020, 4). Le "naturalisme" des pays du Nord n'est pas celui de Zola, en dépit de l'identité du terme; et il en va de même pour la décadence. Ces questions de transferts culturels débordent évidemment la simple période du XIX[e] siècle et le seul décadentisme. Il n'en reste pas moins que, concernant la décadence, deux pensées s'opposent: d'un côté l'idée que la décadence est un phénomène "global", qui a embra(s)sé toute l'Europe, et que l'on peut employer ce terme-parapluie pour parler de ses manifestations; que les décadents forment en tout cas une "communauté imaginée" (Potolsky 2013, 6); de l'autre l'idée que la décadence ne peut être considérée que localement (Gagnier 2015, *passim*). Notre posture de comparatiste nous amène évidemment à pencher du côté de la première option, en reconnaissant qu'il y a forcément des "appropriations" historiquement et géographiquement situées, et ce d'autant plus que la décadence arrive dans les pays du Nord à un moment de forte agitation politique, où des nations tentent de se construire. Si la "décadence" a été peu étudiée pour les pays du Nord, voire si on a remis en question l'idée même que la décadence ait "pris" dans les contrées septentrionales, pour des raisons sur lesquelles nous reviendrons, un *decadence turn* s'est désormais produit, et on met au jour les influences françaises et, dans une moindre mesure, anglaises, de la décadence sur la littérature scandinave[5] de la fin de siècle.

Ce contexte rappelé, le cas de Strindberg devient précisément intéressant. *Sensations détraquées* est écrit en France, et en français, même si Loiseau l'a révisé: si transfert culturel il y a, c'est le transfert de Strindberg lui-même se déplaçant vers la France, et le français – et vers la décadence française? *Sensations détraquées* est de fait l'histoire d'un transfert – le voyage de Strindberg de l'Autriche à Versailles et dans sa proche banlieue. Le retour de *Sensations détraquées* vers la Suède, via des traductions non faites par l'auteur, constitue un autre transfert, fascinant à observer.

Les "étiquettes" téléologiques collées par l'histoire littéraire à divers auteurs ont, on le sait, peu de sens: Flaubert ne se serait pas dit réaliste, et le naturaliste Zola est aussi un décadent. Strindberg présente la même difficulté de taxinomie (et la même chose vaut pour Ibsen, car, comme nous l'avons dit, les concepts "se déplacent" d'un pays à l'autre. Les choses sont toutefois peut-être plus claires pour notre auteur: comme Huysmans, Strindberg passe du naturalisme à "autre chose" – au symbolisme, ou au modernisme. *Mademoiselle Julie* (*Fröken Julie*, 1888) porte le sous-titre de "tragédie naturaliste" (*Ett naturalistiskt sorgespel*); mais *Sensations détraquées* se situe précisément entre cette période "naturaliste" et la grande période des drames symbolistes (*Le Chemin de Damas; Till Damaskus*, 1898). Il serait donc tentant de se demander si on peut lire *Sensations détraquées* comme un texte décadent, tant dans ses thèmes que dans sa forme, d'autant que *Les Gens de Hemsö* (*Hemsöborna,* 1887), et *Au bord de la vaste mer* (*I Havsbandet*, 1890) sont souvent considérés comme des textes naturalistes à thèmes "décadents" (Lyytikäinen *et al*. 2020, 19, 26).

Nous allons revenir sur le concept de "décadence" appliqué aux pays du Nord, et au rôle de "passeur" de Strindberg. Nous tenterons ensuite de lire *Sensations détraquées*, version Loiseau, comme un texte décadent – et faire retour sur la version Strindberg et les versions suédoises.

[4] La "percée moderne", qui trouve sa traduction dans toutes les langues du Nord, se produit dans les années 1870. Les pays du Nord renoncent à la simple importation de modèles étrangers pour fonder leur propre littérature. L'influence des mouvements "modernes" européens est toutefois fondamentale. Le concept de "percée moderne" a été forgé par le critique danois Georg Brandes.

[5] Nous employons ici "nordique", "du Nord", "scandinave", "septentrional", "boréal" de façon indifférente. Rappelons toutefois que "le Nord" est plus large que la "Scandinavie", puisqu'il inclut la Finlande et l'Islande. Dans leur *Nordic Literature of Decadence,* Lyytikäinen, Rossi, Parente-Čapková et Hinrikus élargissent "Nordic" aux pays baltes, en tout cas à l'Estonie, en excluant l'Islande (2020, xvii).

1. Le voyage vers le Nord de la décadence (et retour)

Comme le rappellent Pirjo Lyytikäinen, Riikka Rossi, Viola Parente-Čapková et Mirjam Hinrikus, la décadence est une "plante étrange et singulière" qui pousse dans le "sol sur-cultivé de la société moderne" (2020, 3). Elles citent, de fait, l'auteur suédois Ola Hansson qui parle de son propre ouvrage, *Sensitiva Amorosa*, paru en 1887, considéré sans conteste comme un ouvrage décadent. Les autrices rappellent que la métaphore de la plante vient de Baudelaire, et croise d'autres références chez Huysmans (*ibidem*). Pour elles, l'analogie de Hansson est extrêmement opératoire, tant la greffe de la décadence dans les pays nordiques a pu donner des espèces variées. Les autrices rappellent que l'import de la décadence dans le Nord se heurte d'abord aux mouvements des idées qui agitent ces pays, à cette époque:

> In particular, the controversial new art and literature of decadence seemed to intrude on a region of healthy, 'young' and aspiring nations, where the turmoil of modernity was not yet acutely felt, where 'over-cultivation' was hardly a problem, and where the national and nationalist circles glorified progress and modernization. (*Ibidem*)

Pour Claes Ahlund, autre spécialiste de la décadence, le mouvement décadent est appréhendé dans le Nord de façon très péjorative, de crainte qu'il ne sape les bases de la société scandinave (1994, 18). S'ajoutent d'autres réticences: le poids de l'Église, et l'importance, dans les sociétés du Nord, des femmes (Lyytikäinen *et al*. 2020, 8). Ola Hansson (qui s'était familiarisé avec la décadence lors d'un séjour en Allemagne) fut d'ailleurs contraint à l'exil après la parution de son ouvrage, jugé trop érotique. En revanche, la "mélancolie" attachée aux pays du Nord semble fournir un sol fertile à la poussée de la décadence (14).

Pirjo Lyytikäinen, Riikka Rossi, Viola Parente-Čapková et Mirjam Hinrikus adoptent donc une très large définition de la décadence, suivant les traces de David Weir, et évoquent les textes qui vont du "naturalisme décadent" à la littérature "néo-naturaliste" et "moderniste", en passant par ce qu'elles appellent la *core decadence*, que l'on pourrait appeler "décadence au sens strict" (5). Elles constituent l'unité de leur volume autour d'une sorte d' "air de famille" décadent (**"**family resemblances", *ibidem*): intérêt pour la dégénérescence, anti-modernité, impression que la fin approche, et "an investment in new forms of literature against the grain" (*ibidem*). Comme Ahlund avant elles, elles expriment l'idée que la décadence "à la nordique" ne peut être strictement comparée à sa forme française, mais se rapproche davantage de la posture de Huysmans, entre naturalisme et décadence.

Strindberg est-il décadent? Si être décadent suppose d'être "against the grain" et misogyne, notre auteur semble être un bon candidat. Strindberg a toujours revendiqué sa posture de "paria", et son attitude envers les femmes, et les représentations qu'il en fait, ne cessent d'être problématiques. En Europe, Strindberg a en tout cas fréquenté des décadents: Stanisław Przybyszewski et Dagny Juel, et, en France, en 1897, Péladan, avec qui il restera ami pendant plus de quinze ans. Strindberg représente peut-être la forme ultime du "Nordic 'decadent naturalist' " (14), le terme de "naturaliste", comme nous allons le voir, étant à prendre en son sens le plus étymologique.

2. Le journal d'un névrotique en rade

Sensations détraquées a été écrit directement en français par Strindberg. Pour Strindberg, toujours en quête de légitimité, écrire en français, et publier dans *le Figaro*, est une quête de prestige: "Écrire en français dans le *Figaro* fut la réalisation d'un rêve de jeunesse" (Engwall 2013,

518[6]). Le texte contient de fait une adresse à Paris: il est évident que Strindberg veut écrire en français, pour les Français, quitte à imiter ou pasticher le style d'auteurs qu'il admire. Loiseau s'emploie à traduire ces "Sensations" en (bon?) français. Il travaille et rectifie l' "interlangue" de Strindberg, auteur en proie à une migration physique et linguistique. Ce qui est surprenant, c'est sans doute que Loiseau semble vouloir inventer un français "détraqué", ou de détraqué – il supprime les maladresses qui dénotent la xénité de l'auteur, mais font justement son style, et ajoute çà et là d'autres "étrangetés", quand la version Strindberg n'en comporte pas forcément, ce qui lui donne un autre "tour", sans doute pensé comme "décadent", moderne, ou détraqué.

Sensations détraquées est d'abord paru en trois livraisons dans le supplément littéraire du *Figaro*, les 17 novembre 1894, puis les 26 janvier et 9 février 1895. Le paratexte qui entoure les articles, écrit par Georges Loiseau, mérite d'être relevé. En novembre 1894, Strindberg est présenté comme un "dramaturge puissant", dont la *Mademoiselle Julie* et *Les Créanciers* (*Fordringsägare*) viennent d'être créés en France. La première partie du texte est décrite comme "un article d'impressions sur la France et Paris, qu'il a spécialement écrit pour les lecteurs du *Figaro*" car il est aussi "journaliste et poète". La seconde partie, parue deux mois plus tard, mais datée de décembre 1894, est introduite tout à fait différemment. C'est ici le journaliste qui se rappelle à ses devoirs,[7] rappelant qu'il a annoncé "il y a quinze jours" que Strindberg se trouvait à l'hôpital, car "il s'est brûlé les mains en se livrant à des vagues expériences de chimie". Si le prétexte de l'hospitalisation semble uniquement physique, *Le Figaro* prend soin de noter que le "blessé" a besoin "de repos" mais qu'il occupe quand même ses loisirs à "s'écoute[r] songer". Ce qui était un "article d'impressions" devient également, dans le paratexte, des "notes curieuses qu'il nous adresse de l'hôpital Saint-Louis", *Sensations détraquées* avoue lui-même l'intéressant auteur… (Strindberg 1894-95b). De la première à la seconde partie, nous sommes donc passés d'une sorte de document journalistique façon "la France vue par…" à un *Traumnovelle* ("songe") ou à un récit de maladie mâtiné d'onirique, qui semble déjà difficile à catégoriser, voire à appréhender, le "détraquées" du titre se redoublant dans le "curieuses" du journaliste. De la première à la seconde partie, également, la forme se fait plus fragmentaire et expérimentale ("sensations", "notes" succédant à "article").

Dans l'édition moderne (Strindberg 2016), un saut de page distingue les deux parties du texte, et n'indique pas forcément les circonstances d'écriture. Si elles sont précisées dans l'édition utilisée, elles le sont en fin de volume, et ne permettent pas de déceler, à la lecture du seul texte, un changement dans les conditions d'écriture, voire une dégradation de l'état psychique et physique de l'auteur. Sans doute le titre seul, *Sensations détraquées*, se suffit-il à lui-même.

La biographie de Strindberg est également aujourd'hui bien connue. Le texte, en effet, se situe dans ce que les spécialistes de l'auteur nomment "crise d'*Inferno*". Quittant et sa femme Frida Uhl et l'Autriche, Strindberg débarque à Paris en août 1894, pour résider à Versailles, avant de rejoindre Paris (voir Engwall 2013, 527 sur les pérégrinations précises de Strindberg). Dans les trois années qui vont suivre (*Inferno* est écrit en 1896-97), Strindberg se consacre à l'alchimie, à l'occultisme, dans un état nerveux qui le fait frôler la folie. *Sensations détraquées* puis *Inferno* sont bien "le journal d'un fou" de Strindberg[8] – qui pousse la schizophrénie jusqu'à écrire dans une langue autre. *Sensations détraquées* et *Inferno* se présentent comme des "fixations de vertiges" que le scripteur (un "je" très autobiographique) tente d'expliquer à grands renforts de théories scientifiques (chimie, optique). Si *Inferno* est explicite sur l'état mental du "je" qui écrit

[6] Cité de *August Strindbergs brev* (no. 2), le 07-10-1894. Traduction de Gunnell Engwall.
[7] Loiseau avait d'ailleurs fait paraitre dans *le Gaulois* du 21 décembre 1894 un article intitulé "Strindberg intime".
[8] Il appellera "Journal occulte" le compte rendu de ses expériences scientifiques.

(mais qui aime convoquer les grands modèles canoniques comme Dante), *Sensations détraquées* indique tout à la fois une a-normalité psychique assumée, et un désir explicite que l'écriture passe par la "sensation", aussi déréglée soit-elle. Ces deux textes se caractérisent également par leur flou générique (article? Nouvelle?) et leur auctorialité problématique – l'auteur, se voulant journaliste scientifique, se confondant avec un "je" autobiographique ou autofictionnel. Nous emploierons ici le terme de "texte" et celui de "scripteur". Soulignons d'ailleurs, à ce propos, que Pirjo Lyytikäinen, Riikka Rossi, Viola Parente-Čapková et Mirjam Hinrikus considèrent qu'un texte qui emploie le "je" se rapproche de la "core decadence" (2020, 5). Tandis qu'un texte à la troisième personne relève davantage du naturalisme décadent.

Les deux parties du texte se passent dans deux lieux différents. La première partie narre le récit d'un voyage de l'Autriche à Versailles, en train. Le récit évoque ensuite le désir de revoir le château, que Strindberg a visité en 1876.[9] Il s'agit donc d'une sorte de pèlerinage sur un passé vécu comme plus heureux, que ce soit le passé autobiographique du scripteur ou un passé plus "historique". Le château de Versailles, qualifié par trois fois d'"enchanté" (Strindberg 2016 12, 17, 18), pour lequel le scripteur éprouve une "attraction" contre laquelle il ne peut lutter (13) est toutefois le pays où le scripteur n'arrivera jamais. Strindberg est donc littéralement désenchanté, et cherche le ré-enchantement. "Quelque chose" l'empêche de visiter à nouveau le château. Le promeneur solitaire est empêché par un tabou qui le dépasse, et ne cesse de faire des tours et des détours – nous y reviendrons. Dans la seconde partie, le scripteur est confiné dans sa chambre, et transcrit les "sensations" qu'il perçoit, allongé sur son lit, avant d'aller se promener dans la forêt. Le voyage est ici plus intérieur, les hallucinations se font nombreuses, les questionnements scientifiques plus pressants (rotation de la terre, vie des plantes…)

Sensations détraquées peut-il être lu comme un texte décadent? Le titre semble explicite, qui met l'accent sur la sensitivité d'un névrotique qui se situe délibérément "hors de la norme". Pour Petteri Pietikainen, Strindberg est d'ailleurs "one of the first nervous intellectuels to enter the Age of Nervousness" (Pietikainen 2007, 1). L'auteur cite d'ailleurs à l'appui de cette affirmation le texte-même de *Sensations détraquées*, indiquant d'ailleurs le seul texte suédois (*ibidem*). Le terme "détraqué" avait été utilisé par Marc-Monnier en 1883 pour son "roman expérimental"; deux ans plus tard, Georges Sauton livrait *Les Détraquées*, avant que René Schwaeblé n'utilise le même terme pour ses "études documentaires" illustrées, en 1903.

La "mise en scène" de soi du scripteur possède en tout cas des traits liés à la décadence. Le scripteur ne cesse de parler de sa "fatigue", due, dans la première partie, au très long voyage en train, compensée par un sommeil "de seize heures" qui chasse les "diables noirs", les "chagrins" et les "soucis" (Strindberg 2016, 10). Loin d'être bienheureux, ce vide dénote une absence à soi-même, une "dégageante indifférence" (11). Avec un art consommé de la métaphore, le scripteur se figure ainsi: "je suis nerveux ainsi qu'une écrevisse qui rejette sa carapace, irritable comme le ver à soie qui mue" (21). Il affirme par ailleurs: "toute la nullité de la vie, la vanité de l'existence, l'inutilité du travail me pèsent d'une façon très habituelle" (24). Cette aboulie, cette nervosité, a une cause: "n'est-ce pas l'insomnie, les débauches qui m'ont aiguisé les sens et les nerfs?" (26). Débauché et mélancolique, le scripteur a tout du héros décadent. De façon assez peu étonnante, le scripteur éprouve une certaine misogynie,[10] tant à l'égard de sa première femme que de sa mère (*ibidem*), dont la mort ou l'éloignement l'indifférent.

[9] C'est la date du premier séjour de Strindberg en France, comme correspondant du *Dagens Nyheter* selon Künzli et Engwall (2016a, 149). Ailleurs, Engwall affirme toutefois qu'il avait été missionné par la Bibliothèque Royale pour travailler à la Bibliothèque Sainte Geneviève (2013, 520).

[10] Strindberg écrit à la même époque *De l'infériorité de la femme* (parution en janvier 1895).

Mais si le scripteur est un "nerveux", c'est aussi parce que *Sensations détraquées* est le récit autobiographique d'une crise psychique. Décadent ou juste… détraqué? Le scripteur se pose en malheureux persécuté. Ainsi, désireux de pleurer pour continuer à mener à bien une expérience ophtalmologique, le scripteur évoque "tous les souvenirs désagréables de [sa] vie si riche en multiples déboires" (*ibidem*). L'auto-apitoiement facile prend le prétexte de la recherche d'un état-limite qui fait du sujet l'objet de sa propre observation. Mais si le scripteur expérimente l'ennui, la mélancolie, typiquement décadents, il évoque également des hallucinations, un sentiment de persécution constant, une paranoïa marquée ("les torts constants que l'on me fit", 27), voire des expériences de dissociation (15), expérience extrêmes qui laissent penser à un "décadent" fantastique ou gothique, ici porté par un "je" omniprésent. Des Esseintes croise le Horla.

La posture de l'"individualiste" (23, 29), du solitaire, du contempteur des foules, est cependant patente. Le scripteur est ravi, dans la seconde partie du texte, de loger dans "une maison totalement inhabitée" (23) et affirme: "la solitude est sublime" (*ibidem*) – le terme dénote un plaisir qui semble dépasser le dégoût souvent associé à la décadence. L'auteur, pour exprimer sa joie de se retrouver seul, emploie une formule oxymorique intéressante, qui associe l'ancien et le moderne, le féminin et le masculin: "C'est le couvent ultramoderne" (*ibidem*). Le terme de "couvent", inattendu sous la plume d'un homme, est-il une confusion de Strindberg, qui ne connait pas "monastère", et rapproche le *kloster* suédois (monastère, abbaye, couvent…) de "couvent"?[11]

La description de ses contemporains par le scripteur fait également penser à la figure du dandy. Coincé dans un train qui le conduit de l'Autriche à la France, le scripteur s'estime "prisonnier", "obligé d'aspirer l'acide carbonique et l'azote d'hommes qui [lui] étaient inconnus" (9). Cette promiscuité, qui semble se traduire par une sensation d'asphyxie, comme si le scripteur était forcé de respirer, dans une serre chaude, des plantes vénéneuses, provoque en lui un réflexe de haine "ma première pensée fut de les détester" (*ibidem*), "comme je les exécrais, ces compagnons de boite" (10). Cette sensation olfactive, douloureuse, torturante, est complétée par une misophonie très commune aux névrosés décadents: les voisins de train imposent au scripteur "la violence d'entendre leurs conversations qui mettaient en mouvement [son] cerveau" (9). Le cahot du train n'explique pas seul la douleur imposée au cerveau; le scripteur souffre bien d'une sensibilité exacerbée à la médiocrité des autres. Du "cerveau", le scripteur saute d'ailleurs à l'âme, affirmant, dans la phrase suivante que "l'audition d'idées banales", constitue des "atteintes portées à l'autonomie de [son] âme" (*ibidem*) – ici encore le terme "autonomie" interroge, comme si l'âme du scripteur avait besoin de "tenir seule"; et l'"âme" introduit une dimension spirituelle, ou spiritualiste, sur laquelle il faudra revenir.

Prenant "[sa] place dans la foule" du musée, à Versailles, le scripteur se sent "enrôlé dans cette bande" – le déictique, et le terme, suffisent à marquer la distance entre le scripteur et les autres. Son "Moi se redresse, sous la crainte menaçante de se voir effacé par le nombre ou le contact avec les autres" (17). Ici encore, le "dandysme" ou l'appréhension des foules vire à la paranoïa, sans que l'on puisse trancher entre héros décadent ou simplement détraqué. Les exemples sont nombreux: "ceux qui me suivent me détestent et je ressens leur haine et moi j'exècre ceux qui me précédent et me frôlent de leurs habits qui infectent le concurrent favorisé" (*ibidem*); "forgeant un plan pour échapper à tous ces invisibles ennemis qui m'assiègent" (19). Cette posture de l'intellectuel ou du surhomme qui doit se frotter à la "vulgarité" (9) du commun est en tout cas décrite comme habituelle, car le scripteur qualifie son âme d'"inutilement révoltée" (*ibidem*): le "je" dans la cité des hommes est destiné à souffrir, sans moyen d'action. Cherchant du "travail"

[11] Le manuscrit dit bien "couvent", mais "modernique", terme pourtant étrange et décadent! (Strindberg 2010a, 229).

dans la Grande ville, "la foire et l'usine des cerveaux combattants" (*ibidem*), le scripteur atteste tout à la fois l'existence d'une société matérialiste qu'il abhorre ("foire") mais dans laquelle son intellect, nietzschéen, peut déployer sa vigueur.[12]

Dans son appréhension du temps, le scripteur semble attester également d'une décadence. Il rêve de *retourner* à Versailles, temps glorieux, passé, qui se confondrait avec le sien propre. Versailles est d'abord décrite comme "sainte" (10), son musée est un "sanctuaire" (17). Le château est ensuite qualifié de "vieille et chère connaissance de 1876"[13] (11). La mémoire affective se mêle à une mémoire plus historique, curieusement associée à la religion. Mais une fois le château enfin aperçu, de loin, c'est la déception: "le palais ne ressemble plus à mon vieux château de Versailles de 1876. D'abord celui-ci est plus petit, puis il est d'un style moderne" (12). Et le scripteur d'ajouter:

> Plus petit, car j'en ai, dans ma mémoire, emporté l'image traditionnelle, celle qui symbolise la grandeur du siècle de Louis XIV, par ses immenses proportions. Plus moderne, car le style de Versailles,[14] brique et pierre, a été fort divulgué pendant ces derniers vingt ans. (13)

Versailles a donc perdu littéralement de sa "grandeur". Le scripteur semble jouer sur la polysémie de "grand" et "petit", passant du littéral au figuré. Le château "traditionnel" n'est plus, s'est rapetissé, s'est "modernisé", "divulgué", terme curieux qui voisine avec "vulgaire": le commun a désormais imité le style de Versailles – topos décadent, ou kitsch. Mû par une "idée bizarre", le scripteur trouve que la cour et le bâtiment ressemblent à une oreille, qui servait à Louis XIV pour écouter Paris, et qui va lui parler (19). Une association d'idées se fait avec une histoire de marins qui entendaient encore les cloches de la ville, en pleine mer, "mais seulement en la concavité de la voile faisant ici office de miroir ardent" (20): le "miroir ardent" semble nous amener vers le décadent, et la "concavité" rappelle le rococo plus que le style classique.

Le merveilleux (voir *supra*) s'est en tout cas "perverti" (Palacio 1993, 34). C'est bien un passé héroïque et grand qui est célébré face à une modernité décevante. Dans la seconde partie, Strindberg vantera également les civilisations anciennes, Assyriens, Hébreux, Égyptiens, Grecs, Romains… (Strindberg 2016, 28), grandes civilisations éclairées. Et à la fin de la première partie "Dionysos" lui prête son oreille (20).

Un autre trait "décadent" serait la tendance à la flânerie. Le scripteur se livre à des marches (nordiques?) conçues d'abord comme un exercice sportif et spirituel ("afin de m'étirer quelque peu les jambes" (11). "Je marche. Je marche un quart d'heure peut-être et je me sens fatigué" (*ibidem*). Ces promenades hygiéniques ne sont en fait pas précisément des "flâneries", puisqu'elles ont un but précis, qu'elles manquent d'ailleurs systématiquement – le château de Versailles. La première tentative se fait par l'avenue de Saint-Cloud, "raide, infinie" (*ibidem*). Deux jours plus tard, le scripteur se refuse à reprendre cette allée, "ennuyeuse" (12) et prend la contre-allée. Ce désir de prendre une "contre"-allée pourrait être une métaphore du geste décadent. Échouant toujours à approcher le château, le scripteur continue son périple et "débouche sur la place d'Armes" (*ibidem*). Le trajet vers le château n'est plus une promenade ou une flânerie, mais un chemin de croix, où le scripteur s'accroche à des "point[s] d'appui" comme à autant de stations: une voiture de place, puis un sergent de ville (13). La ville devient une vaste mer ou à tout le

[12] D'abord "socialiste" et préoccupé de la classe ouvrière, Strindberg s'est ensuite passionné pour Nietzsche.

[13] Dans le manuscrit original: "1875" (Strindberg 2010a, 224). Engwall rappelle qu'en 1876 Strindberg avait rédigé des textes sur les "merveilles d'alors Parisiennes" (2013, 520). Le mot "merveille" semble convoquer "enchanté".

[14] Le manuscrit original dit "le style Versailles", ce qui semble plus idiomatique (Strindberg 2010a, 224).

moins une "impression de la mer" (*ibidem*). Un "bec de gaz énorme" devient un "phare" (13, 14). Le scripteur parvient enfin à atteindre la cour d'honneur, "sous la protection de Richelieu, Bayard, Colbert, et autres statues de pierre dont la présence discrète en ce désert m'encourage" (16). Mais la foule du musée, comme vu précédemment, fait fuir le scripteur (les Grands du passé, figés dans la pierre ne peuvent le protéger des humains, trop humains), et le palais reste invisitable – "demi-inconnu, mystérieux" (17) –, finalement peut-être protégé de la décadence par son inaccessibilité même.

La seconde partie de *Sensations détraquées* propose un étrange voyage en chambre: s'apercevant que sa tête est placée vers l'est, allongé sur son lit, sans bouger, le scripteur en conclut qu'il est "vraiment, assis en arrière, dans la promenade qu['il] accompli[t] à travers l'espace cosmique" (24). Regardant par la fenêtre, il cherche pareillement un "point d'appui" (27) qui "[l]'aidera à [se] lever, à [se] tirer du puits dans lequel [il est] abîmé" (*ibidem*). La fenêtre, le bois, la vision d'un grand pin amènent enfin le scripteur vers son but: Paris, la "Ville", décrite dans des termes qu'on peut voir comme décadents: "ce ne sont que monuments, des temples, des églises, des tours, des arcs de triomphe! C'est l'Héliopolis pour dieux, héros, empereurs, prophètes, saints et martyrs" (35). "Héliopolis", ou "la ville du Soleil" n'est pas Versailles, la ville du roi Soleil, mais Paris. Et Paris est une Héliopolis qui, de loin, cache une Babylone décadente car c'est la ville "la plus grande du monde, enveloppée dans le blanc et chaste nuage qui cache les petites maisons sales des acheteurs et des vendeurs" (*ibidem*). Si le début du texte décrivait une arrivée pénible, la fin est une apothéose: "C'est vraiment Paris…que je salue!" (*ibidem*). Rastignac, passant à la décadence, se fait déférent, et non provocateur – à moins que n'apparaisse ici Strindberg, dans une métalepse frappante – si l'on considère le texte comme un texte littéraire, et non journalistique. Si le texte est pensé comme un article scientifique, le salut de l'auteur n'en est que plus surprenant.

Sensations détraquées n'est toutefois pas uniquement un texte décadent. Cela n'entraine d'ailleurs aucune contradiction. Présentée plus comme une constellation qu'une "école" (Lyytikäinen *et al.* 2020, xvii), ou comme une "transition" (Weir 1995, ix), la décadence entretient des liens étroits avec le naturalisme, et la modernité, qui sont précisément questionnés ici.

Du naturalisme, Strindberg retient la méthode expérimentale. *Sensations détraquées* s'insère d'ailleurs dans la série des "Vivisections". Il essaie systématiquement de relier ses sensations "détraquées" (et il n'est donc pas fou, s'il les qualifie ainsi) à des explications scientifiques. "L'angoisse[15] me saisit. Pour la combattre, je reviens à mes idées philosophiques, en évoquant des phénomènes analogues qui se répètent si fréquemment sans qu'on en puisse découvrir la raison" (Strindberg 2016, 14); "je sais que les voûtes des Orangeries se trouvent au-dessous de moi, et je me tiens ce raisonnement tranquillisant" (17). Ses "sensations détraquées" doivent trouver une cause scientifique. Dans sa version, Loiseau oublie d'ailleurs une phrase présente dans le texte initial: "Comme c'est tranquillisant de tout expliquer! Cela chasse la peur de l'inconnu" (Strindberg 2010a, 224).

Le décadent enquête lui-même sur sa "maladie". Ce sont ainsi les cahots du train qui ont "remué la pulpe de [son] cerveau". "En lui des fils conducteurs sont brisés" (Strindberg 2016, 11): Strindberg voit ainsi à la fois le cerveau comme un tout organique et une machine électrique. Dans la seconde partie, le scripteur évoque à nouveau la "pulpe" de son cerveau, qu'il arrose de sang pour "qu'elle pousse des boutons que je me plais ensuite, par amusement, à greffer sur les sauvageons des autres" (23). Plus loin, ayant une première fois échoué à rejoindre

[15] Le "*livsångest*" est une caractéristique de la décadence du Nord selon Lyytikäinen *et al.* (2020, 16).

le château, Strinberg évoque une illusion d'optique, et explique: "ce trouble dans ma vision est la conséquence naturelle du voyage" (11). Rendu exsangue par la force d'attraction du château, il reprend sa force vitale au contact du fer du bec de gaz, qui forme un "psycho-aimant" (16). Mais le scientifique se met à remercier "Soleil, ciel, dieu, peu importe le nom dont nous t'interpellons" (*ibidem*) du naufrage expérimenté sur la place d'Armes: le scientisme se fait ici spiritualiste, ce qui est souvent le cas dans la décadence nordique, sur les traces de Huysmans et de son "naturalisme spirituel" (Lyytikäinen *et al*. 2020, 28). Dans la seconde partie, il en va de même pour l'hallucination qui lui fait voir dans le "marbre blanc de la cheminée un 'réseau de fils rouges de sang' " (Strindberg 2016, 25) puis "un bégonia à fleurs blanches et rouges qui oscillent" (*ibidem*) – il incrimine "la rétine de [son] œil, projetée et grossie" (*ibidem*). Cette fois cependant, Dieu ne vient plus à son secours: son œil semble se développer pour "devenir un microscope solaire d'une force exorbitante" (26). Louant les savants, Copernic, Galilée, Newton, le scripteur développe en effet cette fois une réticence à l'égard de la religion qui défend "de croire à la circonvolution de la terre autour du soleil" (28). Héliocentrisme, photosynthèse… Désireux de se promener dans le bois, le scripteur médite sur le gaz carbonique supposément rejeté la nuit par les plantes, et conclut ironiquement "qu'une promenade nocturne au bois est donc mortelle!" (32). Couché par terre à respirer l'air, il fait l'expérience de sa survie et se rit des "hommes mûrs en habit vert" qui ont émis cette hypothèse (*ibidem*). L'exploration par Strindberg des "détraquements" de son système nerveux oscille ainsi entre croyance absolue en la science, défiance ironique appliquée à certains prétendus savants, et désir de saluer une entité plus haute, qu'il peine à nommer ou à reconnaître.

"Sac au dos", Strindberg fait aussi penser au premier Huysmans, lorsqu'il "sangl[e] [s]on sac" (9). Ainsi, il ne peut être dandy très longtemps, mais redevient zolien, lorsqu'il observe ses compagnons de voyage, enfin silencieux. Il finit "par les plaindre" (10), ils lui font "pitié" (*ibidem*). Ce sont des "malheureux" (*ibidem*). Strindberg se fait presque le chantre de la description de ces misérables de la société moderne, aux "mains encrassées" et à la "figure pâle toute entachée de suie" (*ibidem*). Il semble même participer à une communauté lorsqu'il écrit "un malaise général embrasse cette existence pénible, malpropre" (*ibidem*). "L'existence" est toutefois réduite à un voyage en train, et à l'absorption "en fumée des poussières de charbon et de soufre" (*ibidem*), ou à la projection sur les yeux de "sable" ou de "limailles microscopiques" (*ibidem*). La "bête humaine" (le train), ici, concentre des humains bêtes qu'elle se plaît à torturer.

Très baudelairien, le scripteur se promène dans un monde plein de signes où règne la synesthésie. Les odeurs, le toucher, sont omniprésents. L'ouïe est également sollicitée, comme dans cette scène où le scripteur voit une oreille dans la forme du château, et "enten[d] la mer" en collant son oreille à la muraille (19), le bruit entendu à Versailles le transportant jusqu'à Paris. Dans la seconde partie, la relation entre la musique et la nervosité est explicite. "Je prends ma guitare pour chercher l'accord de mes nerfs" (23). "Mes nerfs, ce jour, sont accordés en *ré* mineur"; "après quelques efforts, je me remonte en *fa* majeur" (24). Le ré mineur a pour Strindberg une valeur tragique, opposée au fa majeur, joyeux. Plus loin, dans le vide de cette même maison, il "désire entendre un bruit, bruit de sonnette, de tambour, ou de fusil" (28). La mimésis se fait littéralement musicale (Halliwell 2002).

Comme souvent chez les auteurs du Nord, ce "naturalisme" teinté de décadence va chercher du côté du primitivisme, au point qu'on peut parler d'une "rural decadence" (Rossi 2013): "mon pin est un être vivant, un grand animal qui mange, digère, croît et aime" (Strindberg 2016, 33). Le bois, les nuages, attirent le scripteur. Le dandy flâneur se souvient de Rousseau, ainsi lorsqu'il arpente un bois:

je me sens déshabillé de mon vêtement d'homme civilisé. Je jette bas le masque du citoyen qui n'a jamais reconnu le contrat dit social; je laisse aller à la débandade mes idées révoltées,[16] et je pense, je pense… sans lâcheté, sans arrière-pensée, je vois alors avec une clairvoyance de sauvage, j'écoute, je flaire comme un Peau-Rouge[17]… (31)

Admiratif d'un grand pin, il affirme "qu'il sent":

Donc, il souffre, et la dryade qui sanglote sous la cognée du bûcheron se révèlera peut-être un jour aux esprits sensibilisés pour leur demander grâce et implorer leur protection contre les mauvais traitements, coups et blessures volontaires. (34)

Théophile Gautier voyait dans le "pin des landes" une métaphore de la souffrance du poète. Ici, le scripteur se met à la place de l'arbre, dans un geste qui fait se rejoindre croyances mythologiques et pensée pré-écologique.

Ce rapport à la nature peut d'ailleurs être aussi un trait décadent, extrêmement situé, toutefois, dans la décadence acclimatée dans les terres du Nord. Comme souvent dans la prose décadente du Nord, en effet, le héros est un jeune campagnard ("j'arrive des monts et des vallées", 9) en route vers "la Grande Ville" (*ibidem*), rêvant un avenir radieux où la nature ne serait pas en putréfaction, mais au contraire en germe: "les raisins non vendangés encore, les tomates, les melons avant leur maturation et les roses en bouton" (*ibidem*). Plus loin, le scripteur confie que "l'odeur des deux millions de fleurs dans les jardins [l]'enivre, et [que] le vent des campagnes [le] dégrise" (17). Le voyage en train rapproche le scripteur et ses compagnons du "sauvage": "soupirs, soupirs des hommes retombés après des millions d'années de civilisation à l'état de la brute ou du sauvage rêvant des verts pacages" (10). Avant d'ajouter, dans la même phrase: "ou peut-être aussi d'un bon meurtre, d'un viol ou d'un inceste!" (*ibidem*), obsession décadente d'une sexualité "détraquée". Du Jardin d'Eden au jardin des supplices…de Zola à Mirbeau.

Il y a aussi du Rimbaud dans ce "je lyrique" qui se rêve "poète-magicien" (16), mettant le pied sur des "bateaux à vapeur" (*ibidem*). *Sensations détraquées* propose un "dérèglement de tous les sens" – à la différence du poète-voyant, toutefois, le scripteur décrit ses… douleurs optiques et peine justement à "voir". La chronique de ce "dérèglement" ne se sublime jamais vers un état poétique assumé; Strindberg, dans son détraquement, agit en scientifique plus qu'en poète, et cherche à "aiguiller [ses] sensations" (27).

"Aiguiller": la métaphore ferroviaire n'est pas vaine – mais ne se trouve que chez Loiseau (Strindberg dit "diriger"): la phrase se poursuit d'ailleurs, avec un art freudien du jeu de mots, voulu donc par le seul Loiseau, ainsi: "elles vont leur train, à leur gré" (*ibidem*). Les objets du progrès sont en tout cas omniprésents dans le texte. Strindberg évoque le train, résumé à son cahot, son bruit, ses escarbilles. L'œil du scripteur accroche également "le ballon du parc aérostatique de Meudon" (28) et ne cesse de demander des découvertes et des "invention[s] à créer"[18]

[16] "Pensées révoltants" dans l'original (Strindberg 2010a, 234).

[17] Un autre écrit de Strindberg en français porte le titre de "Barbare à Paris". Il parait dans *Gil Blas* en août 1895 (Engwall 2013, 528). Le barbare semble une variation typiquement décadente de la décadence latine (McGuinness 2015, 210-36), mais l'image peut aussi venir de Rimbaud.

[18] *Sensations détraquées* est aussi à lire en regard d'articles plus "scientifiques" de Strindberg parus en 1896 et 1897 dans *L'Initiation* ou *L'Hyperchimie.* Strindberg parle de soleil, d'œil, du mouvement de la terre, de transmutation…(Engwall 2013, 531).

(25). Le rapport à la modernité est ambigu.[19] Une sorte de millénarisme apocalyptique surgit, à la mention, à deux reprises, de la date de 1900 (29, 30), il est vrai évoquée de façon amusée, un certain M. Beaudonnat voulant revenir sur l'héliocentrisme… (*ibidem*). Car la "modernité" s'incarne d'abord dans ses objets et le scripteur se questionne:

> né au bon vieux temps des lanternes à l'huile, des diligences messagères, des passeuses, des romans en dix volumes, j'ai traversé avec une involontaire rapidité les époques de la vapeur et de l'électricité, au point d'avoir perdu le souffle et détérioré mes nerfs! (20)

Comme Rimbaud encore, qui voulait "être absolument moderne", le scripteur poursuit : "Ou serait-ce que mes nerfs évoluent vers le raffinement et mes sens vers la subtilisation? Vais-je donc faire peau neuve? Suis-je sur le point de devenir moderne?" (*ibidem*). Mais plus loin, c'est avec une certaine ironie que le scripteur "invoque "du nouveau!" "C'est ce qu'il nous faut! Mais qu'il soit amusant et pas trop vieux surtout" (29).

Strindberg décadent, primitiviste, rousseauiste et rimbaldien. Quitte à proposer une vision "détraquée" de l'histoire littéraire, osons proposer que l'auteur suédois nous semble aussi visionnaire en ceci qu'il parait aussi proposer une appréhension "surréaliste" du monde. Ainsi, le wagon, plein de voyageurs endormis, devient "quelque champ de bataille parsemé de cadavres et de membres dispersés" (10). La contre-allée de l'avenue de Saint-Cloud devient une forêt maléfique: "les troncs d'arbres me serrent et les voûtes ogivales me pincent comme des tenailles" (12). Encore ces relevés pourraient-ils être hérités du conte ou du roman gothique, inspirations pour les décadents. La mention du "poteau de fer" "échauffé" et "amolli par la hausse de la température" (14) relève plus proprement du surréalisme, de même que la phrase "ainsi qu'un animal croisé d'un polype, d'un insecte, d'un serpent et d'un poisson, se dresse le pin" (32).

Bien plus, les *Sensations détraquées* de Strindberg semblent proposer, aussi surprenant que cela puisse paraitre, une esthétique pré-cinématographique. Ainsi, un "travelling contrarié" (ou "compensé", aussi appelé "effet Vertigo") peut-il se lire dans cet extrait, première approche du château de Versailles: "je continue à piétiner sans voir grossir le bâtiment. Il marche avec moi et s'éloigne à mesure que je m'approche" (11). Dans le film d'Hitchcock, qui a donné son nom à cet effet, c'est bien la "sensation détraquée" (le vertige du personnage principal) qu'il s'agit de restituer, comme si le spectateur et la spectatrice devaient la *ressentir* à leur tour. Au cinéma, le mouvement de travelling avant s'accompagne d'un zoom arrière, et le travelling arrière d'un zoom avant. Le processus semble être détaillé par le scripteur: "les lignes de la perspective changent à mesure que j'avance; en même temps l'angle visuel augmente et ce jeu infernal des lignes invisibles détraque mon cerveau" (12). Mais, dans la seconde partie, Strindberg n'imagine-t-il pas son œil devenir "une lanterne magique"[20] (26)? Le détraqué est devenu une machine optique.

3. Les Sensations détraquées: une traduction à rebours?

La décadence du texte *Sensations détraquées* n'est toutefois pas que thématique; elle est évidemment également stylistique. Revenons à la version Strindberg, à comparer à la version Loiseau. La décadence se lit aussi dans une sorte d'écriture "artiste", dont il s'agit dans un premier

[19] Sans pouvoir y insister davantage ici, on renvoie le lecteur à l'article de Strindberg, "Qu'est-ce que le moderne?", paru dans *L'Écho de Paris*, le 20 décembre 1894.

[20] En pratiquant la photographie, Strindberg avait inventé des "célestographies".

temps de voir si elle vient de Loiseau, ou de Strindberg, et, dans un second temps, sans jamais pouvoir trancher vraiment, si elle vient de la maladresse d'un allophone, ou d'un choix délibéré du mot rare, de l'adjectif inattendu par un non-natif très lettré, à la limite du pastiche, ou de la poésie la plus pure. Maurice Gravier, C.G. Bjurström ou Gunnar Brandell se sont ainsi plu à relever les imperfections du style de Strindberg en français (Künzli et Engwall 2016a, 150). Le manuscrit de Strindberg comporte quelques coquilles, comme un "bizaire", qui est évidemment une erreur. Il est évident toutefois que Loiseau a adapté, changeant la ponctuation, éliminant ou ajoutant des passages. Il a également modifié les termes. Nous nous appuyons ici sur une comparaison avec le texte autographe de Strindberg, tel qu'il a été édité en 2010 (Strindberg, [1894-1895] 2010a).

Ainsi Strindberg parle-t-il de "verts pacages" (Strindberg 2016, 10), d'"helminthes" (24, mais il s'agit ici d'un terme scientifique), de "subtilisation" (20) – mots conservés dans Loiseau. C'est toutefois Loiseau qui remplace "souvenirs" par "souvenances" (11), cherchant le terme rare. Strindberg parle également d'une "indifférence dégageante" (*ibidem*); (Loiseau choisit d'inverser nom et adjectif), d'affection "vermineuse" (24); de "sauvageons" pour des boutons de fleurs (23) – ce qui correspond à l'exacte étymologie. Il emploie "lobulé" (33) ou "héliplâtres", corrigé, justement, par Loiseau en "héliolâtres" (35). "Divulgué" (13), qui indique l'état du château de Versailles, est à prendre sans doute au sens de "rendu vulgaire" – Loiseau le conserve. On peut se demander quel est le sens de "fantaisie" (caprice? Imagination?) dans la "fantaisie nouvelle" qui lui fait voir le pavillon d'une oreille dans les "ailes du bâtiment" (19) – le mot "pavillon" a ici une valeur polysémique et poétique. C'est ici le français, dans sa musique vibratoire, qui aurait rapproché les "sensations" et les images de Strindberg, qui fonctionne par association musicale de mots.

Le terme de "tact" (14) au sens de toucher sensoriel n'est pas présent dans le texte de Strindberg, extrêmement modifié à cet endroit. Loiseau, de même, modifie "bénévolent" en "bénévole" (18) alors qu'il faut l'entendre au sens de "bienveillant". L'image de "l'oiseau à l'essor" est splendide (27); mais Strindberg a écrit "oiseau en vol". La phrase "sans remarquer ombre de lassitude", par l'abandon de l'article attendu, est également surprenante (11), de même que "Suis-je pas un détraqué?" (20). Le manuscrit indique toutefois bien un "d'ombre" et "Suis-je un détraqué": Loiseau a-t-il voulu "faire sonner décadent"? Ou "traduit" Strindberg en idiolecte décadent? A moins de vouloir rendre les "curieuses" impressions d'un homme hospitalisé?

En 1898, Strindberg écrit à Georges Loiseau: "la langue Française m'as [*sic*] détruit mon style Suédois, de sorte que je me sens forcé de faire des exercices suédoises [*sic*] pour me rattraper" (Künzli et Engwall 2016a, 149, note 11).[21]

Sensations détraquées a été traduit sous le titre *Förvirrade sinnesintryck* en suédois, en 1895 et 1897, sur les versions révisées parues dans *le Figaro.* En 1895, la première partie a été traduite par Eugène Fahlstedt et publiée dans *Vintergatan*. Le traducteur avait été recommandé par Strindberg lui-même, qui semble avoir relu la traduction. En 1897 les deux parties sont traduites pour *Tryckt och Otryckt IV* par le même traducteur – on ne sait si Strindberg a retravaillé la traduction. La disposition est toutefois étrange: le texte est divisé en trois parties (ce qui correspond aux trois livraisons dans *Le Figaro*), mais la première et la seconde sont inversées. Le texte est republié à de nombreuses reprises, en 1901 et 1909 (Engwall et Stam 2016, 86). Pour une édition plus moderne et plus scientifique, celle de Gunnel Engwall et de Per Stam, commandée par l'Etat suédois, Lars Strömberg a repris pour base le manuscrit original. Paradoxalement, cette version en traduction est donc plus fidèle au texte de Strindberg. Il restitue

[21] Cité par les auteurs à partir de *August Strindbergs brev.* 1970. Tome 12, éd. Torsten Eklund, Stockholm: Bonniers, 334.

par exemple la phrase manquante que nous avons citée plus haut ("Vad det är lugnande att kunna förklara allt! Det förjagar rädslan för det okända").

La traduction "Loiseau" des passages cités plus haut est ainsi:

> Jag kommer från bergen och dalarne, där nerifrån den blåa Donaus stränder. Bakom mig har jag lämnat hyddan vid vägen, de ännu ej skördade druvorna, jag har lämnat tomaterna, melonerna, som vänta på sin mognad, och rosorna, som stå i knopp. (Strindberg 1897, 191)

La traduction "Strindberg" est ainsi:

> Jag kommer från bergen och dalarna vid den blåa Donau. Bakom mig har jag lämnat stugan vid vägkanten, bakom mig finns de ännu ej skördade vindruvorna, de ännu ej mognade tomaterna och melonerna, och rosorna som gått i knopp. (Strindberg 2010b, 82)

Les différences, à l'œil du profane, sont minimes ("hyddan"/"stugan"; "vägen"/ "vägkanten", "stå i knopp"/"gått i knopp"); l'attente du "bourgeonnement" semble toutefois accentuée dans la première traduction ("som vänta på sin mognad": "vänta" veut dire "attendre") quand Strindberg avait écrit "avant maturation" et Loiseau "avant leur maturation": c'est dans le rétablissement du texte original de Strindberg que tient la rectification. Comme dans toute traduction, les beautés du texte se perdent parfois. Dans les traductions sur la version de Loiseau, le fameux "divulgué" devient "*blifvit nagontig mycket vanligt*" ("est devenu quelque chose de très ordinaire") (Strindberg 1897, 195) ou "*har blivit så spridd under de senaste tjugo åren*" ("s'est tellement répandu pendant les vingt dernières années") (Strindberg 2010b, 83).

Si l'on se permet le jeu de mots, Loiseau, on l'a vu, a donc "suédé" le texte français de Strindberg – il l'a non simplifié, comme le terme "suédé" l'indique souvent avec humour, mais au contraire sophistiqué. De retour en Suède, le texte subit de semblables transformations.

Ainsi, la traduction du titre lui-même pose question, le terme "Förvirrade" connotant davantage la "confusion" que le "détraquement". Dans une lettre à Littmansson, datant d'octobre 1894, Strindberg confiait pourtant:

> J'écris comme un damné et j'ai terminé le récit dans lequel je raconte la façon dont j'ai assiégé le château de Versailles. Un compromis détraqué et symboliste entre la poésie des sciences naturelles et la folie. Je pense que c'est assez fou pour être moderne et assez sage pour ne pas l'être (Notre traduction).[22]

Le terme "detraquistisk" aurait pu sans peine voyager du français au suédois, lui ajoutant une touche décadente.

Une autre "perte" significative est sans doute à signaler. Sans doute Strindberg a-t-il écrit avec une vraie joie, et à dessein, entre guillemets, "perdre le nord" (Strindberg 2016, 15). En traduction, la métaphore se dissout en un "falla ur kursen" (Strindberg 1897, 197) ou en un " 'komma ur kurs' " (Strindberg 2010b, 84), toutes expressions qui signifient "dévier de sa route", "sortir du chemin", sans aucune mention géographique septentrionale. Pas de jeu de mots, donc, bilingue, sur un Strindberg qui perd justement… le Nord – en français, et ne le retrouve décidément pas, même re-migré vers le suédois.

[22] Orig. cité dans Engwall et Stam 2016, 347: Jag skrifver djäfligt och skref nu slut huru jag belägrade Versailles slott. Symbolistisk detraquistisk kompromiss med naturvetenskap poesi och ursinne. Jag tror det är galet nog att vara modernt och klokt nog att ej.

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Translating Culture
Oscar Wilde's Decadent Expression into Latvian*

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Abstract

The paper is a comparative study of translating decadence-related cultural concepts encountered in *The Picture of Dorian Gray* into Latvian and compares the first translation of the novel by Jānis Ezeriņš (1920) with that produced thirteen years later by Roberts Kroders (1933). As a result of a mutual "competition" between the two Latvian versions, the translation by Ezeriņš, known as the "Latvian Wilde", has become not only a springboard for the Latvian writers searching for a modern style of expression but also a significant contribution to the reception of Aestheticism and wider recognition of decadent style.

Keywords: Aestheticism, Culture, Decadent Style, Reception, Translation

Introduction

"Culture" is multi-dimensional, complex, and ubiquitous. It has traditionally been regarded as an anthropological concept in anthropology and history, philosophy, sociology, and literary studies. Nowadays, other fields and disciplines, including intercultural communication, cross-cultural psychology, and translation studies, employ the notion of culture as a flexible tool and critical aspect for explaining real-life phenomena from an interdisciplinary perspective (Baldwin *et al.* 2005). In situations where culture serves as a means of creating community or is a system of symbols and signs used to communicate within and between societies, as well as when aspects of one culture are being communicated to another, we may speak of "communicating cultures" (Kockel and Máiréad 2004, 4-5).

* Unless otherwise stated, all quotations from Latvian have been translated into English.

"Translation", defined as communication across languages and cultures (House 2016), ensures the transmission of cultural information or "transporting" one culture to another. As a cross-cultural event (Snell-Hornby 1988) and not only intercultural but also cosmopolitan communication (Canagarajah 2013), translation is one of the forms a literary work exists in – a specific layer of literature that is always at the juncture of one's own and the foreign (Zajac 1987, 157). The underlying aesthetic foundation of translations is the conception of an absolute artistic value of a literary work. Though translation has to be perceived and assessed as an independent work in the context of target-language and target-culture specificity, it simultaneously reflects the source-culture and the author's ideological position in a new cultural environment. Based on typological similarities, translation may be contrasted with both the original and translations into the same or different languages within a comparative literary theory frame (Toper 1998, 179). The differences identified while comparing a source text with a target text arise from objective reasons (language peculiarities, the cultural-historical context, and specificities) and subjective reasons – the translator's individual decisions and creativity.

Taking into consideration the fact that people have always been striving to comprehend a culture (or cultures) other than their own, "translating culture" implies "dealing with *textual objects* experienceable and intelligible only within […] a culture […]" (Silverstein 2020, 94, emphasis in original). Language exists only in the context of culture (Lotman and Uspensky 1978). Culture, in the narrower sense, may seem untranslatable as most of its manifestations are non-linguistic, thus it is one of the main obstacles in achieving a perfect translation (Yue 2015, 555). In doing so, however, the value of the source culture must be preserved while approaching the translation task as a process of looking for similarities between language and culture and avoiding rewriting the text when translating it. According to Venuti (1995), by employing the foreignising approach, the reader is always aware of the translator's presence.

Translation is both a linguistic and cultural activity which involves communication across cultures. The literature of smaller nations is often modelled upon some other nation's literature, thus translated literature "is not only a major channel through which fashionable repertoire is brought home, but also a source of reshuffling and supplying alternatives" (Even-Zohar 1990, 48). Being able to enrich and shape a nation's literary landscape, translations model their developmental contours; however, the flow and reception of translations are an uneven process: "Whether translated literature becomes central or peripheral, and whether this position is connected with innovatory ('primary') or conservatory ('secondary') repertoires, depends on the specific constellation of the polysystem under study" (46). The dearth of foreign literary impacts may lead to the stagnation of national literature. In its turn, if one polysystem (a component such as literature) of a larger heterogeneous polysystem (Even-Zohar 1990) is open and desires innovative ideas and artistic expression forms as the result of the "dynamic process of evolution" (e.g., absorbing direct influences and recreating "borrowed elements" into new original phenomena), translated literature may become an integral system within this literary polysystem, i.e., a part of a cultural, literary, and historical system of the target language (Munday 2016).

In the first half of the 20th century, translations significantly influenced the development of Latvian literature and initiated a rapid growth of literary borrowings in Latvian writers' artistic world (Veisbergs 2021). Multiple comparative analyses of the source texts and texts representing the Latvian national literature reveal thematic similarities, shared depictions of motifs and images, and typical stylistic and linguistic peculiarities. One of the reasons for polemics within West-European writing and borrowings by Latvian writers was a growing interest in decadence as a cultural phenomenon and in decadent writers' style as a means for the rebirth of art, often stimulated by translations.

1. Decadence: The Concept and Phenomenon

Decadence is a rather suggestive and multifaceted concept used for denoting a new trend (not movement) in literature and art associated with the *fin de siècle* fascination with cultural degeneration. Decadence as a literary category overlaps with naturalism, romanticism, Aestheticism, Pre-Raphaelitism, symbolism, impressionism, and modernism and it can be defined as a late-romantic current in art and literature "that raised the aesthetic dictum of 'art for art's sake' to the status of a cult, especially in the final decades of the nineteenth century" (Hanson 1997, 2). Understanding European decadence as a phenomenon of cultural and social transition allows for treating it as pre- or proto-modernism (Weir 2008, xv). The duality of decadence is related to "degeneracy" and "rebirth", i.e., on the one hand, a decadent is attracted by the real world that provokes both negative and positive emotions, pleasures, and senses, but, on the other hand, s/he is longing for otherworldly experiences (Desmarais and Condé 2017). In the atmosphere of "fatigue" and "boredom", decadence manifests itself as a cultural attitude, denying the credibility and certainty of scientific theories and declaring the privileged status of feelings and revelation, or the absolute autonomy of art.

Although the active circulation of the concept "decadence" in British culture had begun around 1850 (Ellmann 1988c), the flourishing of decadence lasted for a comparatively short period: from the early 1880s until the middle of the 1890s. It is considered to have reached its culmination in 1890-91 when Oscar Wilde's (1854-1900) novel *The Picture of Dorian Gray* was published. It was a time when the principal cultural paradigms were interacting and shifting, and the values of mainstream Victorian culture were challenged by such features of decadent style as the prioritisation of unnaturalness over everything natural, the prevalence of form over content, the focus on individualism and excessive self-analysis, disdain for conservative moralism dominating in society, as well as the emphasis of decorative over-refinement, hedonism, eccentricity, and erotic sensibility.

Aestheticism as an anti-positivist reaction and a perspective on literary and social life had been impacted by French literary decadence and symbolism. By exploring the creative work of French progressive authors during his stay in Paris in 1883, and while meeting with prominent French writers Paul Verlaine, Stéphane Mallarmé, and Edmond de Goncourt, among others, Wilde adjusted his interpretation of Aestheticism,[2] developed a more profound comprehension of art, dissociating himself from his former influences. In his series of lectures on *The Value of Art in Modern Life* (1884-86), letters, and literary works, he often maintained that modern literature did not exist outside France (Ellmann 1988b 316-41; Holland 2003, 73, 113); he was especially attracted to the work of Charles Baudelaire, Théophile Gautier, the early philosophy of Aestheticism by the Parnassian poets, and the artistic world of Joris-Karl Huysmans.

The concept of "decadence" was broached in 1893 in the essay "The Decadent Movement in Literature" by Arthur Symons who emphasised that decadent literature reflected all moods and forms of behaviour of a society (Damrosch, Henderson and Sharpe 1999, 1954). His

[2] Wilde's philosophy of aestheticism was related to "not only two very different doctrines, but two different vocabularies – John Ruskin's 'morality' aesthetic and Walter Pater's 'flamelike' aesthetic" (Ellmann 1988a, 46-47). Ruskin had cultivated religious belief and moral values, as well as appealed to human consciousness and disciplined self-possession, whereas Pater advocated mysticism, the imagination, and a sensual drift that was founded on decadent moods (Ellmann 1988a); both divergent perspectives and attitudes provided orienting points in Wilde's writings (Riquelme 2013).

publication in *Harper's New Monthly Magazine* defined impressionism and symbolism as the offshoots of decadence (Symons 1893), which in 1899 were further analysed in Symons's highly influential *The Symbolist Movement in Literature* (Sklare 1951) – a testimony to the rapidly declining popularity of decadence after Wilde's scandalous lawsuits in 1895.

Wilde's ties with decadence are rooted in the stylistic expression of his artistic world, in the pessimistic, psychologically dark spirit of his works. The novel *The Picture of Dorian Gray* is a brilliant manifestation of the writer's aesthetic decadence; his decadent works also include the poem *The Sphinx* (1894) and the tragedy *Salomé* (1893), initially written in French. Wilde's belief in the idea that Aestheticism and decadence complement each other differentiates him from those advocates of Aestheticism who may not be ranked among the representatives of decadence and from those decadents who may not be regarded as worshippers of beauty. Having been deeply influenced by classical art and having acquainted himself with literary works by his Romanticist predecessors and representatives of Aestheticism and decadence, he set the foundation for both a paradigm of beauty and decadent writing, which heralded modernism in Britain, Europe and the rest of the world, including Latvia.

2. Decadence in Latvia[3]

In Latvia, the designation "decadence" was shaped during the first decade of the 20th century, precisely when the newly-formed Latvian literature,[4] searching for original themes and plots and untraditional literary forms, entered the developmental phase of modernism. For writers seeking creative freedom, it was a turning point as Latvian literature in general and literary criticism in particular became polarized on the art-for-art's sake philosophy that had reached the early Latvian modernists, mainly via the translations in Russia and Germany and direct contacts with Russian poets of the Silver Age (Sproģe and Vāvere 2002). For the Latvian nation born in translation (Veisbergs 2014), translated European literature at the beginning of the 20th century ensured the next stage of development due to the local need for a new and modern-world-oriented perception of art. Between 1904 and 1910, a group of so-called decadents who admired Aestheticism and decadent principles united around the journal *Dzelme* (The Gulf) (1906-07). They were known as the *Dzelmes grupa* (Dzelme Group). Although their declaration *Mūsu mākslas motīvi* (The Motives of Our Art) (1906) has been known as the Latvian Decadence Manifesto, their decadence was mainly in the nickname, as they mainly proclaimed the demand for freedom of art and principles of modernism: "None of the modernistic movements in Latvia had its manifesto. Instead, there were declarations and conceptual speculations" (Tabūns 2003, 181). Thus, although the content of their work lacked deep philosophical substance and theoretical unity and was sometimes contradictory, it still provided a framework for promoting individual freedom in art. Latvian modernists perceived Wilde as a gifted decadent writer and an advocate for the "renaissance" in art. Wilde was a

[3] Some aspects analysed in the following sections have been discussed in Kačāne's monograph (2015) and other publications (2008; 2013) in Latvian.

[4] The middle of the nineteenth century, the first "National Awakening" (1850-80) when the idea of Latvia as a nation emerged, is considered the beginning of Latvian national literature. The turning point is 1856 when a verse collection *Dziesmiņas* (Little Songs) by Juris Alunāns – a Latvian philologist and representative of Jaunlatvieši (the Young Latvians) movement – was published. It mostly consisted of translations and was aimed at showing "the beauty and strength of the Latvian language" (Alunāns 1856, 3). Before that, for centuries, it was the Latvian language and folklore which played a crucial role in preserving the ethnic community of Latvians under the subordination of other powers and cultures (German, Swedish, Polish, Russian).

literary icon, appearing in the literary journals *Pret Sauli* (Toward the Sun) and *Stari* (Rays) alongside Friedrich Nietzsche and other West-European writers whose understanding of art offered a means of escaping reality. The early Latvian modernists (including Haralds Eldgasts, Viktors Eglītis, Fallijs, Jānis Akuraters, Kārlis Skalbe, and Kārlis Jēkabsons) were influenced not only by French writers (Charles Baudelaire, Paul Verlaine, and Arthur Rimbaud), but also by the American Edgar Allan Poe, the Polish Stanisław Przybyszewski, the Italian Gabriele D'Annunzio, a number of Russian writers (Konstantin Balmont, Valery Bryusov, Fyodor Sologub), and Scandinavian, German, and Austrian literatures that accentuated "radicalism" through the synthesis of decadence, symbolism, modernism, and other phenomena. Latvian writers experimented with depictions of a restriction-free individual or decadent superhuman (the concept of Nietzsche's Übermensch), portrayed the subject's sense of superiority and mysticism, the dominance of the human's spiritual processes, occasionally focusing on the equal value of the aesthetic and non-aesthetic, the ethical and the unethical, the sublime and the perverse. Significance was laid on the representation of *taedium vitae*, the aestheticisation of Dionysian ecstasy and death.

However, Latvian decadence (sometimes referred to as symbolism and impressionism) must not be perceived as a direct echo of European decadence. Various forms and sub-forms of literary trends that had matured in Europe for decades reached the new Latvian literature in a "compressed" form within one decade (Tabūns 2003; Sproģe and Vāvere 2002). In the Latvian context, early twentieth-century decadence can be interpreted as 1) a literary phenomenon directed against aesthetics of realism and naturalism, that is, as anti-traditionalism, which strived to be independent of the ideology of the epoch; and 2) a testimony of belonging to the West-European adherents to "pure art", where the idea of the supreme individual, for whom the disengagement from a social determinateness was typical, was brought to the forefront. Although the "new" art was accepted critically and labelled as "sick" and "leprous" (e.g., in Jānis Jansons-Brauns's (1908) critically reflective essay "Fauni vai klauni?" (Fauns or Clowns?)), its ideological supporters – both early modernists at the beginning of the 20th century[5] and the second generation of modernists in the 1930s – perceived the influences as a renewal or renaissance of art:

> Any 'renaissance' gets started by some older, former culture […] the Germans and the Russians learnt from the achievements of French culture. […] Decadents themselves, of course, knew very well that it was neither the "decline" nor "over-refinement" but the renaissance they fought for […]. (Eglītis 1949, 64-65)

Wilde entered the Latvian cultural space as an aesthete-decadent and had a decisive and lasting role in the dynamics of Latvian culture and the development of modernist literature. Among the first Latvian translations of Wilde's works are his poems in prose (from 1902) and literary fairy tales (from 1903) which were translated repeatedly in the following years and decades. They were followed by translations and retranslations of plays (among them the tragedy *Salomé*, 1907, translated by Fricis Jansons; 1912, translated by Jānis Ezeriņš), philosophical essays (from 1907), fragments of *De Profundis* (1910; 1933) and aphorisms, as well as short stories (from 1912) and poems (from 1920).[6] Given that some of the first translations of Wilde's

[5] For example, one of the leading figures of the Latvian decadence Viktors Eglītis' theoretical works written in the period from 1903 to 1913 were published in a book titled *Ceļš uz latvju renesansi* (1914, Path to Latvian Renaissance).

[6] For translations of Wilde's works, see "Timeline of the Latvian Reception of Oscar Wilde" (Kačāne 2015, 309-34).

oeuvre (in particular poems in prose and fairytales) were imprecise and incomplete, numerous retranslations were soon published. Latvian authors were attentive to them and strove to achieve fine first translations in Latvian.

A Latvian translation of Wilde's novel *The Picture of Dorian Gray* was first offered to readers in the social-political and literary Latvian daily newspaper *Latvijas Sargs* (1919-34, Latvia's Guard) – one of the first Latvian newspapers of independent Latvia – in 1920 by the poet, writer, and translator Jānis Ezeriņš (1891-1924) (Uailds1920).[7] Ezeriņš's version was also published as a book in 1921 (Uailds 1921).[8] By that time, after the turbulent years of World War I, the proclamation of the Republic of Latvia (1918), and the Latvian War of Independence (1918-20), the early modernists had already found their own unique forms for their artistic expression. Nevertheless, a re-evaluation of the discourse around "decadence" continued due to this translation, and the period was again declared as "a great decadence era" (Jēkabsons 1921).

Ezeriņš had been fascinated by the phenomenon of decadence as a young man. He started translating Wilde's novel while following the activities of the Latvian "decadents" during his student years at Valka teachers' seminary in Valmiera (1906-10) but had to admit that "his language skills were still quite poor to do this job" (Ērmanis 1955, 130). The work was resumed later, and as revealed by the correspondence from 12 March 1917 with Antons Austriņš (1884-1934), his friend, writer, and the then head of the literary department of the newspaper *Līdums* (Clearing, founded in 1913), it was planned that the translation would be published in 1918: "Presumably, the big events will not have changed your intentions as an editor, and we will be able to print 'Dorian' next summer" (RTMM 80767). However, the plan failed due to the swiftly changing political and cultural situation, though it materialized a couple of years later under different circumstances. The translation by Ezeriņš was immediately perceived as "very good" (Egle 1921), "masterly" (Jēkabsons 1921), and "beautiful" (Liepiņš 1924). Despite being somewhat rushed and drawn from translations in other languages, Ezeriņš's translation of Wilde's novel was mentioned in the *Latviešu literatūras vēsture* (History of Latvian Literature) as one of the translator's most significant contributions (Grīns 1936, 396). For decades it was believed that Ezeriņš's translation was made from intermediary languages; however, at the beginning of the twenty-first century, a comment in the republished edition was added specifying that it was based on the original English version (Vailds 2003).

In 1933, another translation of the novel in Latvian, in a print run of 4,000 copies, was published by the gifted theatre critic, theoretician, and translator Roberts Kroders (1892-1956) (Uailds 1933).[9] In time, this coincided with the activities of the second-generation Latvian modernists who "rebelled" against antipodal literary tendencies which belonged to the national

[7] In the first half of the 20th century, Wilde's surname had several spelling traditions in Latvian: Uailds, Vilde, Wilde, Vailds (the latter gradually became the accepted tradition).

[8] The book was published by Ansis Gulbis' (1873-1936) publishing house – one of the first major publishers of independent Latvia that greatly contributed to the development of Latvian literature; the publishing house was originally founded in St. Petersburg at the beginning of the 20th century at the time Gulbis worked there, after the proclamation of Latvia's independence it continued its work in Latvia (Avotiņa 2003).

[9] The book was published by the publishing house Grāmatu Draugs (Book Friend), founded in 1926 by Helmārs Rudzītis (1903-2001), which followed the strategy to print quickly and cheaply to reach the widest readership. The activity of the publishing house was interrupted in 1944 by the Soviet occupation but it managed to continue its work in exile (Smilktiņa 1999b, 41-42; Avotiņa 2003). At the end of the 1920s and in the 1930s, Kroders was a regular contributor to the publishing house, e.g., his translations of Romain Rolland's novel *Jean-Christophe* was published by Grāmatu Draugs in 1927-28, of Guido da Verona's novel *Mimì Bluette fiore del mio giardino* in 1927, of Gabriele D'Annunzio's *Il Piacere* in 1928 and *Trionfo della morte* in 1929, of Stefan Zweig's novellas in 1931, etc.

ideology-based literature of positivism. Ezeriņš and Kroders were contemporaries and creative intellectuals. Both of them were in their own way related to the daily newspaper *Latvijas Sargs*, which was founded and supported by the interim government for expressing the ideas of national independence, unity, freedom, and liberation, and originally functioned in Liepāja, the biggest regional city in the unoccupied western part of the country (Smilktiņa 1999a, 10-11). Kroders was the newspaper's co-founder and member of the editorial board at the time when his twin brother Arturs Kroders was the editor of the newspaper (from early 1919 to March 1920) (Bankavs 1928, 669). Ezeriņš's translation of Wilde's novel was published in 64 newspaper issues between 7 August and 4 December 1920, when its editorial team included Ernests Blanks and Augenbergs-Ezerietis, among others, and the newspaper was already based in the capital Riga.

The creative work of both Ezeriņš and Kroders involved translating: Ezeriņš translated the Old French legend *Aucassin and Nicolette*, Giovanni Boccaccio's short stories, Stendhal's *Le Rouge et le noir*, as well as works by Molière, Charles Baudelaire, Théophile Gautier, William Blake, Alexander Pushkin, and Alexander Blok, whereas Kroders translated the prose works of Knut Hamsun, Henryk Sienkiewicz, August Strindberg, Guy de Maupassant, Arthur Schnitzler, Gabriele D'Annunzio, Erich M. Remarque, plays by George B. Shaw, Johann L. Tieck, Luigi Pirandello, Ferdinand Bruckner, Carlo Goldoni, *One Thousand and One Nights* tales, etc. Both Ezeriņš and Kroders were bright intellectuals who enjoyed a Bohemian way of life. They had known Wilde's novel since their youth thanks to the critics; they had also read it in the original language and they were familiar with translations in other languages, Russian and German in particular.[10]

Irrespective of these similarities, notable differences lie in the specificity of the translators' individual creative self-expression. Unlike Kroders, who was mainly known for his outspoken theatre criticism focusing on the problems of form, as well as translations, Ezeriņš was a successful short-prose virtuoso who mostly wrote in the genre of the anecdotal novelette and who had learned from Boccaccio, Maupassant, Wilde, Poe, and others. He was a witty, merry soul of Latvian literature, a "care-free gambler" (Veselis 1925, 83), a dandy and self-proclaimed decadent; at that time, decadence was often regarded as an analogue of dandyism and was not related to boredom, pessimism, or fatigue, but rather to mischief and wit:

> Jānis Ezeriņš's further conduct and life, too, showed us that he was not only a simple decadent but also a 'genius'. At that time, it was a matter of honour for any poet to wear their hair long; the hair of poets-decadents had to be even longer, as we see in the picture supplement to *Dzelme* in 1906. Decadents should also dress differently. (Pētersons 1929, 203)

When characterizing Ezeriņš's literary work, the Latvian writer Marta Grimma noted that his writing style was so aesthetic that he could truly be deemed the Latvian Oscar Wilde (RTMM 95040). On the other hand, Kroders was described as "an absolute aesthete" for whom, as for Wilde, criticism was a peculiar form of art; Kroders valued Wilde as one of the most recognized playwrights (Liepiņš 1967, 5).

Ezeriņš's life ended abruptly and prematurely some years after the proclamation of independence of Latvia: he passed away at the age of 33 after a severe illness. Kroders lived longer but his life and creative work were interrupted by Latvia's Soviet occupation (1940)

[10] In Germany, the novel was first translated in 1901 (also in 1902, 1906, 1907, etc.), whereas in Russia it was translated in 1905 (also in 1906, 1907, 1909, 1911, 1912, 1915, 1916, 1928, etc.) (Roznatovskaja 2000, 49-66; Barnaby 2010, xxi-lxxiv). The impact of the phenomenon of "Russian Wilde" on Latvian early modernists (major influence) and impetus coming from Wilde's reception in Germany (minor influence) ensured a "dialogue" between Latvian literature and Wilde.

– in June 1941 he and his family were deported to Siberia. He died at the age of 64 shortly after returning to Soviet Latvia when "the development of Latvian literature was halted by the sovietisation and ideological censorship of culture and art, which, demanding the reflection of social aspects of reality and typization in literature, turned against many manifestations of individualization" (Kačāne 2021, 582). At that time, the fact of his passing, the inhumane conditions he had to endure, as well as his contribution to literature, theatre, and art history and criticism, were mostly discussed in Latvian periodicals published in exile (in Australia, Canada, the United Kingdom, the USA, etc.) by the intellectuals who had managed to flee the Soviet occupation in the 1940s. Having once been at the peak of Latvian culture, Kroders's life and work suffered a decade-long neglect in Latvia until their re-evaluation in the 1990s. Similarly, Ezeriņš's creative writing was not widely promoted in the Soviet era, however, his translation of Wilde's novel was re-published in 1976 in spite of the official negative attitude of the Soviet power towards both decadence (including modernism, symbolism, avant-gardism, etc.) and writers representing these trends.

If we analyse the two Latvian versions of Wilde's novel in their historical and cultural contexts, it becomes clear that Ezeriņš's translation has become an integral part of Wilde's Latvian identity, testified also by its repeated publications (Vailds 1976; 2003; 2014; 2017). Numerous critics have acknowledged Ezeriņš's version as a highly valuable, original, partly ancient, decorative, Art Nouveau, creative and theatrical translation, "from which flows an almost palpable beauty" (Riteniece 2019). However, reviews of Kroders's contribution are also positive emphasising "the magic of the Latvian sentence, plasticity, modulation and sophistication of all kinds of nuances" (Jēkabsons 1935). Each of Kroders's translations contained "a stamp of personal luxurious style, […] coming from the two sources – from the richness of the Latvian language and the translated author's spirit" (K. Rs. 1935, 4). Nevertheless, according to the data in the biographical dictionary *Es viņu pazīstu* (1939, I know him) provided by Kroders himself, during twenty-eight years of his work, he wrote 1,218 editorials, essays, reviews, and reflections on art and national ideology for publication in periodicals. In the period from 1910 to 1939 he translated 120 literary and scientific works, as well as published collected works in theatre history and monographs (Unāms 1975, 270-71), which suggests that he oftentimes published in haste, dictating to a typist, producing a final revision that lacked "literary polish" (Zālītis 2005).

On 3 February 2017, when a new version of Wilde's novel was adapted for the stage at the Daile Theatre,[11] a new translation by the literary adviser of the theatre Evita Mamaja was used. According to the producer Laura Groza-Ķibere, Ezeriņš's translation was too old-fashioned; there was exaggerated aestheticisation and poetization (see Jundze 2017). For the first time, the title of the novel's production coincided with the lesser known translation by Kroders – *Doriana Greja* ***portrets*** (literal.: The Portrait of Dorian Gray) (see *Doriana Greja* ***ģīmetne*** in Ezeriņš's translation; literal.: The Facial Image[12] of Dorian Gray; bold mine). Nevertheless, the new approach and

[11] Although Wilde's plays have been staged in Latvia since the beginning of the 20th century, the first production of Wilde's novel *The Picture of Dorian Gray* took place in the renewed Latvia in 1994 in the New Riga Theatre produced by Alvis Hermanis (b. 1965). Many theatre critics perceived it as an artificial performance of unnatural body movements consisting of stylized ballet elements (Radzobe 1994), or attractive scenes of kitschy dances (Čakare 2006). Although the producer's "manipulation" of decadence concepts was seen as lifeless kitsch and the impeachment of decadence in general, the relation to the West-European tradition of decadence was emphasized through the inseparable unity of death and its aestheticisation (Radzobe 2013).

[12] The etymological analysis has revealed that the Latvian derivative *ģīmetne* (borrowed from the Lithuanian *gỹmis* – the "face" and "facial image", for example, in a mirror) has been in circulation in Latvia since the 1870s.

translation, according to the theatre critics, seemed flat, simplistic, and inappropriate, leading to mundaneness on the stage and a lack of philosophical depth (Zeltiņa 2017). The efforts of the Daile Theatre to both bring the performance closer to the source text and modernise the play, on the contrary, alienated the adaptation from the original Wildean style appreciated in Latvian culture. Eventually, Ezeriņš's translation endured the test of time and was indirectly acknowledged as still modern, however, the issue of the translation of philosophical and intertextual layers still remained topical (Rodiņa 2017).[13] Thus, retranslations, being motivated by multiple and complex reasons (interest in an author's work and/or persona, fascination with literary movement the writer represents, commercial decisions, potential ageing of the earlier translation, etc.) are mainly triggered by change and represent a transformation in reception (Cadera and Walsh 2022).

3. Translating Decadent Style

Any culture-specific concepts are translatable only with a thorough knowledge of the cultures between which the transfer of meaning takes place, and therefore the success of literary translation largely depends on prior cultural competence (Herzfeld 2020). In *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, the decadent style manifests itself, among others, in decadence-related culture-specific concepts, often used within English as foreign-language text insertions (mainly in French, sometimes in Latin or other languages). Insertions of an untranslated text – expressions, proverbs, liturgies, citations from other literary texts – into the Anglophone speech of literary characters are for Wilde not only the means for expressing authenticity, cosmopolitanism, or playful aestheticism, but predominantly a strategic manifestation of some definite social and cultural phenomenon and paradigm, which is being implemented through the author's erudition. Intertextual references in French in the novel are conspicuous attributes of a decadent style related to the French decadent school, which emphasises Wilde's affinity with the precursors and contemporaries of the decadent movement across borders and demonstrates his admiration of – and association with – their anti-traditional aesthetic views (Kačāne 2013).Through the analysis of the translation of such phrases, it is possible to compare the translators' approaches to translating decadent style.

Decadence-related foreign-language insertions can be seen within the binary opposition "the old" vs. "the new", where decadents and aesthetes manifest themselves as agents of the beginning of the "new/modern" era. Challenging traditional values is signalled by Lord Henry Wotton's words in French in the following fragment: "The longer I live, Dorian, the more keenly I feel that whatever was good enough for our fathers is not good enough for us. In art, as in politics, *les grand-pères ont toujours tort*" (Wilde 2007, 45). In his translation, Ezeriņš preserves the French expression *les grand-pères ont toujours tort* and adds a literal translation as an insertion within a text "vectēviem nekad nav taisnība" (literal.: grandparents are never right)[14] (Vailds 2003, 62). Kroders, however, deletes the French language within the Latvian text and offers an equivalent translation "senčiem nekad nav taisnība" (literal.: ancestors are never right) (Uailds 1933, 54).

In the dictionary of the Latvian language, *ģīmetne* has been defined as 1) a photograph of a human face (including also the upper part of the body); 2) a representation of a person or a group of people in fine arts (Bāliņa *et al.* 2006, 333). In its meaning as "portrait", the word was used since the 1880s-90s, however, it managed to occupy a stable place in the Latvian lexicon only in the 20th century (Karulis 2001, 332-33).

[13] Although retranslations may be triggered by change and may signal a transformation in reception, they may also represent commercial decisions or ageing of the earlier translation.

[14] Here and henceforth, translations of Wilde's Latvian quotes into English are mine.

Similarly, among the foreign-language insertions in the novel, there are historical terms *fin de siècle* and *fin du globe* applied to characterise the end of the nineteenth-century disillusionment with life, apocalyptic atmosphere, pessimism, the liminality of the epoch, escapism, and change of paradigm, associated with French decadence and Aestheticism in England. Here is an example:

'[…] Nowadays all the married men live like bachelors, and all the bachelors like married men.'
'*Fin de siècle*,' murmured Lord Henry.
'*Fin du globe*,' answered his hostess.
'I wish it were *fin du globe*,' said Dorian with a sigh. 'Life is a great disappointment.' (Wilde 2007, 149)

In the translation by Ezeriņš, both terms in French have been purposefully preserved, and they are supplemented with an adequate explanation in Latvian "gadsimta gals" (literal.: the end of the century) and "pasaules gals" (literal.: the end of the world) within the text (Vailds 2003, 207). Consequently, Wilde's authentic manner of writing, through which the epoch's "spirit" and cultural hallmarks are shown, has been preserved. In Kroders's translation, slightly different phrases in Latvian "laikmeta gals" (literal.: the end of the epoch) and "pasaules gals" (literal.: the end of the world) are offered; however, again no text in French was preserved (Uailds 1933, 179).

In general, this tendency, which can be observed in multiple examples, testifies to the translators' different translation strategies:

'Four husbands! Upon my word that is *trop de zèle*.'
'*Trop d'audace*, I tell her,' said Dorian. (Wilde 2007, 148)

Jānis Ezeriņš's translation:

Četri vīri! Jātzīstas, tā ir centība, liela centība – *trop de zêle*.
Trop d'audace – liela pārdrošība, es viņai teicu, – atbildēja Dorians. (Vailds 2003, 206)

Roberts Kroders's translation:

'Četrivīri! Esatzīstos, ka tāirlielacentība'.
'Lielapārdrošība, esteicu tai', atbildēja Dorians. (Uailds 1933, 178)

'*Rouge and esprit* used to go together.' (Wilde 2007, 43)

Jānis Ezeriņš's translation:

'*Rouge* un *esprit* – smiņķis un asprātība – nebija šķirami'. (Vailds 2003, 60)

Roberts Kroders's translation:

'Sārtulis un atjautība senāk bija nešķirami'. (Uailds 1933, 51)

Throughout the novel, Ezeriņš consistently preserves Wilde's French lexis and inserts an explanatory text in Latvian following the foreign-language text. Kroders's translation strategy, on the other hand, is oriented towards "total translation" on all levels, and therefore intertextual non-English passages from the source text are replaced by the target language text. Even the most extensive quotation in French – the reproduction of the second part of "Sur les lagunes" from Gautier's poem "Variations sur le carnaval de Venise" from the anthology *Émaux et Camées* (1852) – in Kroders's version is given only in Latvian. Similarly, Ezeriņš preserves the text in French and provides its translation. In addition, foreign words used in Chapter 11 in the de-

scriptions of Dorian Gray's aesthetic-decadent exotic infatuation with, for example, musical instruments also testify to this fact (*juruparis* – *juruparis* (Ezeriņš), džuroparisas (Kroders); *clarin* – *clarin* (Ezeriņš), klarnete (Kroders) etc.). Ezeriņš mostly preserves foreign exoticisms in the original language, while Kroders Latvianises them to a great extent.

Foreign lexical items used for introducing "colour" and "culture" into the target text are usually regarded as partially "culturally untranslatable". By being less "absolute" than "linguistic untranslatability" which is determined by differences between two language systems, the issue of "cultural untranslatability" arises when a cultural phenomenon, functionally relevant for the source language text, is absent from the culture of which the target language is a part (Catford 1965, 94, 99). Because of this, and considering the period in which the translations were made, each of the translators has chosen a different approach to translation – for Ezeriņš, the representation of decadence-related concepts in French is significant due to the openness of the Latvian literature to West-European modern literary tendencies and the manifestation of belonging to the West-European adherents to art for art's sake at the beginning of the 20th century, whereas Kroders strives for simplicity through linguistic purism and an emphasis on Latvianness.

One of the themes highlighted in Wilde's novel pertains to dandyism as a social and cultural phenomenon related to decadence and aesthetic-decadent experiences. At the beginning of the 20th century, dandyism was uncommon in Latvia, but Wilde's novel and persona greatly facilitated it. Wilde's novel contributed to the gradual shaping of a new type of self-image that demonstrated an attitude aimed at shocking society (e.g., in the sensational decadent novel *Zvaigžņotās naktis* (1905, Starry Nights) by Haralds Edgasts (1999)). After dandyism became part of the Latvian culture, ironic depictions of dandies appeared in the prose of the young modernist generation of the 1930s protesting against the literature based on national positivist ideology (Kačāne 2020).

In Wilde's novel, Dorian Gray is depicted in the atmosphere of external elegance and refined taste; the character's subconscious desire to create a unique approach to life by combining aesthetic dandyism and decadent aesthetics is revealed:

> […] yet in his inmost heart he desired to be something more than a mere *arbiter elegantiarum*, to be consulted on the wearing of a jewel, or the knotting of a necktie, or the conduct of a cane. He sought to elaborate some new scheme of life that would have its reasoned philosophy and its ordered principles and find in the spiritualizing of the senses its highest realization. (Wilde 2007, 107-08)

In both Latvian translations of Wilde's novel, Latin *arbiter elegantiarum* has been preserved and it is followed by an insertion in Latvian "modes likumdevējs" (literal.: fashion law maker) by Ezeriņš (Vailds 2003, 152) and "modes likumudevējs" (literal.: fashion laws maker) by Kroders (Uailds, 1933, 132), which in this particular case contradicts the latter's more traditional strategy. For Latvian readers, who in the first two decades of the 20th century are only slightly familiar with the phenomenon of dandyism, Wilde reveals a decadent dandy's hyper-engagement with the senses or aesthetic and decadent sensibility, as well as with perfection of the pose and self-construction. Dorian Gray's daily habits are depicted within the frame of a duality "order – chaos", i.e., in the atmosphere of aristocratic luxury, relish, frolicsome ease, and relaxation, as well as a preoccupation with the mysterious night: "I thought you dandies never got up till two, and were not visible till five" (Wilde 2007, 30). A fusion between life and art (the main focuses of the novel), as Michael Subialka remarks, is necessitated by a "penchant for self-fashioning", and decadents' aestheticism "locates that fusion in the dandy's street-wandering performance, which combines the decadent's display with the flâneur's aesthetic investigation of the modern metropolis" (2019, 3).

The novel incorporates the features characterising decadence – including questioning generally accepted values, focusing on the category of the artificial opposing (and prevailing over) that of the natural, searching for relish in *paradis artificiels* unrelated to mundaneness, and demonstrating a picturesque manifestation of darkness, sin, and death.

In the novel, Lord Henry refers to sin as "the only real colour-element left in modern life" (Wilde 2007, 28). While imaginatively engaging with transgressions against divine laws and bringing aestheticism into focus, Wilde attaches positive semantics to negativity and incorporates them into the category of enjoyment, thereby revealing striking features of literary decadence.

In relation to the concept of sin, Ezeriņš uses the lexeme "apgrēcība" (sinfulness) mainly employed in Latvian religious texts, which is derived from the noun "grēks" (sin), by adding a prefix and a suffix and which implies a sinful deed, unreasonable behaviour, and transgression: "Apgrēcība ir vienīgais, kas vēl no krāsainības palicis pāri mūsu dzīvē" (literal.: Sinfulness is the only thing left from colourfulness in our life) (Vailds 2003, 38). Kroders translates this fragment by using the noun "netikums" (vice), revealing the semantic of a moral flaw or weakness due to the repetition of specific actions: "Vienīgais krāsainais elements, kas palicis vēl mūsu dzīvē ir netikums" (literal.: The only colourful element left in our lives is vice) (Uailds 1933, 33). Moreover, while translating, Ezeriņš occasionally aestheticises decadence-related concepts by replacing semantically neutral words with more semantically loaded ones, e.g., in the context of worshipping nocturnal darkness and beautiful sins, the phrase "beautiful things" ("Beautiful sins, like beautiful things are the privilege of the rich" (Wilde 2007, 67)) is replaced by the poetic lexeme "beauty": "Skaisti grēki, tāpat kā arī viss pārējais daiļums, ir bagātnieku privilēģija" (literal.: Beautiful sins, like the rest of beauty, are the privilege of the rich (Vailds 2003, 94, underlining mine). Kroders translates "beautiful things" with a noun phrase "viss skaistums" (literal.: all the beauty) (Uailds 1933, 82). Contrary to Ezeriņš who gives preference to a poetic lexeme "daiļums" that expresses abstraction, Kroders chooses the prosaic and more specific expression "skaistums".

In addition, the comparative analysis of the translations has revealed that, on the whole, Ezeriņš tends towards making the concept of ugliness beautiful and poetic, whereas Kroders underlines the deviation from norms in ugliness. For example, when rendering Wilde's sentence "Ugliness is one of the seven deadly virtues […]" (2007, 161) into Latvian, Ezeriņš uses the derived noun consisting of the abstract noun "glītums" (prettiness) preceded by the prefix "ne-" (non-prettiness/non-beauty), thereby emphasising the destruction of boundaries between the beautiful and the ugly emphasised by Wilde in the novel and other decadent writers: "Neglītums – viens no septiņiem nāves tikumiem […]["] (literal.: Non-beauty – one of the seven deadly virtues:) (Vailds 2003, 225, underlining mine). Kroders, on the other hand, translates "ugliness" with the noun "kroplība" (deformity) derived from the adjective "kropls" (crippled) and thus focuses on hereditary and undesirable deviations from normality or defects, i.e., he retreats from the aestheticisation of the decadent concepts and the paradigm of beauty: "Kroplība ir viens no septiņiem nāves tikumiem[…]" (literal.: Deformity is one of the seven deadly virtues) (Uailds 1933, 194, underlining mine).

In the depictions of Dorian Gray's falling in love with Sybil Vane, Wilde supplements the theme of love by focusing not only on destruction and death (so essential for decadent writers) but also on a cold-hearted game with life and death:

> There is something to me quite beautiful about her death. I am glad I am living in a century when such wonders happen. They make one believe in the reality of the things we all play with, such as romance, passion, and love. (Wilde 2007, 86)

Es viņas nāvē redzu daudz skaistuma. Man prieks, ka dzīvoju gadsimtā, kurā notiek šādi brīnumi. Tas liek mums ticēt lietu realitātei, ar kurām mēs mēdzam rotaļāties, – kaislei, aizrautībai un mīlai. (Vailds 2003, 122)

Es viņas nāvē redzu daudz ko skaistu. Man prieks, ka dzīvojam laikmetā, kad notiek tādi brīnumi. Tie liek mums ticēt lietu reālībai, ar kurām mēs visi spēlējamies, romantiskas aizrautības, kaislības un mīlestības reālībai. (Uailds 1933, 108, underlining mine)

Ezeriņš's translation conveys an aesthetically playful mood. The adjective "beautiful" is translated by the noun "skaistums" (beauty), emphasizing the paradigm of aestheticism. At the same time, the nomination of two out of three emotions is revealed by the choice of short two-syllable poetic nouns with the endings -a ("mīla" – love), and -e ("kaisle" – passion), avoiding words with suffixes ("mīlestība" – love; "kaislība" – passion) that impart heaviness, i.e., by then newly-coined lexemes which in literary texts were first used by the famous Latvian poet, playwright, and translator Rainis (1865-1929) and which can provoke a specific state of ecstasy and ease (Augstkalne 1968). In Kroders's version, longer prosaic nouns with the suffix -īb- followed by the endings -a ("mīlestība" – love, "kaislība" – passion) are rhymed with the noun "aizrautība" (romance); therefore, to denote "reality", Kroders has selected the synonym "reālība" instead of the more frequently used "realitāte", encountered in Ezeriņš's translation, and has created a new phrase "mīlestības reālība" (love reality) (underlining mine). Thus, by striving for rhythm and inclusion of repetition, which creates a certain stiffness and heaviness of expression, Kroders's translation reduces the effects of aestheticism and decadent playfulness.

Conclusion

Decadence as an aesthetic mode influenced and shaped Latvian literature and provoked ambiguous theorisation in literary criticism. Focusing on the artistic ideal, art for art's sake, and the fusion of life and art, the fascination with decadence in Latvia was associated with an aesthetic-decadent paradigm. As an advocate of the artist's freedom, Wilde became one of the most significant influences on Latvian literature. Both translations of Wilde's novel were published in the inter-war period, in 1920 and 1921 and 1933; however, since the beginning of the 20th century, the novel had been known to Latvian intellectuals, especially those oriented toward modernistic expression who were the most devoted connoisseurs of Wilde. Although the novel had contributed to the emerging literary discourse in Latvian literature via its multiple translations in Russia and Germany and had greatly influenced Latvian early modernists, they were not ready to translate Wilde's decadent expression into Latvian during the most active phase of modernism.

The first translation of the novel was related to early twentieth-century Latvian writers' enthusiasm for West-European modern tendencies and, consequently, its function was to consolidate the reception of aestheticism, decadence, and Wilde as a disseminator of art for art's sake philosophy. The communicative-functional approach of translation employed by Ezeriņš ensured the transference of the contextual meaning of Wilde's novel and thereby also his aesthetic-decadence style of expression.

Kroders's translation addressed the consciousness of young readers and those who, while still being open to literary cosmopolitanism, were giving credit to their "own" culture and language. Consequently, when rendering non-English and decadence-related concepts and phrases into Latvian, he relied on domestication as a translation strategy and laid his emphasis

on the target language. This approach in translating culture-specific references created a certain degree of distortion of the original and failed to fully introduce a foreign culture to its readers.

Ezeriņš's contribution to Latvianizing Wilde's legacy is impressive: he translated fragments from Wilde's *De Profundis* (1910), the stories *Lord Arthur Savile's Crime* (1921, 1922), *The Canterville Ghost* (1920), *The Sphinx without a Secret* (1922), and other works, displaying a deep appreciation of Wilde's work and personality. He approached the novel as a writer-creator and simultaneously as an admirer of beauty. Unlike Kroders, Ezeriņš emphasised the decadent style by underlining the concept of beauty and individuality of decadent characters. The translator's creative approach has contributed significantly to constructing Wilde as the most vivid representative of Aestheticism and, much more than Kroders's, presented a novel as a symbol of decadent expression. The preservation and explanation of non-English and other decadence-related concepts testify to an artistically heartfelt and aesthetically enjoyable approach to both the source- and target-culture and language.

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Decadent Culturemes Translating Bernard Shaw's *Widowers' Houses* into Italian

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Abstract

This article discusses my recent Italian translation (2022) of George Bernard Shaw's first play, *Widowers' Houses* (1892), mainly by considering the concept of the culturem. Culturemes, which are semantic units that exemplify and serve as paradigms of certain cultures, have been employed in translation studies in recent years to see how, and even if, culture-specific concepts can be translated. Culturemes are here seen in the light of the transculturality of decadent poetics, and hence interpreted as possible facilitators in the translation into Italian of *Widowers' Houses*, a play written in the decadent period, and developing many features of decadent poetics, whose author utilised key transcultural concepts of the period. Viewing Shaw's text from the perspective of such decadent culturemes as the slums, Cockney English and other decadent sociolects, and the decadent hero, together with the New Woman, not only substantiate the idea of Shaw as a decadent artist, but also suggest possible translation practices and processes for decadent literature.

Keywords: Culturem, Decadence, George Bernard Shaw, Translation, Widowers' Houses

Since the 1990s, Bernard Shaw's popularity in Italy has waned, both in academia, with fewer and fewer courses, if any, taught on his work, and on the stage. Throughout the period, Italian theatres have not been that keen on staging Shaw's texts, which are perceived as formally and thematically obsolete. The inadequacy and outdatedness of the few existing translations of Shaw's works have been identified as another reason for such a negative fluctuation in the author's reception in Italy (Boselli 2011, 97-99; Bertinetti 2022, 33).

It came as no surprise, therefore, when in 2021 one of the major Italian publishing houses, Bompiani, renowned for its dissemination of world literature through high-quality editions, commissioned new translations of Shaw's most important plays. The ensuing volume, published in the autumn of 2022, is part of the prestigious series "Classici della letteratura europea",

edited by Nuccio Ordine (1958-2023) as one of his last tasks. The volume devoted to Shaw includes translations of thirteen plays: the three *Plays Unpleasant* (*Widowers' Houses* (1892), *The Philanderer* (1893), and *Mrs Warren's Profession* (1893)), the three *Plays Pleasant* (*Arms and the Man* (1894), *Candida* (1895), and *The Man of Destiny* (1896)), the *Three Plays for Puritans* (*The Devil's Disciple* (1896), *Caesar and Cleopatra* (1898), and *Captain Brassbound's Conversion* (1899)), *Man and Superman* (1901), *John Bull's Other Island* (1904), *Pygmalion* (1912), and *Saint Joan* (1923). The volume's general editor is leading Victorianist Francesco Marroni, and each play has been edited and translated by a specialist of English and Irish studies. Targeted at an educated, though not necessarily academic, audience, the Bompiani edition includes Marroni's general Introduction, along with introductions and notes to each text, for which substantial bibliographies are also provided. The whole project lays unprecedented emphasis on historical and cultural contextualization by examining Shaw's Italian reception, his transcultural success, and connections to contemporary literature and drama. These are the criteria that have guided my translation and edition of Shaw's *Widowers' Houses* (1892), which will be taken here as an example of translating decadent literature.

Except for a few studies focusing on *Caesar and Cleopatra* (see Adams 1971, 1975; Gordon 1988; Bizzotto 2023), Shaw has seldom been classified as a decadent author. However, Sos Eltis has recently discussed his engagement with "the tropes and techniques of decadent theatre", with which, she recognizes, he was "thoroughly versed" as fundamentally parodic (2020, 209-12). Nevertheless, *Widowers' Houses*, which premiered on 9 December 1892 in London, was Shaw's first attempt at drama and was clearly influenced by contemporary themes and poetics. It develops the notion of decadence in terms of ideas, themes, language, and style. Acknowledging the pervasiveness of the decadent episteme in the play is hence a fundamental step in discussing the strategies and choices adopted in the Bompiani translation. The focus in this essay will be specifically on decadent culturemes, that is, the semantic units which exemplify and serve as paradigms of the decadent era, in light of the more or less common perception of decadence in British and Italian cultures.

The term "culturemе", coined by Raymond Cattell in 1949, began to enjoy greater dissemination in the late 1980s, thanks to its application to translation studies (Lungu-Badea 2009, 15-78; Nicolae 2015, 215),[1] and it has been variously defined ever since. Among the many definitions, a notable one, which accounts for its original meaning and implications, has been developed by Daniel Coman and Corina Selejan. They describe a culturemе as

> the smallest unit carrying cultural (and culture-specific) information, a concept developed analogically to, for example, the phoneme, the morpheme or the lexeme. However, in contradistinction to these, the culturemе is not a linguistic concept, but one related to extralinguistic, social and cultural contexts, denoting a social phenomenon that is specific to a certain culture which, however, emerges as such only by comparison to another culture which lacks that phenomenon. (2019, 303)

In the third millennium, other definitions have been elaborated in relation to translation practices (Pamies 2017, 100-11; Alic 2020, 81). Grounding her conceptualization on former studies, Liliana Alic has explained that

[1] Lungu-Badea provides a detailed background of the theories on culturemes, from the origins to the first decade of the third millennium. Interesting reflections on the notion of culturemе are also advanced in Luque Nadal 2009, esp. 95-96.

> The concept of cultureme is a transdisciplinary one, being used in literature, in cultural studies, in the theory of translation and in foreign language acquisition. If we compare the numerous definitions given to that concept, we find something in common, whether it defines the concept as 'the minimal, indivisible unit of culture: rituals, values and stereotypes' (Jaskot and Ganoshenko, 2019) or as 'cultural facts and cultural interferences' (Motoc: 2017) in the field of cultural studies, or as 'atoms of culture' (Moles, 1967, in G. Lungu Badea, 2009), or as 'cultural references or cultural markers' (Pamies: 2017), we find differences and similarities in point of approach and methodology. (Alic 2011, 81)

Admittedly, Alic appropriates Georgiana Lungu-Badea's notion of the centrality of culturemes in translation studies, where they represent "the minimal unit of culture, the smallest unit of cultural reference or cultural information […] to be transferred from one language to another through the process of translation" (Lungu-Badea 2009 qtd. in *ibidem*). Other valid ideas on culturemes as applied to translation come from Antonio Pamies, who views them as "extra-linguistic cultural symbols, which behave like metaphorical models, motivating figurative expressions in language (lexical or phraseological)" (2017, 101). Pamies explains that while cultural keywords are often untranslatable due to their being "culturally loaded", the same principle does not apply to culturemes, which "[i]n spite of their dependence on local culture" can be "shared by several languages, since the limits of linguistic communities do not necessarily match the cultural ones" (103).

The argument in favour of the translatability of culturemes becomes even more persuasive and suggestive when applied to decadent culturemes. Translation practices suggest that when culturemes pertain to decadent culture they can most of the time be translated or are, at least, less difficult to translate than when pertaining to other epistemes. The reason for this may lie in the nature of decadence itself – here identified with the end of the 19th century and beginning of the 20th, which in Italian is called "Decadentismo" – now widely accepted as a transnational and cosmopolitan phenomenon. Decadence studies have progressively concentrated on zones of intersection between cultures, finding in *The Decadent Republic of Letters* – to quote the title of an esteemed book by Matthew Potolsky – a common set of conventions and references. As regards decadent literature in particular, Stefano Evangelista has maintained that

> cosmopolitanism took shape not as an abstract ideal but as something that informed the actual, living practices of authors and readers as they experimented with new ways of relating local and global identities in a world that they experienced as increasingly interconnected. (2021a, 3)

The interconnectedness of "local and global identities" described by Evangelista not only defines decadence as "a 'transnational' culture" (2021b, 809) in which what is site-specific becomes shared simultaneously across different places, but this idea also supports the notion that culturemes themselves may have become transcultural categories at the end of the nineteenth century. They belonged to a considerable degree to trans-European or trans-Atlantic decadent poetics, and this condition of pervasiveness and circulation should facilitate their translatability from source to target languages.

Such considerations on culturemes will be here applied to the analysis of the latest Italian translation of *Widowers' Houses*. The main culturemes related to the decadent episteme in the play will be selected and passages from the source and the target texts will be juxtaposed in the light of cultural continuities, differences, and imbrications. A fundamental assumption is that, although certain culturemes are common to the two cultures due to the transnational nature of decadence, single words related to these culturemes and the semantic fields to which they belong are not. I will address specific issues in relation to language in various case studies, which will follow a brief history of the Italian translations of the play.

Previous Italian translations of *Widowers' Houses* evince a limited knowledge of the source language, culture, and history – a fact that presupposes a limited awareness of some specificities of the decadent age. The first translation, by Antonio Agresti (1866-1927), was published in 1924 by Mondadori as part of the three *Plays Unpleasant*. At the time, Agresti was Shaw's agent in Italy, a role he played from 1906 to 1926 and which afforded him the privilege of direct contact with the playwright. Nevertheless, Shaw's scant knowledge of the Italian language did not help his translator, whose translation endeavours are in fact characterized by misinterpretations and mistakes. One example is the literal translation of the idiomatic "a false position" (Shaw 2022b, 80) as "una posizione falsa" (Shaw 1928, 47), which makes little sense in Italian and is far from describing a predicament in which people must act against their principles. "Una situazione imbarazzante" (Shaw 2022b, 81) (an embarrassing situation) seems to be the best solution here due to its semantic correspondence to the expression in the source text and the adjective-noun collocation that makes the expression almost idiomatic in Italian.

Paola Ojetti's translation, again for Mondadori, appeared in 1956 and was reprinted in 1984. Faithful to a certain extent to the source text, Ojetti's work became canonical despite some imprecisions, particularly in Shaw's "Preface, Mainly About Myself". A telling mistake in the "Preface" is the misunderstanding of the word "capital" in the periphrasis "capital of the world" (2022a, 12). Ojetti translates it as "il capitale": a masculine noun in Italian when related to the economic field and to Marxist doctrines. As a matter of fact, however, the word refers to London as the British capital, so that the Italian translation should have been "la capitale", as the feminine form of the noun (13). This is in fact a crucial point and could only be interpreted correctly by mastering the historical and cultural episteme in which the play was composed, with the awareness that London was a major cultureme encompassing a myriad of other culturemes in late-Victorian literature. Though far from impeccable, Ojetti's translation has evident qualities. For instance, it manages to convey Shaw's argumentative tone while also proving rather effective for theatrical performance. With some stage adaptations by Luigi Lunari, Ojetti's text was in fact chosen for the play's production at the Piccolo Teatro in Milan in 1975-76 and the following season. A comparison with subsequent translations – Maurizio Sarti's *Le case del vedovo* (1966), often betraying the influence of Agresti's version, and Leonardo Bragaglia's *Le case del vedovo* (1974, reprinted in 1984), specifically meant for the stage (Bragaglia was an actor and director) – only confirm the quality of Ojetti's text.[2]

The first detail one notices in all these works is that the title is invariably mistranslated as *Le case del vedovo* (literally, *The Widower's Houses*). The word "vedovo" (widower) instead of "vedovi" (widowers) is the sole option in all past Italian texts and this posits at least two issues. Not only does it signal grammatical imprecision, but also ignorance of Shaw's implications, since the title in fact rewrites the Gospel According to Mark (14,38-40), where Jesus warns against the scribes, whose hypocrisy and greed are the ruin of poor widows:

> 38 In His teaching Jesus also said, 'Watch out for the scribes. They like to walk around in long robes, to receive greetings in the marketplaces, 39 and to have the chief seats in the synagogues and the places of honour at banquets. 40 They defraud widows of their houses, and for a show make lengthy prayers. These men will receive greater condemnation'.[3]

[2] For further details on the history of the Italian translations of *Widowers' Houses*, see Boselli 2011, 101-02; Shaw 2022b, 61-62.

[3] The episode is also told in Luke 20,45-47.

Shaw mentions this Biblical reference in the "Preface" to *Plays Unpleasant* (2022a, 18). Yet he does not explain that Mark's verse 40 is paraphrased for ironic purposes: the substitution of the female ("widows") with the male ("widowers") introduces one of the main characters in the play: the slum landlord Sartorius, but also his slum-rent collector Lickcheese, another widower-father apparently. Far from being a destitute victim of society, Sartorius shares a scribe's holier-than-thou attitude in his exploitation of the London poor through which he perpetrates the evils of the Victorian economic and class systems.

By failing to convey the complex intertextuality of the original title, all previous Italian translations prevent a fuller perception of the play's antiphrastic and sarcastic subtexts, which allude to a decaying world. Considering that in *The Quintessence of Ibsenism* (1891) Shaw ponders how, in periods of epistemological transition, the Scriptures can no longer be taken as paradigmatic for moral conduct (1891, 62), the title of his first comedy, with its semantic subversion of the Biblical verses, depicts from the beginning the late-Victorian era as a time of decadence, governed by individualism and moral relativism. It is thus vital to preserve such ideological semantics starting from the peritext and translate the title as *Le case dei vedovi*.

As Shaw's first and somewhat tentative dramatic work, *Widowers' Houses* was certainly more influenced by contemporary literary models from the aesthetic and decadent period than his subsequent plays: a detail that should be borne in mind when setting out to translate it. Most conspicuously, the text intersects with the Wildean genre of the aesthetic comedy of manners in multiple ways, so that Wilde himself recognized similarities between *Lady Windermere's Fan* (1892), *A Woman of No Importance* (1893), and *Widowers' Houses* in an 1893 letter to Shaw (Wilde 1962, 339). Though ultimately tragicomic, Shaw's play presents the witty tones, high-society setting, and shallow, often preposterous sophistication of Wildean drama, and these features should be prioritized in the translation process. Like Wilde's comedies, *Widowers' Houses* stages the efforts of some individuals to become part of *la crème de la crème* or, in any case, to improve one's social position. The characters' actions to reach status and affluence emerge as grotesque, vulgar, and unscrupulous, as is typical of a declining society, whose members are portrayed as symbols and caricatures of degradation and lack of morality (Shaw 2019, 85-87). In other words, the characters in *Widowers' Houses* may be taken as embodiments of the constitutive culturemes of the transnational poetics of decadence, which is shared by source and target texts, though sometimes pertaining more to the former than the latter. This raises specific questions that will be addressed for each case study here examined. The culturemes taken as case studies are the slums, Cockney English and other decadent sociolects, the decadent hero, and the New Woman. They may encompass less perspicuous culturemes, also considered in the discussion that follows.

Two culturemes in the play are notably connected with the character of Lickcheese, the slum-rent collector who represents the most dramatic social aspects of his times. A proletarian climbing his way out of poverty, he initially denounces the consequences of savage capitalism on the lower classes, but then an unexpected turn of events transforms him into a tragicomic self-made man, coarsely refined, who has introjected the worst capitalist strategies and mannerisms. He is most directly associated with the cultureme of the slums – one of the most recognizable symbols of *fin de siècle* London. Several lines in *Widowers' Houses* are devoted to the awful living conditions in the imaginary London rookery of Robbin's Row, with dire descriptions of both the exploited and the exploiters, whose degradation is presented as a consequence of capitalist malpractices with which all social classes collude.

The late-Victorian slum cultureme is very culture-specific. The Italian language has no corresponding term for "slum" (the word always appears in the singular in *Widowers' Houses*)

or "slums", but rather offers a variety of options: *baraccopoli* (a neighbourhood of shacks), *quartieri poveri/quartieri popolari* (poor/popular neighbourhoods), and *tuguri* (small and squalid dwellings). Unlike the English lexeme, however, these tend to designate suburban, or in any case not metropolitan, areas or types of dwellings. There was a metropolitan housing problem across Europe at the *fin de siècle* and indeed Italy faced analogous issues than Britain, although they are not so well-known outside Italian culture.[4] It is therefore within Italian history, and urban history in particular, that the corresponding cultureme for "slums" can be found. This is the Italian lexeme *bassifondi*, a slightly old-fashioned word defining the poor, squalid, and often criminal neighbourhoods of historical city centres, consisting of close-knit habitations, with little or no sanitary facilities, where people used to live in poverty and promiscuity. This meaning of *bassifondi* was in use in Italy throughout the 1970s and even beyond, although it originated at the *fin de siècle*. The term is a compound of the noun *fondi*, i.e., "seabeds", and the adjective *bassi*, i.e., "shallow", but also "low", and originally indicated "shallow seabeds", though in the early 1870s the word began to define the lowest social strata.[5] It soon came to include the dilapidated neighbourhoods where the urban proletariat lived, and even their houses.[6] *Bassifondi* thus appears as the word coming closest to *slum*, especially for historical reasons.

Another cultureme associated with Lickcheese is Cockney English. Cockney, which will famously become a central cultureme in *Pygmalion* (1913), is not yet the object of any reforming action in *Widowers' Houses* but indicates urban social decadence. In the play, Shaw draws attention to contemporary sociolects, which he employs to express his characters' foibles as reflections of an overarching epistemic corruption. It is possible to view Cockney as the most conspicuous of these linguistic variants, which include Sartorius' economic and bureaucratic language, finally aiming at defrauding his tenants, or also Blanche's sudden changes of register depending on her moods, which turn her into the decadent type of the hysterical woman, an embodiment of human degeneration. Even within such a composite linguistic patchwork, however, Lickcheese's English is the variety most patently associated with the notion of decadence, particularly meant as a deviation from the norms of social propriety at various levels. This is an idea that pertains to the interpretation of decadence at the *fin de siècle* and finds original formulations in Max Nordau's *Degeneration*, for example when the author draws a distinction between the "sane genius" and the "gifted degenerate":

> It is this which enables the well-informed to distinguish at the first glance between the sane genius, and the highly, or even the most highly, gifted degenerate. Take from the former the special capacity through which he becomes a genius, and there still remains a capable, often conspicuously intelligent, clever, moral, and judicious man, who will hold his ground with propriety in our social mechanism. Let the same be tried in the case of a degenerate, and there remains only a criminal or madman, for whom healthy humanity can find no use. (1913, 23)[7]

Naturally enough, translating such a crucial aspect of the text as Cockney – a sociolect and minority language, but principally a dialect – poses serious challenges, especially when Italian

[4] Two *fin de siècle* classics denounced the dramatic housing conditions in the centres of Florence and Naples respectively: Jarro's *Firenze sotterranea. Appunti, Ricordi, Descrizioni, Bozzetti* (1881) and Matilde Serao's *Il ventre di Napoli* (1884). On the topic, see also Zucconi 2022.

[5] See "bassofondo" in Battaglia 1961.

[6] See "bassofondo" in Cortelazzo and Zolli 1999.

[7] Astute present-day considerations on the connection between decadence and social impropriety are made in Sheehan 2013, 60-62, 82-83, and 121; Sachs 2019, 256-57.

is the target language. Not only is Italian famous for its great linguistic diversity (see Boula de Mareüil *et al.*, 2021) – a fact that makes it difficult to privilege one dialect over another when translating into the language – but none of these varieties possesses the connotations and implications of Cockney. Italian dialects are, in fact, characterized as peripheral and regional, rather than metropolitan. That is why in the translation of Lickcheese's speeches phonetic non-normativity, which would necessarily suggest regionality, has been avoided, whereas grammatical non-normativity has been privileged over non-standard pronunciation, since it can more easily sound pan-Italian. It can, moreover, suggest lack of education. A typical line Shaw gives to Lickcheese is the following:

LICKCHEESE. I' bin gittin on a little since I saw you last. (Shaw 2022b, 160)

In this case, the apostrophe signals the ungrammatical absence of the auxiliary verb, while the verb "bin gittin" indicates non-standard pronunciation through spelling, but also grammar imprecision. So many deviations from the linguistic norm in three words are difficult to maintain in Italian due to the strong regional connotation they would assume. That is why the pan-Italian ungrammatical form of the double dative – "vi pare […] a voi" – has been added and so has the informal, and slightly rude, interrogative interjection "eh?", used for question tags in colloquial situations all over the country:

LICKCHEESE. Ho fatto un sacco di strada da quando ci siamo visti l'ultima volta, non vi pare anche a voi, eh? (161)

In another example from the source text, the "h" in "have" has been dropped to suggest silent pronunciation: one of the most distinguishing Cockney traits:

LICKCHEESE […] You and me is too much of a pair for me to take anything you say in bad part, Sartorius. Ave a cigar? (160)

Again, the choice in the target language has been that of moving closer to standard forms, although efforts have been made to keep the imagery and idioms of the original. Lickcheese's Cockney has been rendered through the informal retort "siamo troppo della stessa pasta", which literally means "to be (made) of the same dough" and semantically corresponds to the English idiom "to be cut from the same cloth". Not only does the sentence bring to the fore the word "pasta", possibly the most recognizable Italian cultureme, indicating the most popular food in the country, especially among the labouring classes, but the sentence "siamo troppo dellastessa pasta" is also elliptical, hence ungrammatical, because the past participle *fatti* (i.e., made) is missing. The correct form should be in fact: *siamo fatti troppo della stessa pasta*. On account of these considerations, Lickcheese's line in Italian sounds too informal to be addressed to a socially superior person, exactly as happens in the source text. The statement is accompanied by another informal, even rude, offer ("Sigaro?"), which is also elliptical, for it does not include any verb or introductory form of politeness:

LICKCHEESE […] Sartorius, noi due siamo troppo della stessa pasta perché me la prenda per ogni minima cosa che mi dite. Sigaro? (161)

In another passage from the source text, the words "secretary", "literary", and "persuade" are mispronounced, while "help" is considered a countable noun:

LICKCHEESE. […] You remember Mr Cokane? he does a little business for me now as a friend, and gives me a help with my correspondence: sekketerry we call it. Ive no litery style, and thats the truth; so Mr Cokane kindly puts it into my letters and draft prospect uses and advertisements and the like. Dont you, Cokane? Of course you do: why shouldnt you? He's been helping me to pursuade his old friend, Dr Trench, about the matter we were speaking of. (172)

In this case as well, the Italian translation has brought the non-standard aspects of language to a grammatical level, even with the addition of some lexical adjustments:

LICKCHEESE. […] Vi ricordate del signor Cokane? Adesso mi sbriga qualche faccenda, da amico, e mi dà una mano con la corrispondenza. Un segretario, così diciamo noi. Non ho fatto le scuole alte io, sono sincero, e così il signor Cokane condisce le mie lettere con un po' di stile e mi butta giù prospetti e inserzioni e quelle robe là. Giusto Cokane? E perché no? Mi sta aiutando a convincere il suo vecchio amico, il dottor Trench, a fare quella roba là che abbiamo detto. (173)

As anticipated, the pleonastic forms as *quelle robe là* (literally, "those things there") and *quella roba là* (literally, "that thing/stuff there") are incorrect, but also informal. Besides, more emphasis than in the source text has been put on hyperonyms rather than hyponyms to underline the character's incapacity to master specific vocabulary – a fact evidencing his alienation from the highest strata of society. All in all, the lack of sophistication and culture in Lickcheese's lines is not lost, although the Italian text is less geographically charged.

According to Linda Dowling's classic argument, in British culture (though not only) decadence of language, expressed either by an excess or a defect of sophistication, was a form of social degeneration. Dowling contends that decadent literary language reproduced the model of dead languages – Latin in particular – often based on over-sophisticated texts, complex in syntax and reliant on artifice and preciosity. On the other hand, literary language at the *fin de siècle* was also based on contemporary idiomatic speech, for example by imitating such popular forms as music-hall songs, so that the decadent literary model was a peculiar "Oxford-cum-Cockney" language (1986, 230-38). In Lickcheese the two tendencies co-exist, for the uncouthness of his Cockney speech is associated with attempts at embellishing his sentences with figurative language, in unintentional parodies of aesthetic prose. Lickcheese's use of vocabulary, grammar, and rhetorical forms that deviate from the norm, either for an excess or a lack of sophistication, implicates his inability to respect personal, social, and political boundaries. In Victorian terms, his linguistic non-normativity reflects decadence, as already explained. An even more eloquent example of this is offered by the following lines, in which Lickcheese's moral degradation transpires from the high register of his competent, though fraudulent, use of legalese (as in: "compensated to the tune of double the present valuation, with the cost of the improvements thrown in"), but also from colloquial expressions ("to put it short", "Now's your time") and figurative speech taken from the street ("to play old Harry", "that cock wont fight any longer"):

LICKCHEESE. […] Theres no doubt that the Vestries has legal powers to play old Harry with slum properties […]. That didnt matter in the good old times, because the Vestries used to be us ourselves. Nobody ever knew a word about the election; and we used to get ten of us into a room and elect one another, and do what we liked. Well, that cock wont fight any longer; and, to put it short, the game is up for men in the position of you and Mr Sartorius. My advice to you is, take the present chance of getting out of it. Spend a little money on the block at the Cribbs Market end: enough to make it look like a model dwelling, you know; and let the other block to me on fair terms for a depot of the North Thames Iced Mutton Company. […] youll be compensated to the tune of double the present valuation, with the cost of the improvements thrown in. […]. (Shaw 2022b, 176)

The passage has been translated very literally as far as vocabulary and register are concerned, while special effort has been paid to find corresponding Italian idioms. Accordingly, "to play old Harry" has been translated as "fare un pandemonio", since both phrases describe chaotic situations in which the devil ("old Harry" and "demonio") has had a part. Similarly, "that cock wont fight any longer" has been translated with "non siamo più i galli nel pollaio", in which the allusion to cock fighting gets lost, and yet the basic semantic field ("galli" is the Italian for "roosters") and the general meaning of losing one's supremacy ("essere/fare il gallo nel pollaio" means to be the leader in a situation) are both kept:

LICKCHEESE. […] Il Consiglio Parrocchiale – non c'è dubbio – ha il potere legale di fare un pandemonio con quelle baracche dei bassifondi […]. Questo non ci faceva paura finché il Consiglio eravamo noi. Nessuno sapeva un'acca delle elezioni e noi ci chiudevamo in dieci in una stanza e ci votavamo tra di noi e facevamo come ci pareva. Beh, adesso non siamo più i galli nel pollaio e, per farla breve, per persone come voi e il signor Sartorius ora la partita è finita. Il mio consiglio è di prendere al balzo quest'occasione per tirarvene fuori del tutto. Spendete un po' di soldi per quell'isolato in fondo a Cribbs Market, quanto basta per dargli l'aria di area residenziale coi fiocchi – non so se mi spiego – e affittatemi l'altro isolato a me come magazzino per la Compagnia del Montone Congelato del Tamigi Settentrionale. […] venite risarciti per qualcosa come il doppio del valore attuale, inclusi i costi dei restauri […]. (177)

The decadence of language in *Widowers' Houses* is also articulated through the cultureme of Francophilia in the character of Cokane. A stereotypical decadent male subject, and at the same time a parody of the type, Cokane is a pedantic, *soi-disant* man of the world who prides himself on belonging to high society, from which he is in fact excluded. His idiolect characterizes him as a decadent figure: the linguistic tendency towards French is evident in his middle name, suggestive of some obscure Norman origins, though this suggestion is overshadowed by the nickname "Billy" (which he abhors), and the unedifying last name, whose pronunciation alludes to typical decadent addictions. Most notable is however the way that Cokane intersperses his speech with French vocabulary, for example, "négligé" [sic], "en règle", "cherchez la femme", "dégagé", or the sentence "Je n'envois pas la nécessité", all of which he utilizes for sophistication's sake out of context, while talking about trivial topics with his best friend Henry Trench. In a meta- and pragma-linguistic moment, Trench even retorts "[s]hut up […]. Or at least speak some language you understand" (Shaw 2022b, 178). Such a penchant for French, even in its parodic undertones, is a cultureme shared by European decadence at large, and presents no great challenge in translation praxis. It is, in fact, one of those exemplary cases of transcultural culturemes most representative of cosmopolitan decadence, with its tendency of multilingualism. In both British and Italian cultures, French was, and partly still is, the stereotypical language of decadence and hyper-refinement, of the poses and mannerisms of aesthetes, dandies, and *poètes maudits*. These considerations are one more reason to leave those French words untranslated in the Italian text. Furthermore, the French lexis employed by Shaw for his character is quite intelligible to Italian readers and audiences, possibly even more than to English speakers, and this is a good reason not to translate it from the original text.

The decadence of society surfaces in the play through personal and familial relations as well. This phenomenon centres on the character of Sartorius, whose socio-economic mobility is correlated to the exploitation of all the people he encounters on his life path, including his own daughter, whose marriage is another one of his well-plotted schemes. Yet Blanche is no victim; she is in many ways an embodiment of the New Woman (see Powell 1998) – a *fin de siècle* cultureme, more pertinent to Britain than Italy, though identifiable in both cultures. Stubborn and independent, not gender-conforming in Victorian terms, Blanche is aggressive

and strong, both physically and psychologically. She symbolizes Shaw's idea of a superwoman born in a decadent era to re-build the future of humanity, according to evident Nietzschean paradigms. More to the point, she is an embodiment of Shaw's "life force", which he recognizes in all those who constantly aim at improving themselves (Lawrence 1972, 139-46).

Blanche's name, like Cokane's, appears antiphrastic. "Blanche" – another item in the pervasive French vocabulary of *Widowers' Houses* – alludes to the refinement associated with French culture at the *fin de siècle*, though ironically so, for the character cannot be associated with any candour or whiteness of the soul and has little of the *naiveté* one would expect from a young woman of her class and affluence. The common Latin roots of Italian and French, moreover, allow for an even fuller understanding of both the literal meaning and the connotation of the word "Blanche" in the target text, rather than in English. Hence, whereas the New Woman cultureme exemplified by the character is less direct and recognizable in Italian, the antiphrastic nature of Blanche's name may strike a stronger chord there, even within a culture in which the New Woman type was, and still is, less popular than in the Victorian *fin de siècle*.

Blanche most clearly comes out as a New Woman in the last act, when she catches Trench alone in the drawing room and wins him over with her seductive strategies. Her supremacy in terms of vitality, wit, and cunning is patent in the long monologue she delivers to her fiancé, part of which is here reported:

> BLANCHE. […] [*She sits down, and softens her tone a little as she affects to pity him*]. Well, let me tell you that you cut a poor figure, a very, very poor figure, Harry. […]. And you, too, a gentleman! so highly connected! with such distinguished relations! so particular as to where your money comes from! I wonder at you. I really wonder at you. I should have thought that if your fine family gave you nothing else, it might at least have given you some sense of personal dignity. Perhaps you think you look dignified at present: eh? [*No reply*]. Well, I can assure you that you dont: you look most ridiculous – as foolish as a man could look – you dont know what to say; and you dont know what to do. But after all, I really dont see what any one could say in defence of such conduct. [*He looks straight in front of him, and purses up his lips as if whistling. This annoys her; and she becomes affectedly polite*]. I am afraid I am in your way, Dr Trench. [*She rises*]. I shall not intrude on you any longer. You seem so perfectly at home that I need make no apology for leaving you to yourself. [*She makes a feint of going to the door; but he does not budge; and she returns and comes behind his chair*]. Harry. [*He does not turn. She comes a step nearer*]. Harry: I want you to answer me a question. [*Earnestly, stooping over him*] Look me in the face. [*No reply*]. Do you hear? [*Seizing his cheeks and twisting his head round*] Look-me-in-the-face. [*He shuts his eyes tight and grins. She suddenly kneels down beside him with her breast against his shoulder*]. Harry: what were you doing with my photograph just now, when you thought you were alone? [*He opens his eyes: they are full of delight. She flings her arms around him, and crushes him in an ecstatic embrace as she adds, with furious tenderness*] How dare you touch anything belonging to me? (Shaw 2022b, 184, 186)

The New Woman cultureme emerges through Blanche's physical, sexual, and social boldness, which distances her from normative Victorian femininity while assimilating her to a model of rampant masculinity, muscular and resourceful. She is gender-hegemonic in the couple, as reflected throughout the passage, and most evidently in such details as her use of the imperative mode "Look me in the face". This appears even more domineering when she articulates single words – "Look-me-in-the-face" – as if dealing with a child. In the previous lines, Blanche is rude and intimidating ("Harry: I want you to answer me a question") and offensive and emasculating ("you look most ridiculous – as foolish as a man could look – you dont know what to say; and you dont know what to do"). All these statements reverse contemporary gender roles, consequently suggesting the decay of established beliefs and institutions. Average theatregoers would recognize the effects of moral decadence in such female behaviour.

Given the relative rarity of the New Woman cultureme in Italian culture, the choice in the target text has been that of expressing it as directedly as possible, thus espousing Lawrence Venuti's idea on the validity of foreignizing in cases of cultural differences (2008, 15-16). Keeping this approach in mind, the Italian translation is the following:

BLANCHE. […] [*Si siede e ammorbidisce un po' i toni, mentre finge di compatirlo*]. Beh, lasciami dire che fai una figura meschina, una figura molto, molto meschina, Harry. […]. E, anche tu, un gentiluomo! con amicizie ai piani alti! con parenti così importanti! così intransigente sulla provenienza dei suoi soldi! Mi meraviglio di te. Davvero, mi meraviglio di te. Visto che la tua buona famiglia non ti ha dato nulla, pensavo che avrebbe potuto darti almeno un po' di dignità personale. Credi forse di mostrare un po' di dignità in questo momento, eh? [*Nessuna risposta*]. Beh, ti assicuro di no. Hai un aspetto che va ben oltre il ridicolo: sembri più stupido di quanto sia umanamente possibile. Non sai che rispondere e non sai che fare. Ma, dopo tutto, non vedo proprio che si potrebbe rispondere per giustificare un comportamento come il tuo. [*Trench guarda dritto davanti a sé e stringe le labbra come per fischiare. Blanche appare irritata, poi si fa gentile ma in maniera affettata*]. Mi dispiace sbarrarvi la strada, dottor Trench. [*Si alza*]. Non vi disturberò più. Sembrate così a vostro agio che non mi devo scusare se vi lascio da solo. [*Fa per andare verso la porta, ma lui non si muove. Lei torna indietro e si ferma dietro alla sedia di lui*]. Harry. [*Trench non si gira. Blanche si avvicina ancora un passo*]. Harry: voglio che tu mi risponda a una domanda. [*Chinandosi seria su di lui*] Guardami in faccia. [*Nessuna risposta*]. Mi senti? [*Afferrandogli le guance e voltandogli il viso*]. Guar-da-mi-in-fac-cia. [*Trench serra gli occhi e fa una smorfia. D'un tratto lei gli si inginocchia accanto, toccandogli la spalla con il seno*]. Harry, che stavi facendo con la mia foto, appena un attimo fa, quando pensavi di essere solo? [*Trench apre gli occhi. Ha uno sguardo pienamente appagato. Lei lo circonda con le braccia, stringendolo in un abbraccio estatico, mentre aggiunge, con rabbia mista a tenerezza*]. Come osi toccare quello che è mio? (Shaw 2022b, 185, 187)

The translation is quite literal, according to Venuti's approach, even though some peculiarities of the Italian language manage to emphasize the implications of the New Woman cultureme. The reference is to the sentence "Look-me-in-the-face", in which single words are emphasized and which has been translated as "Guar-da-mi-in-fac-cia". Since the Italian language is very poor in monosyllabic lexis, it has been necessary to divide polysyllabic words into syllables. Syllable division is one of the earliest competencies taught to schoolchildren in Italy, so that the line sounds even more forceful than the original in its patronizing, imperious tones and lays further emphasis on Blanche as a New Woman, who presents herself as a teacher of basic education to the male subject. By doing so, the lesser relevance of the New Woman cultureme in Italian culture is compensated by the connotations that such a pedagogic activity as syllable division brings with it.

This final case study, like the ones previously analysed, shows how decadent culturemes can provide interesting and unusual perspectives to approach the translation of decadent texts. There is little doubt that the act of identifying and studying decadent culturemes not only pertains to the field of cultural studies but extends to the osmotic exchanges between disciplines and that such exchanges include translation studies. Even when the presence of certain decadent culturemes finds oblique and very partial correspondences in the target culture – as happens with Cockney in *Widowers' Houses* – the application of culturemes to translation practice may disclose original procedures and solutions for works belonging to decadence, a period in which themes, tropes, symbols, and imagery were shared transnationally. Applying culturemes to decadent literature helps to throw new light at oblique angles on both source and target texts, thus pointing at diverse ways to face translation issues.

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Black Feathers and Poison Wine Decadent Aesthetics in Davíð Stefánsson's Poetry*

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Abstract

Davíð Stefánsson (1895-1964) is a poet whose work marks a turning point in early twentieth-century Icelandic literature. This essay offers five new English translations from his first collection *Black Feathers* (*Svartar Fjaðrir*,1919) and introduces a new decadent perspective. Decadence is widely regarded as flourishing in emergent modern societies, but, as this essay shows, its influence extended beyond western Europe. Written in a remote place, Stefánsson's decadence speaks to an aesthetic of emptiness and atemporality. These poems broaden our conception of decadence and evidence a rich cultural hybridity, showing the influence of various traditions including symbolism, the Gothic, folk-songs, and decadence.

Keywords: Davíð Stefánsson, Icelandic Literature, Nordic Decadence, Poetry, Translation

A remote island in the North Atlantic Ocean, with more sheep than people, is not an obvious place to find decadence. The influence of European literature found its way up north, and even though there was a "strong urge to participate in European trends" in Scandinavia as Pirjo Lyytikäinen notes, "decadence was problematic because Nordic countries, with few metropolitan cities and [a] mostly rural population, did not provide a suitable milieu for decadent culture" (2021, 209). These "younger" nations were not comparable with the declining "older" nations of western Europe with their corrupted metropolises and cultural degeneration. This is the view put forward by Jón Thoroddsen in the first full-length novel to be published in Iceland, *Boy and a Girl* (*Piltur og Stúlka*), a story about the tension between ur-

* All the quotations from Baudelaire and Nietzsche are from English translations.

ban and rural communities, that presents nature and the countryside with its pure and simple values as essentially Icelandic and the city as a place of transformation and change, corrupted by Danish influence (Rögnvaldsdóttir 2008, 5-6). Thoroddsen's "city" was not a city by European standards; it was nothing like Charles Baudelaire's Paris or Oscar Wilde's London with their gaslit streets and bustling crowds. In 1850, Iceland had a population of 59,580 people, scattered around the coastline, fighting short days and hunger in the winter, and living in a feudal system under Danish rule. Iceland was a Danish colony until 1918, and monopoly, remoteness, and hard living conditions rendered the population small as well as inaccessible to foreign influence and development for a long time. In an article about Reykjavík in the early 19th century, Agnes Siggerður Arnórsdóttir sums this up: "For ten centuries there were no villages or towns in Iceland – then the nineteenth century arrived. The inhabited areas started to change though extremely slowly".[1]

By 1850, the same year *Boy and a Girl* was published, Reykjavík's population was 1,149 and about half were working class (Gunnarsdóttir 2018, 10). Around this time a middle class was forming, but as with other developments it was happening very slowly. Iceland was not expanding in the same way as other Nordic countries; there were "forty fully educated craftsmen" living in the city in 1850, and few of each profession (Ragnarsdóttir 2015, 6). By 1901, the population of Iceland was 78,000, of which 6,600 lived in Reykjavík. By contrast, the population of Denmark was 2,450,000, and in Copenhagen the population was more than 450,000 (Schriver 2020).

This delay in development in comparison with other European countries had an impact on the emergence of literary movements in Iceland. Romanticism did not emerge in Iceland until about the 1830s and even then "some critics have even claimed that Icelandic romanticism barely deserve[d] its name" (Óskarsson 2006, 252). Critics have found it difficult to connect Icelandic authors writing between 1830-82 to European Romanticism and Icelandic poets did not apply the term to their own writing. The term "romanticism" first appeared in the context of literary history and was not usually applied to Icelandic literature (*ibidem*). Þórir Óskarsson explains that Icelandic culture was "ill-prepared" for changes and offers the example: "There was no literary infrastructure to speak of" in the early 19th century and practising writers did not have writing as their primary profession; they earned their living in other ways. There were few opportunities and "hardly any public forum for literary discussion, given the lack of media and educational institutions, not to mention the critics and teachers capable of generating debate" (254-255).

It was not until after the turn of the century, therefore, that the influence of decadent writers began to be felt in Iceland. Guðni Elísson locates decadence in Iceland in the 1910s, in "the final phase of Icelandic neoromanticism" with the emergence of the figure of the anti-hero, "Dionysian longings", "love of pain", and "fallen women" (2006, 351-52). These themes were uncommon or at least new to Icelandic poetry and where they met with traditional folklore and poetics, such as ghost stories and fairy-tales, they created a new realm of freedom for writers. "Nordic authors experimented with decadence and developed new varieties of it", Lyytikäinen argues, where they "investigated mythic and historical allegories of decay; and explored the connections between primitivism and decadence" (Lyytikäinen 2021, 209). Similarly in Iceland, the geographical and cultural contexts demanded that writers found decadent themes in wildness, nature, and rural life.

[1] Orig. Arnórsdóttir 1984, 7: "Í tíu aldir voru engin þorp og bær á Íslandi – svo kom nítjánda öldin. Byggðin fór að breytast en ofur hægt". Unless otherwise stated all translations are mine.

1. Black Feathers

Davíð Stefánsson was an Icelandic poet and writer, born in Fagriskógur, a farm in North Iceland in 1895.[2] He was a poet who borrowed from the traditions of folklore, Romanticism, symbolism, the Gothic, and decadence and his work is canonical in Icelandic literary history. At the beginning of his career, Davíð is a Neo-romantic poet, but later on he writes in a more social-realist vein, though he never completely abandons his connections to folklore, folk-songs, and fairy tales with their darker themes of death and physical love/lust. He makes his début with the collection *Black Feathers* (*Svartar Fjaðrir*, 1919) which although written in a traditional lyrical style, using rhyme and alliteration, brought many new perspectives to the general Icelandic reader.

The five poems translated into English for the first time here are from *Black Feathers* which was praised for its exciting and original style. It is a substantial volume of poetry, one hundred and fifty-eight pages long, and includes both very short poems of only a few lines and poems of up to six pages. The poems selected for this article are chosen specifically for their style and subject matter. They demonstrate tendencies we find in decadent poetry and are notably different from other poems in the collection. They are clustered together in the latter half of the collection, beginning with the poem "Portrait of a Woman" ("Kvenlýsing") which is facing a poem (not included here) called "Að skýjabaki" (Behind Clouds), which is short and statement-like, explaining that the sun is behind clouds only to mourn how darkness is loved amongst humans. This poem is followed by "Cut Wings" ("Klipptir vængir"), "Abba-labba-lá", and "Delirium" ("Óráð"). "Proud are the Maidens" ("Stoltar eru meyjarnar") concludes the collection.

The poems between "Delirium" and "Proud are the Maidens" deal with unobtainable desires and loss of innocence and childhood; they explore the temptation of physical desires and vanity and deploy various Christian motifs. "Bathsheba" ("Batseba"), for example, is about the biblical character of the same name, and the longer, denser poem called "Bartholomeus' Night" ("Barthólómeusar nóttin") is about the troubles of the Huguenots in Paris, where love for the good and pure is lost to conflict and violence, ending with the image of the river Seine running red with blood. Though desire is a preoccupation throughout the collection, the cluster of poems in the latter half strikes a different tone. The first half of the collection opens hopefully with the figure of the mother, and poems are about the excitement for love as well as a belief in beauty and nature.[3] This article focuses on selected poems in the latter half. Davíð's treatment of the themes of masochistic sexual fantasy, dark beauty, and death, mixed with religion and powerful descriptions of women that resemble the decadent femme fatale, constitute, as I aim to show, a new feature of Icelandic lyric poetry at the time.

The five poems under discussion here pose certain challenges in translation.[4] Davíð played with sound very consciously, creating echoes with half-rhymes and repetitions, careful alliteration, and line breaks. In the translations presented here, the aim has been to retain repetitions, rhythm, and sound over the structure of the traditional end-rhymes. This focus emphasises the imagery of the poems and the way in which Davíð's vivid imagination is conveyed, and the tensions and energy that rise to a climax. In the translations there are, however, still half- and

[2] I have chosen to follow Icelandic convention in referring to the author by his first name, Davíð, in the text.

[3] Unless otherwise stated, all translations from Icelandic sources and of Davíð's poetry are my own.

[4] I would like to thank Maura Dooley and Richard Scott for all their advice, time, and generous support on the translations of these poems.

in-rhymes as well as line-breaks, which are retained as far as the syntax allows, with the exception of the poem "Portrait of a Woman" where "barren" is placed in the last line alongside "husk". These translations aim to give insight into Davíð's lyrical and imaginative talent and open a dialogue around his treatment of decadent themes and images.

There were controversies about certain poems in the collection dealing with the themes of betrayal, vanity and lust, such as "Proud are the Maidens", "The Nun" ("Nunnan"), and "Delirium", the latter which was the most criticised of them.[5] Even so, the collection as a whole received great praise and one review which appeared in *Morgunblaðið* in December 1919 even described Davíð as "one of the few, that is born a poet".[6] The book quickly sold out and within a few weeks the poet became nationally renowned. Although Davíð had published some poems in magazines prior to this publication, he now reached a wider audience than his contemporaries, and he reached them in new ways.[7] His readers were able to explore new areas, some of them which were considered too private or a taboo, including sexual fantasies, exciting dreamscapes, and melancholy, alongside lust, and female fury as well as female passion. Literary scholars have noted especially that the principal innovation of Davíð's collection is "the treatment of the erotic".[8] Sveinn Skorri Höskuldsson emphasises that "sensuality, delight and lust of physical, temporal love had never been glorified in a similar way".[9]

Although it was later praised, the eroticism of Davíð's verse appalled many readers when the collection was first published. On the poet's sixtieth birthday, Jóhannes Jónasson úr Kötlum, an acclaimed writer and parliamentary member, described how Davíð's "flight on 'black feathers' " and the flame that Davíð brought to Icelandic poetry was "exactly the tone that our life-thirsty young Iceland needed".[10] Jóhannes' comment had political resonance. A year before the publication of *Black Feathers*, in 1918, Iceland had gained sovereignty from Denmark, marking an end to its period of being a colony, province, and dependent country since the 14th century (Hálfdanarson 2015). This was a milestone for the island which would only see complete independence in 1944. The fight for independence and change was a prominent

[5] "The Nun" is another interesting poem for this context, in which a nun, described as small, beautiful and stupid, is tempted by the life outside the convent and tries to climb out when the abbess is sleeping. The poem begins and ends with the statement "Meyjum aðeins mátt þú unna, / menn átt þú að hata. / Boðorðin átt þú öll að kunna / en eðli þínu glata. / – Veslings nunna" which translated without the rhyme reads: "Maidens you are only allowed to care for / men you should hate. / The commandments you shall know by heart / but lose your nature. / – Poor nun".

[6] Orig. *Morgunblaðið* 1919, 3: "einn af þeim fáu, sem er fæddur skáld".

[7] Davíð's first attempt to get poems published was met with some reluctance. In the beginning of the year 1916 Davíð's friend Sigurður Nordal reached out to the magazines *Eimreiðin* and *Iðunn*, which he had published in before, in order to get Davíð's poetry in print but was met with the response that it was "hardly poetry" and could be "composed better" (Olgeirsson 2007, 68-91). In September 1916 someone did however change their mind and Davíð published five poems in the magazine *Eimreiðin,* then as an unknown author. They were grouped together over three pages of the issue with the header, "A Few Poems" (*Nokkur kvæði*) which would all later be included in *Black Feathers* in a slightly changed form. In October the same year he published two more poems in the magazine *Iðunn*, which were also republished in the collection, one of which is *Mamma ætlar að sofna*, the first poem in the book. In 1917 his poems were included in both the January and the April issue of *Iðunn* which would also be included in his first collection. Three more poems from the collection were published in the 1919 January issue of *Iðun*, including also the poem "Abba-labba-lá". After this steady exposure there was quite some anticipation in the literary scene to see what he would do next (Olgeirsson 2007, 68-91).

[8] Orig. Olgeirsson 2007, 112: "meðferð hins erótíska".

[9] Orig. Höskuldsson 1995, 39: "munúð, unaður og losti líkamlegra, stundlegra ásta höfðu aldrei verið lofsunginð með áþekkum hætti".

[10] Orig. Jónasson 1955, 6: "flugið á sínum 'svörtu fjöðrum' ". The word used for "flame" in the original is "eldtunga" meaning both flame and "fire-tongue"; Orig. *ibidem*: "einmitt tónninn sem okkar lífsþyrsta Ísland vantaði".

theme in Icelandic Romanticism, where nationalism and idealism met in a new hope for a better way of living. The "life-thirst" to which Jóhannes refers was not only political. It signalled a welcome new energy and a shift away from the pessimism of "the generation of Icelanders growing up during the latter half of the nineteenth century" that felt or believed that "Iceland was a doomed country – doomed to huddle outside European culture" (Elísson 2006, 309). Davíð's intensity and strong voice were undoubtedly a reaction to the zeitgeist but the "life-thirst" of youth and his decadent aesthetics were also the result of his personal situation, that is experiencing often extreme conditions while serving his great passion for poetry and art such as dealing with illness which resulted in a delirium and a near-death experience at a young age, moving between different environments, the farm in the north, the capitol Reykjavík in the south, and city life in Copenhagen.

2. Reading and Translating Davíð: Themes and Context

Though Davíð's decadent tendencies and aesthetics were noticed at the time, readers had no language to describe them or examples to draw on for comparison. Older generations of writers and readers criticised his poems as "ugly and dark".[11] The poet Herdís Andrésdóttir (1858-1939) was one of the people who spoke against Davíð in verse. In a long poem that she wrote on "new poetry and verse", she claimed that in Davíð's poems there was "just betrayal and swindle", "a pitch-black winter night", "women on vice-roads", and "Satan doing soul hunting".[12] Herdís ended her poem-critique with three dramatic lines as advice to the young poet. Translated (without rhyme), her lines read: "If you desire to have a warm place in our hearts / throw off you the feathers black, / fly on swan wings bright".[13] Since the collection was popular among readers on the whole, most of them did not pay much attention to the "darker" poems and simply read on. Höskuldsson claims the reason for Davíð's popularity was the fact that even the lascivious and pessimistic tendencies were written "in simple and easily understood language using the tone from folk songs and dance music".[14] He further adds that these subjects must have been refreshing for a generation that had been in "intellectual shackles and moral chastity belts" (Höskuldsson 1995, 39-40) of the more traditional and heavily pastoral romantic poetry of the early 1800s in Iceland.[15]

Davíð's passion for life and fascination with dreams and lust derived from personal experience. He entered into a delirium through a near-death experience as a young teenager. At the end of 1911, when only sixteen years old, Davíð developed and suffered from pleuritis, became weak and was intermittently bed-bound for two years. In Friðrik G. Olgeirsson's biography, Davíð's condition is described as being so severe in the early months of 1913 that he would not have been able to survive had it not been for the love and attention of his family who carried him outside in good weather so he could breathe in "the clean and pure air of Eyjafjord which he holds in higher esteem than other air".[16] As Davíð could neither attend school nor meet his

[11] Orig. Olgeirsson 2007, 112: "ljót og myrk".

[12] Orig. Birgisdóttir 2017, n.p.: "Hjer sjerðu svik og pretti", "kolsvarta vetrarnótt", "konur á lastaleiðum", "satan á sálnaveiðum".

[13] Orig. Birgisdóttir 2017, n.p.: "Viljirðu eiga ítök hlý í okkar hjörtum, / fleygðu af þjer fjöðrum svörtum / fljúgðu á svanavængjum björtum."

[14] Orig. Höskuldsson 1995, 39: "á einföldu og auðskiljanlegu máli með tón frá þjóðvísu og danslagi".

[15] Orig. Höskuldsson 1995, 40: "vitsmunalegum herfjötrum og siðferilegri skírlífsbrynju".

[16] Orig. Olgeirsson 2007, 55: "hreina og tæra lofti Eyjafjarðar sem honum þykir taka öðru lofti fram".

peers, he did little else than read, mostly poetry, and dream of a future and freedom. He did not think he would survive his illness, and because of this he turned to writing, though his poems were not published until later. Olgeirsson comments that Davíð's illness shaped his poetics greatly and refers to a speech that Þórarinn Björnsson, a headmaster and educator, delivered in 1955, in which he describes Davíð's entrance into the world of poetry through sickness: " 'A teen so intelligent and sensitive can find it a fruitful occurrence, when the spitfire of youth and the cold breeze of death collide' ".[17]

Death, beauty, and desire are frequently juxtaposed in Davíð's work, together with illness, both physical and mental. "The force of desire is always seen as an accomplice of death and suffering", Lyytikäinen notes, because there is always the desire to do the impossible and escape "the lethal entanglement" of illness and death (2014, 94). In Davíð's poems, beauty plays a part in this process, and is frequently described as the victim of disorder or disease. "[B]eauty does not provide freedom from suffering", Lyytikäinen maintains; beauty both suffers at the hands of mundane reality and is the cause of suffering (91). In his poem "Cut Wings", the suffering of natural beauty is due to human material desire, while in "Proud are the Maidens" man suffers from woman's desire for artificial beauty. Lyytikäinen describes "nature contaminated by decadent forces" as an idea found in decadent literature of other Nordic countries (92). This is particularly fitting in relation to Icelandic literature, as Iceland is a place shaped by, and constantly interacting with, monumental natural forces.

After recovering from his illness in the autumn of 1915 Davíð left for Copenhagen. There, his dreams and desires for life began to materialise. He drank wine and spirits, learned Latin, saw *Hamlet* in the Royal Theatre, and joined an exclusive Icelandic poetry collective named Boðn, through which he quickly began gaining confidence in his writing (Guðmundsson 1965).[18] During a year spent in Denmark, Davíð developed a new lifestyle and seems to have written a great deal as he shared work regularly with the members of Boðn. They had meetings where, as one of its members attests, through "over drinking [they] performed a great swarm of poems".[19] At one meeting, Davíð provided most of the poems which were "mostly poems about love […] so hot everything seemed to be about to burn" (*ibidem*).[20]

When Davíð returned to Iceland in the spring of 1916, he was a changed man, in poetic style as well as manners and appearance. He purchased "goldbrace glasses, snuff boxes made of walrus-tusk and all of Gustaf Fröding's poetry books" before returning home to the rural north.[21] Upon his arrival, the news of his new look and demeanour spread through the fjord quickly. This shift from the exciting and vibrant world of Copenhagen to the quiet countryside was not easy for the poet. While living at his parents' farm that summer, he wrote to his friend Björn "to have no company with amusing girls for a whole summer… that is killing for both poets and versifiers".[22] Other letters demonstrate further frustration with his surroundings in Iceland. Three hours of sunlight in the high winter resulted in quiet indoor

[17] Orig. Olgeirsson 2007, 59: " 'Gáfuðum unglingi og næmgeðja getur reynst það frjótt, er saman lýstur funa æskunnar og kuldagusti dauðans' ".

[18] Boðn is a vessel. It is the name of the pot that carries the poetic-mead, the well of inspiration, in Norse mythology.

[19] Orig. Björnsson 1965, 23: "yfir drykkju var fluttur hinn mesti sægur af kvæðum".

[20] Orig. *ibidem*: "flest kvæðin um ástir og svo heit, að allt ætlaði að brenna".

[21] Orig. Olgeirsson 2007, 77: "gullspangargleraugu, neftóbaksdósir úr rostungstönn og allar ljóðabækur Gustafs Frödings".

[22] Orig. Olgeirsson 2007, 73: " 'að hafa ekkert samneyti við skemmtilegar stúlkur í heilt sumar…það er drepandi bæði fyrir skáld og hagyrðinga' ".

days "where some think of money, some about something else – but some think nothing at all", Davíð complained in a letter to a friend in 1917.[23]

Having experienced the exciting life of Copenhagen and then Reykjavík in 1916, Davíð found his rural return difficult. There is no doubt that this experience created the great contrasts in his work and person. He became known for his contradictory behaviour, passionate or dramatic at one moment and then completely serene or reasonable the next. He began to focus on the theme of restricted freedom. His poem "Cut Wings" illustrates the feeling of being robbed of flight:

"Cut Wings"

I flew towards sun and summer.
I sang for the cygnets and foals.
My song echoed off the cliffs.
The lake and the reeds smiled back.
– My wings were white.

I hovered out to the deep ocean,
sang a poem no one understood.
The cliffs stood silent and shrouded.
Nobody wanted to listen to me
but I heard them cry out:
White wings!
White wings!
The hut floor needs sweeping. –

One spring night a hunter
caught me in his trap,
kissed me on my white breast,
sliced my wings off.

When he got home that night
he gave his wife the wings;
with swan blood still on his hands
he slept fitfully on her breast.
– My wings were cut.

Down by the water no one listens
to the bloodied swan crying out,
and a woman alone with white wings
is still, and always, sweeping.

"Klipptir vængir"

Flaug ég móti sól og sumri.
Söng ég fyrir dalabörnin,
Söng minn björgin bergmáluðu.
Brosti við mér sefið, tjörnin.
– Vængir mínir voru hvítir.

Sveif ég út að sænum djúpa,
söng þar ljóð, sem enginn skildi.
Björgin voru hljóð og horfin.
Hlusta á mig enginn vildi.
En ég heyrðu ýmsa hrópa:
Hvítir vængir!
Hvítir vængir!
Kofagólfið þarf að sópa. –

Vorkvöld nokkurt veiðimaður
veiddi mig í snöru sína,
kyssti mig á hvíta brjóstið,
klippti af mér vængi mína.

Þegar heim hann kom að kvöldi
konu sinni vængi gaf hann;
með svanablóð á bringu og höndum
á brjóstum hennar illa svaf hann.
– Vængir mínir voru klipptir.

Enginn út við sæ því sinnir,
þó svanur blóði drifinn hrópi,
og kona ein með hvítum vængjum
kofagólfið alltaf sópi.

"Cut Wings" is written from the perspective of a swan and portrays great beauty being met with great violence. This is the only poem in Davíð's collection written from the perspective of an animal. He wrote about animals and mythical creatures and from the perspective of

[23] Orig. Olgeirsson 2007, 82: "sumir hugsa um peninga, sumir um eitthvað annað – ensumir ekki neitt".

historical figures, women and children mainly, but here the speaker is in the first person as the swan. The swan is in the sky to begin with, enjoying its pure and serene natural surroundings. While nature reacts to the swan in actively positive ways, down on earth the white wings are regarded differently. The swan is caught by a hunter, who cuts off its wings. The intimacy of the hunter kissing the swan on the breast and then sleeping on his wife's chest with his bloody hands, creates tension by combining the intimate physical space of the couple with the physical act of mutilation. This contrast becomes grotesque and by the end of the poem the swan is left in a liminal space on the shore, wingless and suffering but not dead. It is stuck and cannot fly away. Meanwhile, the wife is portrayed sweeping the floor continuously with the wings. Instead of gliding through the air, the wings are now destined to slowly deteriorate so that the woman can keep her house tidy. The swan becomes a "tragic victim of primitive stupidity" to use a phrase from Lyytikäinen's essay, and nature becomes a victim of domestic bourgeois life (2021). This poem can be read as a metaphor of the poet's life, describing the experience of fullness and flight and then the violent deprivation of freedom. The word "sweeping" at the end of the poem almost reads as the word "weeping" and during the translation process I considered having "the bloodied swan weeping" instead of "crying out" to mirror the rhyme of "hrópi" and "sópi" that occurs in the Icelandic. "Hrópa" in Icelandic does however mean to shout or call out so weeping felt too gentle in this context. The connection between the words remains in the sound of "sweeping" where the "s" at the end of "always" merges with the "s" of "sweeping" and leaves us hearing "weeping".

The treatment of the swan and feathers in this poem evokes Baudelaire's swan in his poem "Le Cygne" (1857, "The Swan"), in which the majestic bird is captured and robbed of its freedom and beauty, made to suffer in the city, "with a heart possessed by lakes he once had loved", "Stretching the hungry head on his convulsive neck, / Sometimes towards the sky" (Baudelaire 1993, 175). While we do not know whether Davíð read Baudelaire's poetry, there is an echo of the French poet's work in his poem. Both swans suffer due to human intervention, and they endure great pain and violence on the ground. In Baudelaire's poem, the swan "trailed his white array of feathers in the dirt. / Close by a dried out ditch the bird opened his beak" (*ibidem*). Davíð's swan likewise, shouts through an open beak, lies helpless on the shore, while his wings are used as brushes, trailed back and forth in domestic dirt. In "L'Albatros" (1857, "The Albatross"), Baudelaire similarly portrays an image of a trapped and humiliated bird. In this poem, the great big bird is captured by a crew of sailors and described as: "Hurt and distraught, these kings of all outdoors / Piteously let trail along their flanks / The great white wings, dragging like useless oars." (15). Like the swan in "Cut Wings", the albatross's powerless wings are pulled along the floor vividly demonstrating the bird's helplessness. "Cut Wings" locates pain in great beauty, pleasure in the monumental sky/heavens, and suffering on earth. It reminds us of various proximities, of life and death, beauty and death, humanity and cruelty.

Birds are present throughout *Black Feathers* as strong symbols which can be related to decadence. The title of Davíð's collection is a reference to the feathers of the raven. Ravens are remarkable in Icelandic folklore and myths, bringing both good news or cautionary notice.[24] They sometimes have the ability to speak or clearly communicate with humans but at other times they are mysterious and signify the Other. The ravens in Davíð's poems are

[24] The most famous example being Óðin's ravens Huginn and Muninn in nordic mythology and religion, where the two birds were sent off every morning to fly around the whole world and observe everything that happened in order to return at night and croak the news in detail to the god, who could in this way stay omniscient.

not necessarily bad omens but mysterious, wise, and to be respected. In Icelandic literature the figure of the raven is dualistic, a symbol of darkness but also resolution, such as in the tale "Skíðastaðir", which is preserved in Jón Árnason's collection of folktales and adventures, where a raven rewards a young girl who has fed it by warning her of a mudslide that is about to crush her farm, thus saving her life, and brings the bad news of death for the rest of her family (1864, 42-44).[25] In Davíð's writing however, the raven is damned and destined to darkness because of its physical appearance – much like the poet who is damned by the human condition of existential anxiety.

In "Raven" ("Krummi"), Davíð describes the bird as a misunderstood animal that only desires to sing and be heard. The poem bids the reader not to judge the raven on its appearance, its darkness and croaks (Stefánsson 1995, 64). The third stanza of the poem sympathises with the bird, whose only desire is to sing beautifully:

Croak, croak and caw.	Krunk, krunk og krá.
On some a curse rests,	Sumum hvíla þau álög á
never to reach the tune best,	aldrei fögrum tóni að ná,
though their heart has no request	þó þeir eigi enga þrá
other than to sing,	aðra en þá að syngja,
fly as the swans sing.	fljúga eins og svanirnir syngja

The raven is here contrasted with the swan which is beautiful in both appearance and song. Despite the fact the raven desires nothing else but to sing, it can never exchange its cawing for swansong. In an earlier verse the speaker of the poem reminds the reader of the possibility of finding "sun-loving hearts" beating in those who "wear black feathers", claiming an inherent beauty in darkness and attraction to the different and strange.[26] It is possible that Davíð is drawing a parallel with his own experience in this poem; as someone who stands out in his surroundings, someone whose heart will, like the raven's at the end of the poem, be "tormented by desire, break".[27]

Though Davíð asks the reader not to judge the raven and to look beyond its appearance, he does the opposite when discussing and describing the appearance of women in a few of his poems. He blames their appearance for the presence of deceit and corruption. In "Proud are the Maidens", Davíð draws attention to female material artifice and the speaker of the poem does so with bitterness and disgust, painting a picture of the maidens as perverse and malicious.

[25] The raven as a symbol of death, a knell, is one possible reading of the collection's title and the author's photograph portrays Davíð hugging a raven with its wing spread. He embraces the symbol of impending death and by leaning his head on it affectionately and looking solemnly straight into the camera, he is portrayed as overcoming death.

[26] Orig. Stefánsson 1995, 64, ll. 8 and 9: "sólelsk hjörtu"; "svörtum fjöðrum tjaldi".

[27] Orig. Stefánsson 1995, 64, l. 22: "kvalið af löngun brestur".

"The Maidens are still Proud" –

In Myrkárdalur
the maidens are still proud.
They won't see anyone
other than the wealthiest.

They style their hair
and gaze into the mirror,
pad their breasts and hips
and rouge their cheeks.

They want everyone
to bow down before them
but will only lead the
richest to their bed

and will only bed
the one with red-gold
livery, with farmhands
to pull the plough

the one who has servants
to fulfil every whim.
To decorate and adorn
is the maiden's occupation.

Clad in silk and
silver-pinned shoes,
they gavotte to
sensual chords.

That one, with the most
precious stones and gold
thinks herself the fairest –
but that's just not true:

If she parts with the pearls
and her embroidered silk
then it all just falls away –
she is ruined, empty.

In Myrkárdalur
the maidens are still proud
yet mostly their husbands
end up bankrupt, in tatters.

"Stoltar eru meyjarnar" –

Stoltar eru meyjarnar
í Myrkárdalnum enn.
Þær vilja ekki sjá
nema vellauðuga menn.

Þær bera smyrsl í hárið
og horfa í spegilinn,
stoppa brjóst og mjaðmir
og mála vanga sinn.

Þær vilja láta alla
lúta að fótum sér,
en rekkja hjá þeim einum,
sem ríkastur er.

En rekkja hjá þeim einum,
sem rauðagull á nóg
og getur látið þræla
ganga fyrir plóg,

sem getur látið ambáttir
gera allt, sem þarf.
Að greiða sér og mála sig
er meyjanna starf.

Svo ganga þær í silki,
á silfurspenntum skóm
og dansa eftir girndanna
ginnandi hljóm.

Sú, sem mest af gimsteinum
og gulli á sér ber,
þykist vera fegurst
– en því er ver:

Skilji hún við perlurnar
og skrautbúninginn sinn,
þá er hann allur skældur
og skininn, líkaminn.

Stoltar eru meyjarnar
í Myrkárdalnum enn,
– en flestir verða bændur þeirra
fátækir menn.

This is not the only way Davíð represents women in his collection but here he conjures an image of the "inherently perverse" and shallow woman. As Asti Hustvedt explains in the introduction to *The Decadent Reader*, the female body is "abhorrent" for its natural and reproductive powers, whereas the feminine "may be admired because it is duplicitous, mys-

terious, and finds its ultimate realisation in artifice" (1998, 19-20). "Proud are the Maidens" presents an image of the femme fatale, where the woman who "parts with the pearls" and takes off the costume of beauty and arrogance is actually a horrid creature underneath. The husbands are portrayed as victims of female nature. The proud maidens of the poem value artifice and money above all, leaving their husbands broke and miserable. Although we might argue that this poem is a general critique of lifestyle and meretriciousness, as Davíð "attacks […] materialism in any form", the gender-specific stereotype cannot be ignored (Beck 1968, 224). The women hide behind the jewellery, "silk, / and silverpinned shoes". They perform as women but are potential monsters in their "true nature", giving themselves willingly to lust and enjoyment at any cost (Stefánsson 1995, 110-12). While the maidens are sick in their vanity and descend into physical deformity the husbands are portrayed as victims that descend into poverty and vapidness.

The poem "Portrait of a Woman" portrays the idea of the femme fatale again but in four short lines (Stefánsson 1995, 71). Here, the poet evacuates the female body. Her internal landscape is a completely blank canvas though the exterior looks beautiful and lively:

"Portrait of a Woman"	"Kvenlýsing"
Your body is as fair as the birch in full-leaf, but your soul is barren, a husk.	Þinn líkami er fagur sem laufguð björk, en sálin er ægileg eyðimörk.

This description compares the beauty of the female body to a birch tree in its most beautiful state. It does not say the body is like the tree, but its beauty compares with the tree's beauty. It compares the female body to nature but also keeps it separate from it. Meanwhile, the mind is simply empty. The woman's body is a beautiful exterior, a shell for the poet to project onto and into. These short lines sum up the decadent woman that is an artificial container, ready to be ventriloquized or simply dismissed. In Icelandic, "eyðimörk" can be translated to mean "desert" or "wasteland" but it also conveys a general meaning of emptiness, meaning empty land/area. The choice of the word "husk" seems more appropriate to convey that message in the poem, as "desert" in English has stronger connotations with geographical locations and an environment full of sand and warmth. In Icelandic "ægileg eyðimörk" means "a dire desert", with an emphasis on the negative quality of that space. The word "husk", however, signifies more strongly given the context because unlike a desert, which is full of heat and light, a husk is empty, without interior. Like Ernest Dowson in his poem "Ad Manus Puellae" where he describes the lady's glove as "the empty husk of a love" (83), Davíð's intention in the poem is to empty the female body and attribute to her an inherent coldness, suggesting deceit on her behalf. He suggests a conflict between the exterior and interior of her body: he might simultaneously lust after the one while fearing the other.

Lust and erotica are prominent features of Davíð's poetry in this first collection. His poem "Delirium" is an excellent example. Through a marriage ritual, almost a coronation, Davíð portrays a blasphemous scene of lust and physical violation. The mixing of religious symbols and violence in the lustful scene this poem recalls the work of continental European decadent writers fascinated by the proximity of pain and pleasure. The images of the maltreated body and beautiful fabric, a crown of ice and shoes from fire are decadently sensual and the poem contains

imagery suggestive of the rituals of Catholicism. Thorns and ornamental garments of saints in agony and ecstasy, who derive sexual pleasure from the pain of devotion and punishment, are images that beguile decadent writers such as Algernon C. Swinburne.

The subject in "Delirium" is a woman without autonomy who is described by a speaker that has complete power over her body. He mistreats her body while simultaneously elevating it in the almost ritual-like proceedings of his dream. Calling the poem "Delirium" is possibly a self-reflexive or apologetic act, but it is not self-critical as the dream is manifested in such rich erotic imagery that the poem is presented as taking pleasure in itself.

"Delirium"	"Óráð"
Since it is so deathly quiet ha, ha – now I fall asleep, and meet, O in a dream tonight, the queen.	Ha, ha – nú sofna ég, fyrst svona er dauðahljótt; svo hitti ég í draumi drottninguna í nótt.
I give her a crown I have fashioned from ice, and she will soon dance as a queen should.	Þá gef ég henni kórónu úr klaka á höfði sér. Hún skal fá að dansa eins og drottningu ber.
I give her a midnight veil to shroud her body, so no one will witness how I've dishonoured it.	Svo gef ég henni svarta slæðu að sveipa um líkamann, svo enginn geti séð, að ég svívirti hann.
Then I give her red shoes stolen from the flames, and bind her pale neck with a crown of pink thorns.	Svo gef ég henni helskó, hitaða á rist, og bind um hvíta hálsinn bleikan þyrnikvist.
Then I smear her breast with a cross of my blood and kiss her cheek like Jesus – no, like Judas.	Svo rjóðra ég á brjóst hennar úr blóði mínu kross og kyssi hanaí Jesú nafni Júdasarkoss.
Then we spin and spin and drink poison wine … I become the king of demons and take my queen.	Svo dönsum við og dönsum og drekkum eitrað vín. … Ég verð konungur djöflanna, hún drottningin mín.

The dancing represents a state of excess and madness. It is continuous and wild. Dance is here a way of transcending oneself mentally, or a way of descending into the realm of physical desires and corruption. Guðni Elísson describes the dance as "symbolic phenomena" (Elísson 2006, 354-55) and compares this focus to Friedrich Nietzsche's in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* (*Also sprach Zarathustra*, 1883) where he should "only believe in a god who knew how to dance" and "one must dance – dance over and past yourselves!" (Nietzsche 2006, 29, 285). While it is not clear whether Nietzsche had a direct influence on Davíð's philosophy it is evident

that Davíð was heavily influenced by the Swedish poet Gustav Fröding (1860-1911), who was known for writing openly about revelry, women, alcohol, the neglected and mundane. "[F]ew poets were so clearly influenced by Nietzsche [as Fröding]", Guðni explains (Elísson 2006, 355). These themes most certainly caught Davíð's attention. It is difficult to establish precisely what Davíð had read by the time he published his first volume of poetry, but in his biography, *Touch my Harp: Biography of Davíð from Fagriskógur* (*Snert hörpu mína: Ævisaga Davíðs frá Fagraskógi,* 2007), Friðrik G. Olgeirsson describes the "foreign influence" on Davíð and mentions Fröding as an important source of ideas and style, especially Fröding's references to folklore and use of colloquial language in a lyrical style, including as well the influence of Danish poet and painter Holger Drachmann and translations to Danish from Russian by the Danish writer Thor Lange (Olgeirsson 2007, 112).

Along with the wild dancing, the "poison wine" in the poem is symbolic. Through these juxtapositions and references the poem "reconciles two sides of the same coin: degeneration and regeneration" (Fleurot 2014, 75). It is another route of descent and is also the point at which pleasure and death meet. Poison wine might reference something more specific, such as absinthe, but it more likely signifies a physical and mental condition. The wine is mind-altering, addictive, and inevitably damaging and dangerous – though consumed willingly in the heat of the moment of the ritual. The pleasure is in the descent, in the risk and danger. As well as pain and pleasure, there is a sense of hardness and softness in the poem. The violent actions against the woman's pale body and the soft fabrics are vividly juxtaposed. There is even a form of resurrection as the woman rises as a queen after being maltreated. The relationship between style and subject-matter creates a striking tension in the poem. The language of the poem is playful and simple, even innocent in its fairy-tale references to "king and queen", while the subject is violence and malice. In the original Icelandic, the end rhyme in the second and fourth line of each stanza (ABCB) creates a steady ritualistic beat. As the sibilance increases, so does the sinister, dark undertone, changing the dream into a delirium.

During the process of translating "Delirium" the "poison wine" became a point of discussion. For the sake of a more poetic language, the question arose: what is the poison? Can it be referred to as "deadly nightshade" or "hemlock" instead of just "poison"? Or as something else? While this could have offered a more refined and sophisticated phrasing, neither of these plants grow in Iceland and there are no snakes, scorpions, or other venomous creatures. There are no obvious sources of poison in the country. Here it felt right to maintain a cultural translation, not introducing or imposing new ideas onto the image, but rather keeping it general and allowing the poison to be the generic notion of poison – the altered and intoxicated state of mind. In contrast, other words were made more specific in order to convey their meaning more precisely. One example is the line "Svo gef ég henni helskó". Here "helskó" (which directly translates to "hell-shoe") is replaced with "red shoes", to reference the fairy tale, *The Red Shoes* (*De rødesko,* 1845*)* by Hans Christian Andersen. It tells the story of a girl who becomes trapped in beautiful red shoes which make her dance and dance until she amputates her own feet to escape them. The Icelandic word, "helskór", is a reference to shoes either causing death or bound to the feet of the dead. Though the original does not bear a specific reference to Andersen's fairy tale it is fitting to maintain the connotation between the shoes and death, the price of Beauty and vanity as well as Davíð's tendencies to reference folk- and fairy tales. It is also a text that Davíð would have been familiar with and had access to.

Writing about the progression of Neo-romanticism in Iceland and the emergence of the anti-hero in Icelandic literature, Guðni describes the decadent poet as "more depressed than

his predecessor, often full of melancholy and despair, a victim of his own desires, a self-elected wanderer abandoned by God and man" (Elísson 2006, 352). The speaker in "Delirium" is certainly a victim of his own dark and secret desires and portrays what was described as a temperament emerging in Icelandic literature of the 1910s: "a self-consciousness that understands itself through destructive needs" (*ibidem*). The speaker of the poem is neither an observer nor an innocent bystander but instead is notably active, and is, in fact, the agent or the performer of the ritual. The speakers are often active participants in Davíð's poems, no matter what shape they assume, human, animal, or spirit. They often tell a cautionary tale, in the style of fables and fairy tales. Unlike traditional fairy-tale narratives, Davíð's rarely offer a happy ending or a resolution, which recalls Oscar Wilde's handling of fairy tales where "the moral is not to be found in the punishment of the bad and reward of the good" (Fleurot 2014, 71). Fleurot describes Wilde's fairy tales as "a call for change", because they are not conveying and perpetuating classic moral narratives but instead casting light on social issues and power hierarchies. As Fleurot notes: "In Wilde's tales, the opposition is clear between who is rich and who is not, but also between who has the means to express himself and who doesn't" (72).

In Davíð's and Wilde's tales there is often no solution or way of avoiding violence, punishment, or cruelty. In Wilde's story *The Happy Prince* (1888) society's focus is on artificiality and beauty over kindness and charity. The protagonist, a golden gem-cast statue of a prince, takes pity on people in the city and gives away his valuable exterior to those in need. He does this with the help of a bird who continuously delays its migration to warmer lands to assist the statue. Their efforts are neither noticed nor valued: the bird dies in the cold of winter and the statue of the Happy Prince is eventually taken apart and melted down as he is not beautiful any more. Despite their noble work, both characters gain no recognition until they have transcended earth and God deems them "the two most precious things in the city" (Wilde 1920, 37). Wilde draws attention to injustice, where there are no consequences for violence and oppression, and no one, not even the most innocent creatures, are able to escape evil. Davíð takes a more traditional approach to the fairy tale. He uses them as cautionary tales although they do not offer the resolution of a better life. His characters are not innocent, but have been tempted, tricked, or even murdered. Some of them are cautionary tales, as, for example, in the narrative of the poem "Abba-labba-lá", which is an attempt to save others from the speaker's fate as well as an entertaining story. Instead of creating fairy tales as an escape that "often spoke for the humble reader's wish to acquire a better life", Davíð and Wilde use them as reminders of reality. Like Wilde, as Fleurot suggests, Davíð might "not [have] believed that a magic wand is enough to solve the miseries of the world" (2014, 71-73).

The speaker of the next poem attempts to warn the reader of the dangers of the world by describing his own miseries in an encounter with a seductress. The poem "Abba-labba-lá" presents another version of the decadent woman where the speaker of the poem becomes a victim of a seductive she-beast.[28]

[28] In "Abba-labba-lá", á is pronounced "ow" as in "cow".

"Abba-labba-lá"

Her name was Abba-labba-lá!
Dark-haired, dark-browed,
she lived in a shack in the woods
between green boughs
and believed the land was breathing.

But no one knew where
she had come from.
And no one knew why
she was wild, unbridled.
And no one knew why
she would bite and lash out. –

Her name was Abba-labba-lá!
Her dark-hair, dark-brow
drove everyone crazy,
that tried to hold her down.
Abba-labba-lá drank
beast blood.
Beast blood.

. . . Once I saw
Abba-labba-lá
dancing in the forest,
dark-haired, dark-browed.
My heart burned
so I cried out:
Abba-labba,
Abba-labba,
Abba-labba-lá!

And then she came running
and kissed me and laughed
bit me and drank my life-
blood, – I died.

Now I haunt the
forests and coves shouting:
Beware, curious folk,
beware, lonely folk,
of Abba-labba-lá!

"Abba-labba-lá"

Hún hét Abba-labba-lá.
Hún var svört og brún á brá
og átti kofa í skóginum
á milli grænna greina
og trúði á stokka og steina.

En enginn vissi, hvaðan
hún kom í þennan skóg;
enginn vissi, hvers vegna
hún ærslaðist og hló,
og enginn vissi, hvers vegna
hún bæði beit og sló. –

Hún hét Abba-labba-lá.
Hún var svört á brún og brá
og gerði alla vitlausa,
sem vildu í hana ná.
Á Villidýrablóði,
á villidýrablóði
lifði Abba-labba-lá.

. . . Einu sinni sá ég
Abba-labba-lá.
Hún dansaði í skóginum,
svört á brún og brá.
Mér hlýnaði um hjartað
og hrópaði hana á:
Abba-labba,
Abba-labba,
Abba-labba-lá!

Þá kom hún til mín hlaupandi
og kyssti mig og hló,
beit mig og saug úr mér
blóðið, – svoégdó.

– Og afturgenginn hrópa ég
út yfir land og sjá:
Varið ykkur, vesalingar,
varið ykkur, vesalingar,
á Abba-labba-lá.

"Abba-labba-lá", is one of the wilder poems in the collection, being especially playful and loud with its fast rhythm, ellipsis, and exclamation marks. It illustrates the overwhelming feeling of obsession and desire through the use of fast-paced repetition and alliteration. Maintaining the tone of each poem was important in the translation process. Here, preserving the simplicity of the language in "Abba-labba-lá" was crucial, where the tone is fable-like and rudimentary. Retaining the moments of wit and humour, such as in the abrupt line "– so I died" ("– svo

ég dó") is also important as it conveys Davíð's playfulness and his eye for surprise. In order to preserve the strong rhythm of the poem, only a few lines are moved around. The last three lines of the third stanza have the eerie repetition of "á villidýrablóði/á villidýrablóði". In the original the repetition of "beast blood" is in lines 5 and 6 before the last one, but changing the syntax so that the stanza closes with the repetition feels more impactful in the translation. In the last stanza, the word "vesalingar" in line 3, meaning wretch/unfortunate/poor thing, is not repeated in the English translation, and the words "curious folk" and "lonely folk" are chosen instead to cover the wider meaning and feeling of the word in Icelandic.

Abba-labba-lá is a wild female creature, a seductress in the forest. There is no direct indication of her beauty in the poem but instead there are references to her exoticism and mystery. She is simply described as "dark-haired, dark-browed". She is desirable and exciting until the speaker finally manages to approach her. Then the poem turns: she attacks the speaker and murders him by sucking his blood like a vampire. This is the femme fatale again. The speaker, now speaking from the dead in the last verse, warns other suitors by repeating "beware […] beware of Abba-labba-lá", and her true nature as a monster is declared.

Monsters and ghosts are common motifs in Icelandic folktales as well as in Neo-romantic literature, though the speaker in the poems is rarely a ghost. Guðni attributes the popularity of this particular figure to "horror-romanticism", and Davíð's biographer agrees, explaining that Davíð's darker, decadent poems were "not a testament to [the] mental problems of the poet" but were "sprouts of the horror- or frightful-romantics that had been popular abroad for some time".[29] This term "horror-romanticism" (Elísson 2006, 354) seems to refer to a mixture of themes derived from romanticism: Neo-romanticism, symbolism, the Gothic, as well as folklore. This hybrid term might easily also encapsulate some tendencies of decadent poetry.

Conclusion

Iceland was certainly a remote and isolated place in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries but that does not mean the culture developed without external influences. As Gunnar Harðarson maintains in his book *The Stretcher behind History* (*Blindramminn bak við söguna*), "many accepted ideas believed to be authentically Icelandic might in fact be the offspring of forgotten foreign ideas that stand as painting stretchers behind the visible image of the Icelandic literary- and ideological history".[30] Davíð's poems capture the unique sensibilities of lyrical poetry in Iceland in the beginning of the 20th century, but more work needs to be done, both on translating and critically evaluating his contribution to literature in the early 20th century. Davíð was certainly a powerful voice in Icelandic literature, not only with this first collection but with the nine collections of poetry that followed, a novel, and four plays. He published four very different poetry collections between 1919 and 1929, each dealing with different themes and topics as he began to move away from traditional forms. In the fourth collection, *New Verse* (*Nýkvæði*, 1929*)*, he began writing in free verse and increasingly he became interested in historical references and scenarios as well as travelling. The life of the wanderer became a prominent theme. Gradually, the lust and fantasies in his early work gave way to a passion for

[29] Orig. Olgeirsson, 2007, 112: "ekki endilega til vitnis um sálarlega erfiðleika höfundarins"; "angi af hryllingsað askelfirómantíkinni sem hafði verið vinsæl erlendis um tíma".

[30] Orig. Harðarson 2009, 9: "margar viðteknar hugmyndir sem taldar eru rammíslenskar séu í raun og veru afsprengi gleymdra erlendra hugmynda sem standa eins og blindrammi bak við hina sýnilegu mynd af íslenskri bókmennta- og hugmyndasögu".

a changed world where socialist motifs become dominant, especially after the poet's visit to Russia in 1928. Throughout Davíð's career his love for storytelling is apparent and as Gunnar Stefánsson comments in a foreword to Davíðs complete poetic works: "All of Davíð's poetry reeks of fervour; his works are never phlegmatic, always alive".[31]

Davíð was not the only Icelandic poet residing in Reykjavík or in more rural areas writing about decadent themes. There are undoubtedly other poets working at the turn of the 20th century, who, like Davíð, were influenced by Scandinavian and European literature more broadly, and who were writing poems with the potential to be disruptive, grotesque, and exciting. In the search for Icelandic decadence, writers of both poetry and prose whose work is worth examining further, writing around the same time as Davíð, include Sveinn Jónsson (1892-1942), Sigfús Blöndal (1874-1950), Stefánfrá Hvítadal (1887-1933), Sigurður Nordal (1886-1947), and Jóhann Sigurjónsson (1880-1919). Sveinn Jónsson and Sigfús Blöndal, like Davíð, wrote about themes of death, pleasure, anti-heroes and mystical women. Sveinn, in particular, writes about the place "where pleasure is linked to death through a mad, crazed dance" as Guðni describes Sveinn's poem "Poison" ("Eitur"). There the speaker exclaims in a strong rhythm in the refrain: "Poison! More Poison! / Warm will I dance and wanton. / Poison! Poison! Poison",[32] combining dancing and an altered mental state just as Davíð does in "Delirium": "Then we spin and spin / and drink poison wine" (Elísson 2006, 354). New translations of these poems will expand our understanding of the reach of decadence towards the Arctic Circle.

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[31] Orig. Stefánsson 1995, 38: "Skaphita Davíðs leggur af öllum skáldskap hans; verk hans eru aldrei daufgerð, alltaf lifandi".

[32] [bibliographical reference?] "Eitur! Meira eitur! / Ör vil ég dansa og heitur. / Eitur! Eitur! Eitur!"

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Decadent Aesthetics in Cyril Scott's Translations and Song Settings*

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Abstract

Of the early twentieth-century composers inspired by decadent and symbolist verse, Cyril Scott (1879-1970) produced the greatest number of literary translations and musical adaptations. This essay considers Scott's literary translations of Charles Baudelaire and Stefan George alongside his song settings of Ernest Dowson's poems within the context of the cosmopolitan aesthetic circles in which he moved. The essay argues that a productive reading of his work takes into account a "nineties" decadent aesthetics that emphasizes sensuality, mood, and interstitiality and can be read across both his literary translations and song settings.

Keywords: Charles Baudelaire, Cyril Scott, Decadence, Song Setting, Stefan George

In the years leading up to the First World War there was a flurry of interest in translations of decadent literature among a number of small British publishers and booksellers, including Elkin Mathews who notably devoted himself to nurturing and publishing the work of a wide range of poets, translators, and poet-translators. This did not make him much money, but it marked "the birth of an interest […] among the proponents of that esoteric movement which was reaching beyond the rather superficial occult explorations of the Decadent circle" (Clark and Sykes 1997, xxxiii). In the spring of 1900, Mathews commissioned a series of poetry translations and launched the Vigo Cabinet series, or as one advertisement proclaimed, "the longest series of original contemporary verse in existence" (quoted in Nelson 1989, 55). This was a typically personal and small-scale venture that

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reflected Mathews's own tastes in literature celebrating what he saw as "something of a real awakening of the popular interest in current verse" (63).[2]

By 1912, the Vigo Cabinet series had reached 100 numbers, among which was a series of translations of French and German decadent poetry, which though rarely mentioned today represents a modest but significant shift in British publishing. As James G. Nelson comments, the Vigo Cabinet series of translations, "[r]eflect[ed] the movement away from the insularity of the Victorians toward a more cosmopolitan outlook and range of interests on the part of the Edwardians" (62). This series

> rang[ed] from the extant verse of Sappho (no. 65) and the quatrains of Omar Khayyam (no. 53) to the lyrics of the Ruthenian poet Tarás Schvchéncko (no. 86). Among the more interesting as well as significant examples were *Poems in Prose from Baudelaire* (no. 29), selected and translated from *Les Petits Poèmes en Prose* by Arthur Symons, and *Baudelaire: The Flowers of Evil* (no. 66), selected and translated by Cyril Scott. The work of two contemporary German poets, Stefan George and Hugo von Hofmannsthal, was represented in *German Lyrists of To-Day* (no. 58), translated by Daisy Broicher, who was responsible for the later *German Lyrics and Ballads* (no. 3). (*Ibidem*)

The Vigo Cabinet community was relatively small, and while it is difficult to gauge the extent to which individual translators knew each other and shared their work, there are some intriguing connections between the three listed by Nelson. Arthur Symons and Cyril Scott knew each other. Scott admired Symons and Symons was very encouraging to Scott, although apart from scattered references here and there, mainly in Scott's autobiographical writings, there is little published record of their relationship, which may have been one-sided. Scott dedicated his 1909 translation of Baudelaire's poems to Symons and he composed a projected overture and incidental music to Symons's adaptation of *Elektra* (that manuscript is now lost) over which there was a testy correspondence about the terms of engagement.[3] About Daisy Broicher, the first to translate George's verse into English, there is very little information available, only newspaper reviews (mainly in Canada and North America) of the works she translated,[4] but although there is no evidence to suggest that she and Scott exchanged notes (their approaches are very different),[5] their Vigo Cabinet translations were published very close together; Broicher's edition of *German Lyrists of To-Day* was published in 1909, Scott's *Stefan George: Selection from his Works* a year later.

Of the early twentieth-century composers inspired by decadent and symbolist verse, Scott produced the greatest number of literary translations and musical adaptations. He was passionate about poetry and admired Algernon C. Swinburne, Dante G. Rossetti, and Francis Thompson. As a young man he was particularly drawn to the work of the Romantics and decadents and he was himself a prolific poet and translator. Between 1905 and 1915, he published five volumes of

[2] "Mathews' final distinction, […] may be thought to rest on his nurture of poetic talent through some of the most insipid years in the history of English poetry, those between 1900 and 1908. In those years, Mathews published much of the best that was available: Masefield, Monro, Flecker, Gibson, Plarr, Binyon, Symons, Joyce, Pound. It is a roll of honour" (Fletcher 1967, n.p.).

[3] See Scott 1924, in which he suggests that despite a difference between him and Symons about terms, he had at least finished the overture (referenced in Scott, Foreman, and De'Ath 2018, 438).

[4] Reviews of Broicher's translations include *Toronto Saturday Night*, 25 September 1909; *America Register*, 18 September 1909; the *Globe*, 26 May 1909; *The Queen, The Lady's Newspaper*, 29 June 1912.

[5] Broicher's are freer and more musical while Scott's are more faithful to the original. This might have been because, unlike Broicher, he knew George well (their friendship was homoerotically intense) and he might not have wanted to take liberties with the original decadent/symbolist aesthetic of the poems.

his own poetry[6] and two volumes of translations. Given his admiration of Symons, his translations of Baudelaire and George, his likely familiarity with Broicher's translations of George, and the role that he played in furthering Mathews's endeavours to expand the literary horizons of Edwardian readers, it is somewhat surprising to see Scott omitted from anthologies and critical studies of translations of Baudelaire and George into English. To some extent, this is because he is better known as a pianist and composer, but it might also be because of his enthralment with an 1890s aesthetic and an enmeshment in occult circles which put him somewhat out of step with other translators of the time.[7] If we compare Scott's translations of Baudelaire with those of F.P. Sturm's in 1906 and J.C. Squire's in 1909, for example, Scott's appear outmoded, quaint even, more in keeping with a late Romantic 1890s' aesthetic. Unlike Squire's "commendably direct and undecorated versions which draw on a wide range of Baudelaire's subjects" (Clements 1985, 222), Scott reverts to a Swinburnian emphasis on what T.S. Eliot described as the "nice sounding phrase" (Eliot 1927, 429). Eliot was referring to Symons's translation of Baudelaire's *Prose and Poetry*, but the point he makes about Symons "turn[ing] Baudelaire into a contemporary of Symons" (424), might well apply to Scott whose translations of the French poet, it could be argued, are cognate with a decadent aesthetics. Scott's preoccupations are with the senses, feeling, mood, and threshold states.[8]

This essay argues that a productive reading of Scott's translations takes into account their decadent aesthetics, making them, as Eliot said of Symons, "explicatory of the 'nineties, rather than as a current interpretation of Baudelaire" (425). Although Scott never directly acknowledged his debt to decadence (or to symbolism), decadent aesthetics can be traced across to his song settings of Dowson's poems, which he undertook between 1904 and 1915, around the same time that he was translating Baudelaire and George. Unlike his literary translations, however, the song settings are stylistically more cuspish, "occupying", as Sarah Collins has described, "an unusual in-between space" (2013, xiv). It is beyond the scope of this essay to analyse Scott's song settings in detail, but it explores some thought-provoking correspondences between his early literary translations and musical adaptations, recovering his reputation as a significant Vigo Cabinet series translator and drawing him into the broader discussions currently taking place about the English tradition of translating decadence (initiated in 1985 by Patricia Clements in her book, *Baudelaire and the English Tradition*). We begin by considering Scott's life and work and his involvement in various cosmopolitan literary and musical circles at the turn of the 20th century, followed by a comparison of a small selection of his translations of Baudelaire with those of his contemporaries, Sturm and Squire, with a focus on "La Vie Antérieure", "Correspondances", and "Causerie". In these translations, Scott deploys a late-Victorian diction, emphasizing rhyme and the sound of individual words and phrases. Given that he "embodied

[6] Cyril Scott: *The Shadows of Silence and the Songs of Yesterday* (1905); *The Grave of Eros and the Book of Mournful Melodies, with Dreams from the East* (1907); *The Voice of the Ancient* (1910); *The Vales of Unity* (1912); and *The Celestial Aftermath, A Springtide of the Heart, and Far-away Songs* (1915).

[7] In Carol Clark and Robert Sykes' edition of *Baudelaire in English*, Scott's translations stand out for their non-appearance; indeed, the editors draw attention to this in their introduction where he is listed alongside other esoteric translators: "Aleister Crowley, Cyril Scott (not represented here) and Yeats's friend Thomas Sturge Moore" (1997, xxxiii).

[8] He describes his approach in the "Foreword" to his selection of George's works, where he claims that "[a] part from this depth and beauty, [George] has created a new form, endowed verse with new colour and sound, and greatly extended the possibilities of expression in the German language. Through his personality; his pathos and ethology he has furthermore engendered a new ideal; a synthesis of Christian and Pagan feeling which in this form has not existed before. That the English-speaking public may gain at any rate some faint idea of his genius, it has been my joyous task to translate the following small selection of his works" (Scott 1910, 5).

an aesthetic of an earlier time" (Collins 2013, 224), this emphasis is perhaps unsurprising, but in his song settings of Dowson's poems ("Pierrot and the Moon Maiden"; "A Valediction"; "Let Silence Speak"; "Sorrow"; "Meditation"), the music expresses interstitiality and uncertainty. As the third and final part of the essay suggests, Scott's settings respond to the sense of interstitiality in Dowson's poems, interpreting language and its absence (silence) in fluid and proliferative ways to create modern soundscapes that evoke a twilight "nineties" mood.

1. Scott's Cosmopolitan Circles

Cyril Scott was born in 1879 in Oxton, a southern suburb of Birkenhead, near Liverpool. He was the youngest of three children, his mother an amateur pianist, his father a scholar of Greek and a businessman in shipping. Scott was a nervous child and a musical prodigy. He showed a precocious talent for the piano, picking out tunes almost before talking, and in 1891, at the age of twelve, he made the first of many trips to Germany to study piano there. He was enrolled in Dr Hoch's Konservatorium in Frankfurt am Main, where he learned from fellow student Thomas Holland-Smith the "notion of perpetuity through originality […] so important in the development of his aesthetic thinking" (Collins 2013, 34). On returning to England two years later, he was placed with a tutor in Liverpool, not far from where he was born in Oxton, and was discovered by the Swiss corn broker, Hans Lüthy, who took him into his home and promoted his musical development. It was Lüthy's influence that prompted Scott's transition to agnosticism, later described by Scott as a formative step in his embrace of eastern spiritual traditions.

In 1895 – at the age of sixteen and a half – Scott returned to Frankfurt to study composition, harmony, and counterpoint with Iwan Knorr, and there met Henry Balfour Gardiner, Percy Grainger, Norman O'Neill, Roger Quilter, and Frederick Septimus Kelly. They collectively came to be known as the "Frankfurt Group". This second period in Frankfurt made a huge impression on him. In 1896 Scott met the symbolist poet George who impressed upon him a passion for poetry and who he described in the dedication to *The Grave of Eros* (a collection of his own poems Scott published in 1907) as "The Awakener within me of all Poetry". Through George, Scott became interested in arcana and Pre-Raphaelite otherworldliness, and he easily integrated with George's cosmopolitan dandified style and anti-bourgeois sentiments. In his autobiography, *Bone of Contention*, Scott claims that

> besides being a remarkable poet he looked like one to a superlative degree, with [a] pale and somewhat Dantesque face, very deep-set, rather melancholy eyes and his imposing head of long black hair… . He both loved and radiated power. (1969, 102)

Scott was very attracted to this charismatic figure. George had attended Mallarmé's famous "mardis" and instilled in the young English musician "disinterestedness, a pure fervor and obedience to the cult of beauty" (Norton 2002, 47). Scott self-consciously fashioned for himself a Romantic spiritual persona, wearing expensive suits and watch chains, playing chess intensely, and reading books on reincarnation and oriental occultism. Like Joris-Karl Huysmans's fictional neurotic Des Esseintes, and indeed George and his artist friend Melchior Lechter, who furnished their apartments with medieval minichapels, Scott created an "ecclesiastical atmosphere" in his own home, building his own gothic furniture, replacing his windows with church stained glass and burning incense (Scott and Eaglefield Hull 1917, 29).

Scott moved often between Liverpool and Frankfurt and although throughout his lifetime, as Richard Price attests, "he was probably better known and certainly more highly esteemed,

abroad, particularly in France and Germany, than in his own country" (2018, 39), Scott was also part of avant-garde social networks in London. He moved mainly in music circles. Gardiner's house in Kensington was a regular meeting place, and Scott attended along with Frederic Austin, Arnold Bax, Benjamin Dale, and Gustav Holst, among others. It was via a series of literary and social connections made in London by his friends the composer Percy Grainger, the socialite Lilith Lowrey, and the painter Jacques-Émile Blanche, that he was introduced to Symons, but there is no record on Symons's side about this encounter. In the heyday of his fame, between 1905 and 1925, a period associated with the publication of many of the songs, Scott was the most internationally renowned British composer, "st[anding] apart in outlook and education from the mainstream of the conservative British musical establishment at the turn of the century" (Lloyd 2018, 3). While his reputation as a composer and pianist is well known, his contribution to literature and to the early twentieth-century revival of interest in decadence, is not so well known. However, his fascination with the aesthetic ideas of decadents and symbolists and his involvement in aesthetic and decadent artistic circles informed his later interests, and, as Collins has argued, "provided him with a pathway into a spiritual conception of his life and work" (2013, xiv).

Scott's early friendships generated an enthusiasm for all forms of art. As Leslie De'Ath notes, his youthful circles of acquaintance "gave him a sense of being a direct, active participant at the cutting edge of modernity, with its concomitant air of superiority" (2018, 135). When in 1898 Scott left Frankfurt to return to Liverpool, described by the critic P.H. Muir as "a distant outpost of the Aesthetic Movement" (1952, 32),[9] he moved in with Charles Bonnier, a professor of French literature at the university, well read in nineteenth-century English literature.[10] Bonnier was an ardent Wagnerite and a lifelong committed socialist, and he consolidated Scott's deepening love of poetry, especially the French decadents and symbolists (like George, Bonnier had known Mallarmé). For the next few years Scott lived a life of radical politics and aesthetics in equal measure, surrounded by figures prominently involved in the Fabian Society, women's suffrage, and pacifism, and infused with the aesthetic principles of Edward Burne-Jones, Edward Carpenter, Havelock Ellis, William Morris, and Dante G. Rossetti. Bonnier was hugely influential in Scott's formative years. He taught him versification and persuaded him to translate Baudelaire's *Les Fleurs du mal* into English.

2. Baudelaire: Sensuality and Mood

Eschewing those poems in *Les Fleurs du mal* that deal with the shock and thrill of modern urban life (there is no explicit mention of Paris, the text is largely depoliticized, dehistoricized), Scott selects poems that are sensual and romantic, focused on nature's beauty and transcendence. He ranges across the first and third editions of *Les Fleurs du mal*, taking the majority of his selection of poems from the "Spleen et Idéal" section, and then he selects more randomly. From "Le Couvercle" onwards, the last 11 poems are randomly picked from the final sections

[9] A reference by P.H. Muir to various 1890s' figures and their connection with Liverpool, including Richard Le Gallienne's connection with The Bodley Head. Le Gallienne was a clerk in Liverpool when he became its first author. At the same time, Holbrook Jackson was working in Liverpool as a linen-draper. For more detail, see Muir 1952, 32.

[10] Charles Bonnier wrote a series of short essays on English authors, including Emily Brontë, Henry James, George Gissing, George Meredith, Thomas Hardy, Walter Pater, Jane Austen, Charles Dickens, and Robert Louis Stevenson, collected together as *Milieux D'Art* and privately printed by Donald Fraser. The collection also contains an essay rarely cited in Dowson scholarship: "E. Dowson" dedicated to Cyril Scott (Bonnier n.d., 15-17).

of Baudelaire's volume – "Tableaux Parisiens", "Le Vin", "Fleurs du mal", and "La Mort" – concluding his selection with the poem "La Mort des pauvres". On the whole, Scott's translations adhere closely to the original text and tend to be faithful to the semantics and sonic structures. Here, for example, are Baudelaire's "La Vie Antérieure" (from "Spleen et Idéal") and Scott's version in full:

"La Vie Antérieure"

J'ai longtemps habité sous les vastes portiques
Que les soleils marins teignaient de mille feux,
Et que leurs grands piliers, droits et majestueux,
Rendaient pareils, le soir, aux grottes basaltiques.

Les houles, en roulant les images des cieux,
Mêlaient d'une façon solennelle et mystique
Les tout-puissants accords de leur riche musique
Aux couleurs du couchant reflété par mes yeux.

C'est là que j'ai vécu dans les voluptés calmes,
Au milieu de l'azur, des vagues, des splendeurs
Et des esclaves nus, tout imprégnés d'odeurs.

Qui me rafraîchissaient le front avec des palmes,
Et dont l'unique soin était d'approfondir
Le secret douloureux qui me faisait languir. (Baudelaire 2008, 30-31)

"Interior Life"

A long while I dwelt beneath vast porticos,
Which the ocean-suns bathed with a thousand fires,
And which with their great and majestic spires,
At eventide looked like basaltic grottoes.

The billows, in rolling depictured the skies,
And mingled, in solemn and mystical strain,
The all-mighteous chords of their luscious refrain
With the sun-set's colours reflexed in mine eyes.

It is there that I lived in exalted calm,
In the midst of the azure, the splendours, the waves,
While pregnant with perfumes, naked slaves

Refreshed my forehead with branches of palm,
Whose gentle and only care was to know
The secret that caused me to languish so. (Scott 1909, 16)

The most striking feature of Scott's translation, aside from the surprising misconception of the word "antérieure" for "interior" in the title (the correct English translation of the title would be "A Former Life" or "A Past Life"), is the use of a late-Victorian diction which evokes the sense of a bygone time ("eventide", "all-mighteous", "in mine eyes", "to languish so") and the emphasis on the synaesthetic experience of the speaker in the reflection of whose eyes we appreciate the spectacle of a sunset sky. The billowing clouds are an orchestration of mystical grandeur ("The all-mighteous chords of their luscious refrain") and the speaker receives all this in a state of "exalted calm". Scott changes the word order only in the third stanza to retain the original rhyme scheme, effecting a rhyme between "waves" and "slaves". Throughout his selection of Baudelaire translations, sense is subordinated to sound. In "Parfum exotique" , for example, he changes words to force the same rhyme structure of the sonnet (ABBA, ABBA, AAB, ABA). In the first line, Baudelaire's reference to the "soir chaud d'automne" (warm autumn evening) becomes "hot afternoon" to half-rhyme with "sun" in the last line of the stanza, and he repeats this in the second stanza, exchanging the French word "vigoureux" for "astute" so that it rhymes with "fruit" in the line above. We find the same preoccupation with sound in his translation of Baudelaire's well known sonnet "Correspondances":

"Correspondances"

La Nature est un temple où de vivants piliers
Laissent parfois sortir de confuses paroles;
L'homme y passe à travers des forêts de symboles
Qui l'observent avec des regards familiers

Comme de longs échos qui de loin se confondent
Dans une ténébreuse et profonde unité,
Vaste comme la nuit et comme la clarté,
Les parfums, les couleurs et les sons se répondent.

Il est des parfums frais commes des chairs d'enfants,
Doux comme les hautbois, verts comme les prairies,
— Et d'autres, corrompus, riches et triomphants.

Ayant l'expansion des choses infinies,
Comme l'ambre, le musc, le benjoin et l'encens,
Qui chantent les transports de l'esprit et des sens. (Baudelaire 1975, 11)

And here is Scott's rendering:

"Echoes"

In Nature's temple, living columns rise,
Which oftentimes give tongue to words subdued,
And Man traverses this symbolic wood,
Which looks at him with half familiar eyes

Like lingering echoes, which afar confound
Themselves in deep and sombre unity,
As vast as Night, and like transplendency,
The scents and colours to each other respond.

And scents there are, like infant's flesh, as chaste,
As sweet as oboes, and as meadows fair,
And others, proud, corrupted, rich and vast,

Which have the expansion of infinity,
Like amber, musk and frankincense and myrrh,
That sing the soul's and senses' ecstasy. (1909, 10)

The original is a suggestive and expansive poem about the mysterious and mystical relationship between the senses and the soul, and it is easy to see why it appealed to the Romantic side of Scott. He re-titles the poem "Echoes", picking up Baudelaire's reference to "longs *échos*" in the first line of the second stanza, but in doing so he slightly reframes the poem as being about reflection (back) rather than the idea of the puzzling and strange correspondences between physical and metaphysical realms. The key phrase in the first stanza is "confuses paroles", translated by James McGowan for the Oxford World's Classics edition of *The Flowers of Evil* as "confusing speech" (Baudelaire 2008, 19). In Scott's translation, the idea of speech not easily comprehended is misinterpreted as "tongue to words subdued", which serves as a half-rhyme with "wood" in the third line but interferes with Baudelaire's intention to open the poem with the figure of Nature whose "vivants piliers / Laissent parfois sortir de confuses paroles". In Baudelaire's poem, the "vivants piliers" speak confusingly; in Scott's translation, they "oftentimes" (rather than "parfois" / "sometimes") "give tongue to words subdued". Looking back at his translations of Baudelaire's *Les Fleurs du mal* in his unpublished memoir, *Near the End of Life*, he admits that his early translations were over-ambitious: "I became too preoccupied with sound and insufficiently with sense, and employed words in a grandiloquent manner without appreciating their precise meaning and manner of use" (quoted in Scott 2018, 315).

Sturm's translation, by contrast, published three years before Scott's, translates Baudelaire's title directly and is less concerned with sound and style than the theme of man's place in the vast sensorially interconnected universe, which he describes in unadorned, plain language ("wander", "friendly", "far-off", "brilliant", "speak", "things"). Sturm was the first to "attempt to render into English any sizable [sic] portion of *The Flowers of Evil*" (1969, 18). His efforts were acknowledged as being among the finest translations of the period, not least for their avoidance of "old-fashioned diction" (Baudelaire 1955, viii). Here is Sturm's version in full, with differences between Scott's version underlined:

"Correspondences"

In Nature's temple, living <u>pillars</u> rise,
<u>And words are murmured none have understood</u>,
And <u>m</u>an <u>must wander through a tangled</u> wood,
<u>Of symbols watching him with friendly</u> eyes

As long-drawn echoes heard far-off and dim
Mingle to one deep sound and fade away;
Vast as the night and brilliant as the day,
Colour and sound and perfume speak to him.

Some perfumes are as fragrant as a child,
Sweet as the sound of hautboys, meadow-green;
Others, corrupted, rich, exultant, wild,

Have all the expansion of things infinite:
As amber, incense, musk, and benzoin,
Which sing the sense's and the soul's delight. (1969, 244)

Neither "La Vie antérieure" nor "Correspondances" appear in J.C. Squire's slim volume of translations. He concentrates on 38 poems from the "Spleen et Idéal" section of Baudelaire's *Les Fleurs du mal* – only about half of which correspond to Scott's selection – and appends them to a selection of 21 of his own poems with the sub-title "And Baudelaire Flowers". The translations are gathered together under the heading "Blossoms of Evil". Unlike Scott's ruminative approach and archaic language, Squire demystifies and disambiguates the meanings in Baudelaire's verse, reverting to the 10-syllable line of the traditional sonnet form and infusing his translations with simple, plain language. His "Blossoms of Evil" are fairly uniform in their bitter-sweet tone and they correspond well to his own selections of verse which are a combination of erotic and valedictory love poems ("The Surviving Sense", "Consummation", "Fin-De-Siècle"), pastoral and mood poems ("Pastoral", Lassitude", "On the Road"), and poems about war and death ("Two Triumphs", "To the Continental Socialists"). Although *Poems: And Baudelaire Flowers* was published in the same year as Scott's translations of Baudelaire their approaches to the French poet are very different. Here, for example, are Scott's and Squire's versions of Baudelaire's "Causerie":

"Causerie"

Vous êtes un beau ciel d'automne, clair et rose!
Mais la tristesse en moi monte comme la mer,
Et laisse, en refluent, sur ma lèvre morose
Le souvenir cuisant de son limon amer.

— Ta main se glisse en vain sur mon sein qui se pâme;
Ce qu'elle cherche, amie, est un lieu saccagé
Par la griffe et la dent féroce de la femme.
Ne cherchez plus mon cœur; les bêtes l'ont mangé.

Mon cœur est un palais flétri par la cohue;
On s'y soûle, on s'y tue, on s'y prend aux cheveux!
— Un parfum nage autour de votre gorge nue!…

Ô Beauté, dur fléau des âmes, tu le veux!
Avec tes yeux de feu, brillants comme des fêtes,
Calcine ces lambeaux qu'ont épargnés les bêtes! (Baudelaire 2008, 114-115)

"Causerie"

You are a roseate Autumn-sky, that glows!
Yet sadness rises in me like the flood,
And leaves in ebbing on my lips morose,
The poignant memory of its bitter mud.

In vain your hands my swooning[11] breast embrace;
Oh friend! Alone remains the plundered spot,
Where woman's biting grip has left its trace:
My heart, the beasts devoured—seek it not!

My heart is a palace pillaged by the herd;
They kill and take each other by the throat!
A perfume glides around your bosom bared—

O loveliness thou scourge of souls—devote
Thine eyes of fire—luminous like feasts,
To burn these rags—rejected by the beasts! (Scott 1909, 37)

"Causerie"

You are an autumn sky, suffused with rose….
Yet sadness rises in me like the sea,
And on my sombre lip, when it outflows,
Leaves its salt burning slime for memory.

Over my swooning breast your fingers stray;
In vain, alas! My breast is a void pit
Sacked by the tooth and claw of woman. Nay,
Seek not my heart; the beasts have eaten it!

My heart is as a palace plundered
By the wolves, wherein they gorge and rend and kill,
A perfume round thy naked throat is shed…. (Squire 1909, 60)

Beauty, strong scourge of souls, O work thy will!
Scorch with thy fiery eyes which shine like feasts
These shreds of flesh rejected by the beasts! (Squire 1909, 60)

Squire's version is more prosaic. While Scott retains the elemental imagery in the first stanza, invoking skies, floods, and mud (very Baudelairean!), Squire keeps the human body in close view. Scott's "flood" that "leaves in ebbing on my lips morose" becomes for Squire a sensation that

[11] I have corrected the printer's typo "swooming" here to "swooning".

equates to bodily fluids: "salt burning slime". The imagery in Squire's translation is primeval, raw, and savage, but it also suggests the fall of Rome. The breast is a "void pit / Sacked by the tooth and claw of woman" and the wolves "gorge and rend and kill". Scott also invokes "beasts" to rhyme with "feasts" (another allusion to Roman excess), but in his version, the beasts turn upon themselves, giving the impression that the reader is watching at some distance, slightly preserved perhaps from the worst of the devastation. Squire's translation affords the reader no comfort. The language is plain and confrontational and the reader is made to feel intimately acquainted with the ravaged heart of the speaker.

Scott's and Squire's translations of Baudelaire were published early in their careers (in 1909 Scott was 30, Squire 25), and as Patricia Clements notes of Squire, their "shifting responses" to their early translations as they grew older "tidily demonstrate […] [the] line of development of attitudes towards Baudelaire" in the twentieth century: "In 1920, art for art's sake and the decorations of decadence were out of style" (1985, 221-22). They both continued to write poetry, but while Scott followed a musical and occultist path, Squire became an influential journalist, essayist, and parodist, establishing the *London Mercury* in 1919 (for which he wrote under the name "Solomon Eagle"). Later on, he was literary editor of the *New Statesman* and chief literary critic of the *Observer*. Squire was not a member of the avant-garde; he was lambasted in the 1920s and 1930s for his establishment views by the Sitwells and the Bloomsbury Group and for being the leader of "the Squirearchy". Squire's unembellished style ("Seek not my heart; the beasts have eaten it!") contrasts with Scott's quaint diction ("the plundered spot, […] My heart, the beasts devoured - seek it not!"). Scott's emphasis is on the evocation of being between two temporalities (antiquity and modernity), two elements (sky and sea), and two physical and emotional states (swooning adoration and a savage plunder). This dynamic interstitiality is a noteworthy feature of Scott's settings of Dowson's poems.

3. Dowson: Interstitial States

While Scott's literary translations tend to be focused on replicating patterns of sound and rhyme, Scott's settings of poetry into song show a degree of freedom and flair. There is a tension in his work at times between creative fluency (imagine his hands improvising at the keyboard) and lack of self-critical reflection, and this becomes particularly evident when we consider his many settings into music of the poetry of Dowson, one of his most favoured poets in the early years of the century. The affinity between the two, as discussed elsewhere (see Desmarais 2021), is widely acknowledged. Scott's "Victorian sensibilities accorded well with Dowson's and in that vein", his son Desmond avers, "he loved to indulge in pleasurable feelings of sadness, though he was, in reality, the least melancholy of men" (Scott 2018, 314).

Scott discovered Dowson's poetry through his continental travels in a roundabout way. He was introduced to the work of the English poet by George who in turn discovered the poetry through German translations made by his close friend, the Dutch poet, Albert Verwey.[12] Verwey's translations of Dowson in the late 1890s set in motion a wave of interlingual and intermedial translation activity that is remarkable for its intensity and linguistic range. Verwey was a mystical and pantheistic poet, whose first book of poems, *Persephone*, was published in 1883. He published an essay and some translations of his poems in the September 1897 issue of

[12] "The poet Verwey, the painter Jan Toorop, and the architect Berlage were George's Dutch friends" (see George 1944, 12).

his bi-monthly magazine, *Tweemaandelijksch Tijdschrift*. George read Verwey's essay and translations and was impressed: "Your essay on Dowson brings many new things and the translations give a good picture. I am certain you will be good enough to lend me one of Dowson's books. Perhaps I might try my luck and show some of that to the Germans".[13]

George was inspired to translate Dowson's poems and he recommended the English poet to Scott who in turn responded by translating almost the entire spectrum of George's poems and setting Dowson's poems to music. According to the editors of the three-volume *Stefan George und sein Kreis*, Scott's translations of George specially consider *Der Siebente Ring* (1907), *Der Stern des Bundes* (1913), and *Das Jahr der Seele* (1897), focusing on poems that convey less "Weltanschauung" and more "musical" texts (thereby intensifying their euphony). In contrast to Broicher's translations of George's poems into English (Broicher 1909), where the semantics are handled liberally and the abundance of rhyme, assonance, and alliteration enhance the textual musicality, Scott's translations are more faithful to the original. For example, Scott's translation of "Komm in den totgesagten park und schau" uses two pairs of rhyme - "shimmer; / "glimmer" in the first stanza and "twining" / "combining" in the final stanza, which correspond neatly with the "female" (i.e., polysyllabic) rhymes in the original.

While Scott's rationale for translating Dowson's poems into music is the evocation of different moods, they also all have in common the theme of what Jessica Gossling has termed "betwixtness" or "thresholdness" (2017; 2019). They each evoke in different ways an interstitial state of being (being in love/not being in love; being vocal/silent; being alive and warm/cold and dead). Their palette is bled, the language is plain and monosyllabic for the most part, and the mood valedictory. The transitional period between late summer and autumn prevails across a few of the poems ("A Valediction" with imagery of sowing, reaping, crops, harvesting). Some lines are repeated, most often at the beginning and end of the poem, and the words that recur are "heart", "love", "kiss", "silent" / "silence", "kiss", "forgot" / "forgotten", "weep", "sleep", "dream". The poems speak to what Dowson in "Beyond" calls "The twilight of poor love" (l. 9) (2003, 173). The thematic similarities are strongest in the poems written between 1904 and 1911 where "silence" articulates a state of suspension or heightening of emotion and is called upon paradoxically to say more than words can ever express.

Dowson's use of silence – using line-breaks, caesura, and punctuation – is a striking feature noted by many critics (see Kuduk Weiner 2006; Desmarais 2019). In a volume of short essays by Bonnier entitled *Milieux D'Art*, Bonnier identifies silence as a key feature of Dowson's poems. Dowson, he maintains, is "un poète de la soi-disante décadence latine, un psalmodieur de proses ecclésiastiques, dont l'écho retentit sous les voûtes des cloîtres" (Bonnier n.d., 15). He elaborates on the various kinds of silence encountered in Dowson's poems:

> Le silence: c'est l'atmosphère de sa poésie; il isole le chant, dont les ondes le traversent; il donne à sa musique—et ce fut un des poètes les plus musicaux—une signification, comme d'une note attendue longtemps, un soupir étouffé dans une église au crépuscule, un frôlement d'ombre par de longs corridors. Lorsque le son s'éteint, le silence reprend, accru, semble-t-il, par cette voix qui l'a exprimé. (16)

We know that Scott's interest in Dowson was fired by George in Frankfurt, but it may also have been stimulated or reinforced by his friendship with Bonnier. Bonnier's essay is dedicated

[13] George was not uncritical of Dowson. Before he possessed a copy of his own, he maintained that although Dowson's poems were "unsurpassed in detail", they lacked "the Great Idea". See Oelmann 2012, 642, translation by Andreas Kramer.

to Scott, with the epigraph "(A Gift of Silence)" taken from the opening line of Dowson's poem "Amor Umbratilis" (15), and although it is undated, Bonnier clearly recognises Scott's love of Dowson's poetry and his attunement to the poet's use of silence as a form of expression. Both Dowson and Scott were familiar with the poetry of Stéphane Mallarmé and Paul Verlaine, for whom poetry was evocative and intersensory like music. "We now hear undeniable rays of light", Mallarmé claimed in his essay "Crise de vers" (1897, "Crisis in Poetry"), "It is not *description* which can unveil the efficacy and beauty of monuments, or the human face in all their maturity and native state, but rather evocation, *allusion*, *suggestion*" (Mallarmé 1956, 40).

"Pierrot and the Moon Maiden" is a convenient doorway to Scott's settings of Dowson. He excerpts a pair of exchanges between the two characters in Dowson's "The Pierrot of the Minute" (1897). The key is E major with, often, an added sixth (a Scott compositional fingerprint), and although Scott chooses duple metre (two crotchets to a bar – a frequent choice in his songs), he disrupts our expectations slightly by opening with three bars of suspended quintuplets in the right hand of the piano alone. When the left hand enters, with a held "diminished" chord, tonal ambiguity is confirmed. Both these elements suggest the musically interstitial, a zone neither dark nor light, and one which Scott's Dowson settings frequently inhabit. Odd and disqueting, especially when contrasted with the folk-like simplicity emulated by the voice, such features enhance the uncertainty of a delicate, questing mood.

The voice enters echoing the first three notes of the piano with "What is love?" and there are further metric changes here – perhaps to underline the unsettling question – until the music subsides into an occasionally disrupted three-in-a-bar metre. We should note here that changes of metre are very frequent in some of Scott's piano music, and one characteristic which led to him being considered something of a maverick modernist. They do occur, sometimes rather unpredictably, in his Dowson settings, but Scott may well have decided to pare back this modernistic element with the more conservative taste of his likely song audience in mind, and also the frequently reflective atmosphere.

The twilight mood of Scott's song settings is characteristic of Dowson's poetry after 1889, the year when he met and fell in love with Adelaide Foltinowicz, the eleven-year-old daughter of the owner of the "Poland" restaurant in SoHo, London. In the twenty-one "Poésie Schublade Notebook" poems inspired by Adelaide, he expresses a mixture of piety and sinfulness. As Gossling comments, "while the figure of the little girl on the cusp of maturity featured in Dowson's poetry before he met her, afterwards there is a clear intensification of his use of the *jeune fille* motif" (2019, 103). In "A Valediction", a poem written after Adelaide rejected Dowson's marriage proposal in April 1893, he puts words into the mouth of his mute young muse, idealising their parting ("Then let it be like this", l. 2), deferring the "anguish" of their separation by entreating her to say "*Until to-morrow or some other day, / If we must part*" (Dowson 2003, 173, italics in original). Paradoxically, given that this is a situation where "Words are so weak", "silence" is given a strong poetic voice in the second stanza to articulate the unresolvable tension between living, loving, and loss of love:

> *Life is a little while, and love is long;*
> *A time to sow and reap,*
> *And after harvest a long time to sleep,*
> *But words are weak.* (112)

The ventriloquial technique in "A Valediction" creates a sense of distance between the speaker and his feelings. The frustration in the first stanza at the "useless anguish of a kiss" as a parting gesture concedes to resignation. The speaker passes the microphone, as it were, to a

personified silence to utter the closing words. The poem concludes with a sense of declining energy ("a long time to sleep, / But words are weak").

Scott begins his setting, like "Pierrot" and many others, in duple metre, with a languorous two-bar phrase over an oscillating pedal, suggesting the reluctance of the poet to part. This piano phrase appears identically before each of the two verses, the conflicting inclinations of the lovers perhaps being suggested by a pulsing alternation of two chords just a semitone apart. In setting strophic poems, Scott is often content to repeat similar music in each verse. This is less the case here, suggesting an element of hopefulness as the text unfolds in verse 2. Verse 1 imagines that a further meeting may be possible, but in the event the second falters into sleep.

On account of Dowson's distinctive rhyme scheme (ABABCCA, with the last line changing to a repeat of "C" in verse 2) particular words and resonances claim attention. "Part" on its first appearance (l. 1) emerges from a repeat of the piano's opening phrase but with the final chord adjusted semitonally, thus marking already a departure from the opening mood. When the word recurs in line 7, the piano reverts via a perfect cadence to the harmony of the opening couplet, as if acquiescing to the opening question. "Heart on heart" (l. 3) is set to amply harmonized chords in the piano, exemplifying the richness of feeling where two people are involved. "Anguish" (l. 4, in mid-verse) comes at the apex of a rising/falling vocal curve and an apparently cadential formation in the piano which does not arrive where one expects. This technique of suspending or eclipsing a sense of arrival on the keynote is particularly characteristic of Scott's modernist instrumental works, there leading to a sense of restless searching; here there is a moodier uncertainty. It would be fruitful to compare and contrast the energetic peregrinations of those works with the exploration of atonality in the pre-serial works of Arnold Schoenberg, contemporaneous with much of Scott's song output. Harmonically speaking, Scott's eschewal of "points of arrival" is closely linked to his ideas about musical flow, which he outlined in a lecture to the Fabian Society in 1913: "[N]othing can be more aggravating than a continual coming to an end and a continual restarting. The decree of incessant flux […] is one which pervades the universe…" (quoted in Collins 2013, 186-87).

In "Let silence speak" (which might perhaps be a motto for the meeting of Dowson and Scott's decadent aesthetics),[14] the word "speak" is enunciated on a rise in the voice without emphasis in the piano, just a richly sustained harmony, so that the singer speaks as it were to the air. Then, with characteristic liberty, Scott repeats the phrase with the voice curving downwards and the piano progressing through another unresolved cadence. "Sleep" (akin to silence?) is repeated at the end of the last two lines of the poem and Scott allows the singer to arrive at the home key for these, but not on the keynote (again a sense of suspension), and the last is enunciated low in the vocal register and against the reverberating (and slowing) pulsations of the opening piano motif.

The melancholy mood of "A Valediction" is maintained in Dowson's "O Mors! quam amara est memoria tua homini pacem habenti in substantiis suis", the title of which is taken from *Ecclesiasticus*: "O death, how bitter is the remembrance of thee to a man that liveth at rest in his possessions" (41:1). The poem was first published in the first book of the *Rhymers'*

[14] The capacity for both music and silence to go where words could not was, of course, amongst the tropes of the epoch. On silence, Maurice Maeterlinck in *Le Trésor des humbles*, is characteristic: "Le silence est l'élément dans lequel se forment les grandes choses, […] La parole est trop souvent […] l'art de cacher la pensée, mais l'art d'étouffer et de suspender la pensée, en sorte qu'il n'en reste plus à cacher. […] La parole est du temps, le silence de l'éternité" (1896, 7-9). The rich repertoire of allusions to music – as symbol, as acceptable reservoir of deep feeling for bourgeois consumers, and as a "revelatory influence on personal identity" – in the poetry of Dowson itself is explored by Sutton 2005.

Club (1892) and then in *Verses* (1896), and Scott sets the poem as a song in 1904, retitling it simply "Sorrow". In Dowson's poem, the repetition of words across the poem and the return of phrases in the first and last lines of each stanza, "exceeding sorrow"; "give over playing"; "forget to-morrow" (2003, 89), create a feeling of engulfing sadness as the speaker entreats his unnamed mute love object to give up the music she is playing and lay her head his way, to focus on "this one day" rather that the to-morrow, which we presume may never come. Rather like Symons's "La Mélinite: Moulin Rouge", "O Mors!…" is a poem that circles on itself, but instead of imitating the circular, revolving action of dance, Dowson invokes the silent inward turnings of pure thought, emphasising negation and minimal effort. The speaker directs the love object to cast her viol away "*Merely* laying / Thine head my way" and goes on to instruct her to "Weep *nothing*" (*ibidem*, my emphasis).

Scott's setting (as "Sorrow") evokes the ambivalence of intimacy before parting, by selecting a home key in the major, but beginning in and allowing frequent colouration by the relative minor key. He also employs brief, sighing phrases, particularly in the piano part, again cast in his preferred duple metre. As earlier observed, the vocal line avoids chromaticism, setting the words syllabically – sometimes almost breathlessly – for the most part, whereas greater richness through added notes and passing harmonies can and does characterize the piano part, as if this is carrying the emotional weight of the mood setting.

The intimate spaces of "A Valediction" and "O Mors!…" deny the reader any view of a world outside the poem.[15] Instead they generate a focus on sounds and imagery that evoke a certain mood, in this case, sorrow. They contrast with Dowson's poem "Beata Solitudo", where Silence is situated in a beautiful, isolated valley landscape:

> Where pale stars shine
> On apple-blossom
> And dew-drenched vine. (Dowson 2003, 96)

The poem evokes a state of innocence and youth. At the end of the first stanza, the speaker asks tentatively whether the land "Is yours or mine?" but goes on to evoke a space where the lovers can rest, forget, and hide away from "the world forsaken / And out of mind", be in tune with nature ("We shall not find / The stars unkind"), with "vistas / Of gods asleep, / With dreams as deep". The last stanza repeats the first stanza with one variation: the question-mark is now a confirmatory and decisive exclamation mark: "A land of Silence, […] Be yours and mine!" (96-97).

"Vita summa brevis…" made a particular impression on Scott. It inspired him to both write a poem ("To the Memory of Ernest Dowson") which he set to music and called "Afterday" (scored for voice and piano) (Mathews 1906) and set as a song ("Meditation"). In common with several other settings discussed Scott not only repeats key words here ("the gate") but also elects to repeat Dowson's first verse as a third, thus changing not only the structure but the emphasis of the original. Whereas Dowson progresses with at least some sense of opening out ("our path emerges for a while") (2003, 63), Scott creates more turning back, withdrawal, thus emphasizing our "passing the gate" (our dying fall).

[15] Kuduk Weiner describes this as Dowson's attempt "to create a 'pure' and purely aesthetic poetry whose imagery and sounds would be comparable in their autonomy and anti-representational potential to paint or notes of music" (2006, 483), and goes on to say that Dowson's techniques of substraction responded to "[…] calls to 'obliterate' mimetic subject matter and reveal a pure song at the heart of poetic expression" (485).

To this end, the minor adjustments Scott makes to the vocal melody in each verse stand out. In his verse 2 the melody is identical until we reach the word "roses" which he moves up just a semitone in comparison with the comparable "laughter" in verse 1. The line "Our path emerges…" has fresh melody, to convey hopefulness, then "within a dream" is hypnotically repeated and echoes at lower pitch the sighing intonation given to the keyword within "Out of a misty dream" just before. In turn, exactly those pitches return when "the gate" repeats at the very end of the setting. In other respects the melodic setting of Scott's verse 3 is identical to verse 1. There is here a dance between lulling hypnosis and subtle variation.

The piano introduction is typical of Scott in its slightly disrupted serenity. There is a rocking, barcarolle-like interplay between the anchoring fifths in the left hand and the oscillating added-note chords in the right, but he interjects a change of metre already in bar 2 (four in the bar to an unusual five). Why does he do this? To suggest some unease already present within the calm? Also characteristic is the static ambiguous harmony which persists right up to the fourth bar before minor disruptions and returns to the focal opening chord. This interplay between an ambiguous harmonic stasis and progressions of uncertain direction seems characteristic of the piano writing in Scott's Dowson settings overall, in the wandering between points of uncertain fixity.

Scott uses triplets, chains of quavers, and even an off-beat pause in the voice to attempt to accommodate and pace the text, not always allowing the singer a smooth progress.[16] There is also an odd hiatus on the word "after" (end of line 3) and a lingering piano pause before "We pass the gate". Then the piano intervenes, with a sequence of descending sighing chords emerging from the harmonies of the opening but not related to them, recalling the interlude we noted in "The Valley of Silence". These and other aspects of the piano writing described above suggest a composer working at speed, and probably at the keyboard, perhaps being mindful of his publisher expecting another delivery of songs.

Conclusion

The translations of Baudelaire's and George's poems published as part of the Vigo Cabinet series between 1905 and 1910 spurred on other translators, and while Mathews's endeavours to expand the literary horizons of the Edwardians may have had limited impact in relation to George's reception among English-speaking readers (George's work was known in France and Holland but wasn't translated into English again for more than thirty years),[17] they had an impact on English readers' perceptions of Baudelaire. Scott cut his translating teeth on Baudelaire, just as George had done ten years earlier. His translations of Baudelaire's poems from *Les Fleurs du mal* tend to substitute Baudelaire's subtle meanings with a sentimental lyricism and youthful fascination with melancholy and death. The autumnal reverie of Scott's slim volume

[16] Taxing for a singer could be the contrast between the expectation of a predominantly smooth melodic contour and relatively unprepared leaps for "laughter" (bar 3), "hate" (bar 4), "after" (bar 8), and "roses" (bar 15), for instance.

[17] Scott and Broicher were the first to translate George into English. There is not much information available about Broicher, but in her "Introduction" to *German Lyrists of To-Day*, she references the French and Dutch translations of a group of German poets, tentatively suggesting that it is time for the English reading public to know their work. She writes: "Now that the names and works of this group [Stefan George, Hugo von Hofmannsthal, Karl Gustav Vollmoeller, Karl Wolfskehl, Ernst Hardt, Leopold Zu Andrian-Werburg, Richard Perls, Friedrich Gundolf, Georg Edward] have already been some years introduced into France and Holland, it may perchance be of interest for the English public also, to become acquainted with them by way of translation" (1909, 8-9).The next English translation to appear was George 1944, followed by George 1949, which was based on the final edition of George's poems (1927-34).

is in striking contrast to Baudelaire's provocative and cynical tones and whereas Baudelaire immediately confronts the hypocrisy and vanity of the reader, Scott focuses on decorative diction and the sound of words over sense. Taken as a whole, Scott selects poems that are meditative and geographically non-specific and his translations are entrenched in the style of 1890s' verse. This approach, as his son Desmond Scott notes, "harks back to the Victorian era in which he grew up" (2018, 311) and stands in stark contrast to his otherwise experimental and iconoclastic music-making, particularly as a virtuoso pianist.

Scott never directly referred to the influence of decadence on his work. As with the symbolist tradition "it remained as a silent partner in Scott's philosophical development" (Collins 2013, 230), and yet, as this essay has attempted to show, his early literary translations and song settings of Dowson's poems resonate with decadent themes and imagery. Scott first encounters Dowson's poetry via the translations made by Verwey which are then circulated and recommended by George. Coming upon Dowson circuitously in this way may have focused Scott's attention to the soundscapes of the poems, the emphasis on patterns of words and phrases, and their affective and associative qualities.

Their delicate decadent lyricism had enormous appeal to musicians, singers, and composers in the early twentieth century (see Desmarais 2019). Dowson "had the pure lyric gift, unweighted or unballasted by any other quality of mind or emotion", Symons commented in *Studies in Prose and Verse*, "a song, for him, was music first, and then whatever you please afterwards, so long as it suggested, never told, some delicate sentiment, a sigh or a caress" (1904, 274-75). The lack of freightedness that Symons identifies as being peculiar to Dowson is a quality that we also find in Scott. It permitted him likewise to move across and between physical and artistic boundaries with "an intense self-consciousness […] an over-subtilizing refinement upon refinement" (Symons 1893, 858), and create music that works a passage between quasi-medieval, romantic/decadent and modernist tendencies, often requiring significant accomplishment on the part of his performers to convey the distinctive moods.

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A Decadent Hermitage
Tanizaki Jun'ichirō's *The Golden Death* as a Dilettante Translation of Artificial Paradise*

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Abstract

Tanizaki Jun'ichirō's novella *The Golden Death* (1914) commemorates Japan's participation in the global circulation of *fin de siècle* decadence and Aestheticism. A close study of *The Golden Death* shows how the protagonist Okamura's project of building his artificial paradise showcases a chaotic bricolage of European and Asian artefacts and literary masterpieces. Failing to emulate *fin de siècle* writers, the Japanese novella simultaneously reveals the author's inability to formulate a clearly defined aesthetic belief through borrowing Western counterparts. This tragicomic story reflects Japan's unsystematic reception of *fin de siècle* Decadent literature and Aestheticist discourses when the country's literary circles were still under the strong influence of Naturalism.

Keywords: Fin de siècle Decadence, *Konjiki no shi*, Modern Japanese Literature, Occidentalism, Tanizaki Jun'ichirō

This essay examines the Japanese decadent novella *Konjiki no shi* 金色の死 (1914, *The Golden Death*), written by Tanizaki Jun'ichirō 谷崎潤一郎 (1886-1965), one of the most prolific writers and a representative aesthete in Japanese literary modernism. Nominated for the Nobel Prize in Literature seven times, Tanizaki consciously developed his early career as a transcultural successor of *fin de siècle* decadence and Aestheticism. As Nagai Kafū 永井荷風, a notable polyglot writer of the time, describes, Tanizaki is "urban, decadent, and eloquent", the antithesis of the stereotypical Naturalist writer, who can be considered both the Baudelaire and the Edgar Allan Poe of Japan (Ito 1991, 51-52). Tanizaki's work displays an intricate confluence of urban sensibilities and modernist literary trends imported from Europe (52). Nevertheless, what underlies his narrative is somewhat sombre and melancholic – while his

* All quotations from secondary texts have been translated into English.

"cultural aspiration" to the West is undeniable, it displays a hint of slavishness stemming from his cultural complexity regarding Japan's geopolitical position at the time as a latecomer to Western modernity. Such an attitude manifests itself also in a radical Occidentalism, reducing the West to tangible and visible artforms devoid of historical contexts. As I hope to show, his fictional writings like *The Golden Death* attest to the intricate desire for "possession [of] and participation [in]" the Other's literary modernity (63).

Unlike the majority of polyglot Japanese writers in the early twentieth century, Tanizaki built his career primarily as a sinologist, and his lack of expertise in European languages and literatures forced him to consult literary works in translation and secondhand criticism. Even with such limitations, *The Golden Death* nonetheless commemorates the Japanese reception of major *fin de siècle* decadent literature, particularly the influence of Joris-Karl Huysmans's *À Rebours* (1884) and Walter Pater's *The Renaissance* (1873). Furthermore, as Japanese modernist writer Edogawa Ranpo 江戸川乱歩 (1894-1965) pointed out, the novella pays zealous tribute to Poe's novellas "The Domain of Arnheim" (1847) and "Landor's Cottage" (1849) (Bienati 2018, 350). Since the plots of these stories also revolve around the affluent protagonists' ambitions for building a utopian garden, *The Golden Death* is often considered Tanizaki's mimetic recreation of Poe's works (353). Whereas the narrative frame of utopia-building constitutes a possible comparison, their works belong to the opposite ends of the spectrum at the subtextual level of temperament. The garden in Poe's works deploys a serene beauty of nature complemented by mysterious Gothic ambiance, wonderment at an invisible spiritual world, and subtle consternations. In his magnificent estate, the protagonist Ellison exalts primitive and uncultivated nature, considering them "prognostic of *death*" (Poe 1984, 861). Tanizaki's narrative, on the other hand, almost entirely dismisses the virtue of nature and the sense of apprehension. Rather than contemplating the harmony between nature and artifice, the narrative agitatedly assigns a privilege to manmade artefacts, and as a result nature is deemed a simple prop, a pretext for constructing an amusement-park-like edifice. The pursuit of artificiality ultimately results in the protagonist's self-destruction, and the utopia also thus semantically vanishes as an illusory dream. In this narrative construct, Des Esseintes' avid pursuit of artificiality built on the plethora of pleasure-driven *objets d'art* in *À Rebours* provides a congenial model for Tanizaki's decadent hero.[1] Their passions are equally invested in the dreams of constructing a utopian hermitage *par excellence* for escaping rowdy urban realities. Marked also by a Baudelairean cult of agonistic individualism, these works embody and resonate uncannily with the decadent spirit at the *fin de siècle*.

The rebellion of European decadents against modern mass society belatedly influenced Tanizaki, who was born in the middle of the Meiji-Restoration phase and grew up in the post-Restoration age (1880s-1910s). As a latecomer to the development of a modern nation in the eyes of the West, Japan's Meiji government avidly implemented the principle of scientific positivism toward the end of the 19th century under the slogan of *bunmei kaika* 文明開化 (Civ-

[1] The argument here dwells on a speculative reading of the texts of Huysmans and Tanizaki. The Japanese translation of *À Rebours* was published by Shibusawa Tatsuhiko in 1962, nearly fifty years after Tanizaki wrote *The Golden Death*. Therefore, Tanizaki would not have accessed the French novel when he wrote the novella or even before he died. However, as Shibusawa notes in his postscript to the translation, the novel expounds on the neurotic humour of the "pleasure principle" unleashed by Huysmans, whose poetic spirit was repressed by daily routines of labour (see Shibusawa 2004, 376). In Tanizaki's *The Golden Death*, the protagonist's (as well as the author's) pleasure principle emanates from the plethora of universal artefacts placed in the utopic garden. The range of artefacts encompasses various historical and cultural sources, and such a chaotic arrangement of the Other's work reflects the repressed conditions of Japan's native culture.

ilization and Enlightenment) and *fukoku kyōhei* 富国強兵 (Enrich the Country, Strengthen the Armed Forces) in its national functions and public operations. These dicta aimed at concretizing a utilitarian ideal of the young nation whose development was based on rational thought and empirically scientific knowledge.

In turn, Japan's national leaders openly relegated the value of arts and letters, considering them "leisurely studies" lacking empirical objectivity and pragmatic purpose (Maruyama 2001, 43). This trajectory of the government's stance succeeded in developing a vigorous national polity, as exemplified by its victories in the wars against China in 1895 and Russia in 1905. In the realm of literature, alongside the reformation of the modern Japanese language, naturalism, which was reductively equated to realism, flourished as the vanguard literary style that effectively accommodated scientific observation of social realities. Subsequently, the advent of social and literary cosmopolitanism in the 1910s helped disseminate an increasing amount of European literature in translation, while urban intellectuals were increasingly plagued by a widespread neurosis stemming from the conditions of an indigenous Japanese culture ceaselessly exposed to Western trends and fads. In such a sociocultural climate, *The Golden Death* can be read as a manifest backlash against Japan's renouncing its cultural continuity. Simultaneously, the novella displays an intricate cultural politics that entail a cultural and literary alliance with *fin de siècle* decadence as a galvanizing and radical remedy for Japanese literature of the 1910s.

Given this secondhand exposure to the West, as critics saw it, Tanizaki's fictional works tend to project an oversimplified and fetishized image of European culture (Yoshinori 2005, 242). *The Golden Death* is no exception, representing a phase of the author's intricate Occidentalism. Tanizaki's encounter with the West a few decades later was, as Margherita Long provocatively observes, shaped into a "Western superego" (2009, 17) that dominated him as an imaginable model to follow. With such a subtext, the story features an unnamed narrator who is a writer and the protagonist's friend since school. What the narrative renders is, therefore, according to Tsuboi Hideto, an anti-novelistic story where Okamura accumulates deterministic aesthetic viewpoints (2008, 85), that are later shaped into his artificial paradise consisting of a chaotic bricolage of artefacts. The plethora of art forms in the novella unpacks Japan's unsystematic reception of foreign cultural production. Consequently, in the guise of a utopian space, a cultural autotoxemia arises from the hasty and drastic absorption of foreign cultural productions, combined with the grotesque desire to reproduce classic masterpieces. Through excessive consumption and failed digestion, the story closes with the protagonist's death with the transformation of his own body into an artwork. His abrupt death proves the feebleness of an artificial paradise built on the imitation and transplantation of the Other's cultural productions. Here, the prominent influence of *fin de siècle* decadence can be traced back not only to Baudelaire and Huysmans's Des Esseintes but also to Wilde's Dorian Gray. Where these influences are noticeable, *The Golden Death* constitutes a sort of patchwork of borrowed aesthetic credos and thus lacks a genuine originality (*ibidem*). While the reader strays from a navigated path according to a core aesthetics, the novella's aesthetic promiscuity attests to a transcultural circulation of *fin de siècle* decadent sensibilities that deeply resonated in the Japan of the time when gradual urbanization and mass consumerism began to erode traditional cultural spaces and aesthetic values.[2]

At this juncture, it is appropriate to revisit Poe's influence on this Japanese novella. Published in his late twenties, Tanizaki's piece is believed to be inspired by Poe's "The Domain of Arnheim". The protagonist Ellison, a young millionaire who inherits his family's tremendous assets, builds a

[2] Tanizaki's "In Praise of Shadow" eloquently laments that modern technology imported from the West was gradually invading and replacing Japan's traditional values and cultural space (see Tanizaki 2001).

utopic garden filled with the beauty of nature and tranquillity. He intends to create a dream-like space halfway between nature and artifice, aiming to escape the contemporary hustle and bustle. The narrative tone remains consistent throughout the story, maintaining serenity and elusive suspense. In light of the awe before nature and spirits running through "The Domain of Arnheim", the Japanese novella displays a gaudy bricolage of foreign cultural legacies and a dismissal of stylistic cohesiveness. Therefore, the two stories have only a basic structure in common comprising an embedded narrative and a utopia-building plot. In sum, the novella is an empirically unique failure of *ars combinatoria*, which foregrounds an eclectic and libidinal desire for devouring Western and global artforms in a reductively totalized cluster. There is a radical mishmash of diachronically as well as culturally alienated art forms – architecture, statues, visual arts, literary references, and performing arts – and the consequential autointoxication as symbolized by the protagonist's death.

Loosely following the narrative skeleton of "The Domain of Arnheim", *The Golden Death* amalgamates the *fin de siècle* decadence, Gothic, and Romantic literary imaginations. Shaped by the recollections of the protagonist Okamura's unnamed friend, the first-person narrator reports the man's peculiar artistic credo and discreet process of developing a private utopia that features an anachronistic palatial edifice and a geometrically-designed garden. In contrast to Ellison's contemplative and introverted desire for escaping rowdy urban life in "The Domain of Arnheim", *The Golden Death* produces a daringly romantic, self-serving energy transformed into a corporeal materiality. As the story progresses, the first-person narrator reports his witnessing of the protagonist's exotic fetishism, as exhibited by the juxtaposition of the Parthenon, the Alhambra, the Vatican, and Asian edifices (Tanizaki 2005, 35). While such an undisciplined representation of history and civilizations caused the author's abhorrence for his own novella later in life,[3] I argue that the *tour de force* of *The Golden Death* manifests itself in the form of materialistic debauchery, concretized by the protagonist's meticulous construction of an edifice laden with the collection of aesthetic objects and indulgence in the artificial paradise *par excellence*. The overall trajectory of the novella is linear, simple, and yet chaotic for all its disorderly aesthetic schemes. Consequently, all the episodes in the novella are ultimately integrated into the destructive loss of the protagonist's life. With the unequivocal tone of narrative, Okamura's actions, his aesthetic views on art, and explicit depictions of objects that adorn his utopia, all drive the tragicomedy. The garden envisioned by Ellison is the world that constitutes an unfathomable mystery, invisible angelic spirits, and a transcendental cosmology closely intertwined with spiritual purity. Towards the climax, the narrative describes in detail Ellison's boat trip to find the ideal land for his project, suspending the reader until the moment at which "the whole Paradise of Arnheim burst upon the view" (Poe 1984, 869). What the narrative underscores is the uncanny power of nature – "a gush of entrancing melody", "an oppressive sense of strange sweet odour", "bosky shrubberies", "flocks of golden and crimson birds", and "lily-fringed lakes", to name a few (*ibidem*). Such a depiction of nature is almost completely bypassed in *The Golden Death*, as the land for the project is blatantly "purchased" in a rather popular resort location (Tanizaki 2005, 34).

[3] Mishima Yukio calls *The Golden Death* Tanizaki's "忌まわしい秘作" (a detestable piece that needs to be concealed) (2000, 201). Unless otherwise stated, all translations are mine. I am aware of an availabe English translation by James Lipson and Kyoko Kurita (2013). Tanizaki excluded the work from his own complete anthology. However, more than ten years after Mishima interpreted the novella's significance focusing on narcissism that "achieved the ultimate contempt for intellectual cognition" (214) *The Golden Death* was included in *Tanizaki Jun'ichirō zenshū dai 2 kan* 谷崎潤一郎全集第二巻 (The Complete Works of Tanizaki Jun'ichirō vol. 2) in 1981. The inclusion occurred long after Tanizaki's death in 1965.

The general profile of Okamura misleads the reader to consider him as a Japanese variant of Ellison in "The Domain of Arnheim". Indeed, he is an attractive and idiosyncratic maverick, raised by a quasi-aristocratic family blessed with tremendous wealth. Nonetheless, upon a closer inspection, his persona derives from the *fin de siècle* decadent heroes whose narcissism, ennui, and scepticism of mainstream cultural norms drive him to a fatalistic and tragic end. In his youth, he excels in the humanities while developing an insolent self-consciousness as a young aesthete. The unbalanced tendency manifests itself in his excessive passion for European languages and literatures. Thanks to his affluent upbringing, Okamura masters French and German during his adolescence and begins to recite some passages from original texts such as Guy de Maupassant's *Sur l'eau* (10).[4] Not satisfied with simple reading, his passion for European literatures manifests in more extraverted actions. His new epistemological journey to the West begins though a bodily and sensorial re-education. In the process, Okamura invests his time and energy into body-building, arguing that "all literatures and arts" are born out of "the human body" (13). Proudly exhibiting his well-contoured body with inner muscles, the man consciously restages the Greco-Roman vision of the body in a highly narcissistic fashion (*ibidem*). The gesture suggests his empathy for the homoerotic fascination referenced in Pater's chapter on "Winckelmann" in *The Renaissance*.[5] Meanwhile, as he matures, Okamura increasingly despises science and mathematics, fields that entail objectivity and reasoning. His abhorrence of those academic subjects is not an arbitrary episode, but commonly shared among Japanese anti-naturalist aesthetes of the time who rebelled against the collective valorization of those limited bodies of knowledge. During the 1910s and 1920s, these national objectives began to recede as the victory in the Russo-Japanese War (1904-05) proved the success of the Meiji Restoration and its technological advancement. Together with economic development, the rigid objectives of the nation were subsequently replaced with urban commercialism, cosmopolitan ambience, and an increased interest in Western culture and arts. In the context of such social shifts, Okamura mirrors the mindset of a privileged young generation that keenly sensed the vicissitudes of the austere Meiji's epochal value system. His economic and physical privileges thus further invigorate his narcissism and rebellion against pragmatism (15).

Okamura's excessive narcissism backed by wealth is a significant pretext in *The Golden Death*. His family's affluence is synonymous with wine, opium, or hashish for Baudelaire, something that could empower the user "to free himself" while also having an enslaving effect (Baudelaire 1971, 64). What empowers Okamura is, as Ito posits, access to the West and Western products, which signify one's privilege in terms of political, cultural, and economic power (1991, 61). Furthermore, in culturally fluid Taishō Japan, wealth was a prerogative of those who had access to "the potent other world" (62). Okamura's self-fashioning through Western attire and objects exemplifies this valence of class-consciousness, also echoing the Baudelairean cult of individualism. Being merely a middle-school student, Okamura hammers out his personal image of a pretentious fashionista by "separating his front hair, carrying a gold watch,

[4] Maupassant is known as a leading writer of the Naturalist School in France, but he was one of the French authors whose works were most widely read by Japanese students of European literature. Okamura displays his decadent dispositions, and yet his familiarity with Maupassant is a reference to early twentieth-century Japan's education in foreign language and literature.

[5] In this episode, Okamura does not make a clear reference to Pater's *The Renaissance*; however, later, he refers to Pater's statement on music as the purest art form in the context of appraising the absence of meaning in music and its pure materiality of sound effects that do not entail any methodological process of understanding (Tanizaki 2005, 23). Tanizaki appears to accentuate the physical beauty pursued by Greco-Roman cultures and the pure materiality of music alluding to Pater.

smoking a cigar, and even wearing a diamond ring" (Tanizaki 2005, 15). These conspicuous items not only affirm his affluent economic status but also overturn standard norms and values associated with socially exemplary youth. As he grows older, Okamura indulges his "picturesque" dandyism with a seventeenth-century kimono and androgynous makeup (18-19). His daring, marked by confidence in physical beauty and aesthetic sensibility, echoes those of *fin de siècle* decadent heroes such as Oscar Wilde's Dorian Gray and Gabriele D'Annunzio's Andrea Sperelli in *Il piacere*, among many others. From the onset of the narrative, *The Golden Death* displays these performative elements, likened to those representative of European decadents and aesthetes. With his "excessively arrogant, fashionable, and selfish personality" (Tanizaki 2005, 15), Okamura belongs to the same genealogy of superfluous decadent heroes whose fatalistic nature drives them to devastating self-destruction.

Going through an insolent youthful phase, Okamura awakens to his aesthetic creed based on the supremacy of sensory beauty in art. What galvanizes his belief is Pater's *The Renaissance*, above all the chapter on the "School of Giorgione", which underscores the sensory nature of music. In the essay, Pater endorses the essence of music for its capacity of transmitting beauty to the audience without requiring any intermediary knowledge or faculties for comprehending it (23). In *The Golden Death*, the first-person narrator alludes to Pater's famous dictum on music as the ideal form of art, which realizes a "perfect identification of matter and form" (Tanizaki 2005, 23; Pater 1998, 88). The passages relevant to Okamura read as follows:

> Art […] is […] always striving to be independent of the mere intelligence, to become a matter of pure perception, to get rid of its responsibilities to its subject or material; the ideal examples of poetry and painting being those in which the constituent elements of the composition are so welded together, that the material or subject no longer strikes the intellect only; nor the form, the eye or the ear only; but form and matter, in their union or identity, present one single effect to the 'imaginative reason', that complex faculty for which every thought and feeling is twin-born with its sensible analogue or symbol.
>
> It is the art of music which most completely realizes this artistic ideal, this perfect identification of matter and form. (Pater 1998, 88)

Quoting these well-known passages almost verbatim, Okamura explains to the narrator that the sensory nature of music remains free from any reason or thought (Tanizaki 2005, 23). The following episode concretizes the same point further, by harshly criticizing German Enlightenment thinker Gotthold Ephraim Lessing's essay on the ancient sculpture *Laocoön and His Sons* (1766). In the essay, Lessing eulogizes John Milton's blindness and states that the absence of the physical apparatus can maximize the workings of the "eyes of mind" (Tanizaki 2005, 20). Through contemplation of Laocoön's excruciating facial pain and physical posture, Okamura continues, Lessing asserts the artistic notion of "an implied moment", a liminal phase when a subsequent action and emotion are conceived by a transfixed visual intensity. Such an "implied" meaning expressed in art vexes Okamura, as it lacks substantial clarity. Unless the art form itself galvanizes the recipient's sense of immediacy, he argues, beauty does not prove its value:

> I hate such an idea as imagination that is tantalizing and irritating. Beauty does not convince me unless it manifests itself in front of me and offers the form that is visible, tactile, and audible. Unless I savour the boisterous feeling of beauty that has no space for imagination but directly strikes me with the light of arc lamp, I cannot be satisfied. (27)

Here, Okamura's claim radically reduces art to a mere sensory stimulant. His oversimplified formula of art could be considered a sign of Tanizaki's immature interpretation, which also

reveals Japan's hasty receptivity to Western art theories. In any case, his protagonist disputes Lessing's advocacy of positivistic intellectualism, passed down from the Age of Enlightenment through an apparently incomplete and crude wrangling.

While Okamura's argument regarding the essence of art remains incomplete, the second half of *The Golden Death* narrates the concretization of what he believes to be genuine art. The massive project he launches is located in the countryside of the Hakone region, about 100 km southwest of Tokyo. Escaping busy urban life in a region where nature abounds, he purchases a vast acreage on top of a plateau and constructs a manmade landscape that includes a lake, fountain, waterfall, and hill that imitates Ellison's garden, utilizing the beauty of nature. This space is used to build a gigantic "heaven of art" where Okamura wields a radically eclectic vision of an artificial paradise that exhibits architecture from various civilizations and historical periods:

> Around the strangely sharp ridge akin to the painting of the Southern School, the Chinese-style castle echoes poems from the Tang Dynasty. Around the fountain in the flower garden, the Greek-styled rectangular pavilion stands surrounded by stone columns. At the corner of the cape sticking out to the lake, there is a palatial-style cottage of the Fujiwara Period with the banister over the water. Inside the windy forest, the marble bathhouse of ancient Rome is filled with sparkling hot water. […] Each residence displays the faces of the four seasons, imitating the image of the Parthenon, following the ambience of the Phoenix Hall, or tracing the style of the Alhambra, and appropriating the palace of Vatican […]. (35)

All the architectural structures are copies lacking authenticity and originality. According to Matthew Potolsky, literary imitation in decadent texts not only "read more like bibliographies than fiction or poetry" but also "thematize them" (1999, 236). In the passage above, the plethora of copies holds its own end, thematically reifying the ambition for opulence. The exhaustive list of renowned buildings and landscape designs reminds the reader of Des Esseintes' obsessive collection, which spans from literary magnum opuses and exotic perfumes to plants that stimulate his neurotic senses. In the massive garden, the multitude of exhibits constitute a sort of hodge-podge, described by Mishima Yukio as "the confused dreams and styles" revealing the vulgarity and ugliness of modern Japanese culture (Mishima 2000, 214). The nightmarish scenery staging "an amusement park-like space" (215), Mishima continues, is not only the failure of Tanizaki but also reveals the artistic and intellectual poverty of 1910s Taishō Japan. The same assortment of chaotic artwork keeps unfolding as the narrator moves forward into the property. A closer inspection of each sculpture reveals that all of them are mock masterpieces, like architectural designs borrowed from various historical ages and cultures, from China's Ming Dynasty through contemporary France. One of those pieces catches the narrator's attention: an imitation of August Rodin's *The Eternal Idol*, a sculpture that copies the face of Okamura himself (Tanizaki 2005, 36). Here, the narrative reveals a glimpse of the novella's overarching theme: the transformation of the artist into the artwork itself.

The final part of the novella reveals what the protagonist – and likely Tanizaki himself in the 1910s – envisions as the ideal form of art. The narrator tells the reader that two years later, he is once again invited to Okamura's massive property in Hakone. Welcomed by Okamura in the guise of a Roman citizen wearing toga and sandals, he observes a series of copies of sculptures such as Michelangelo's *Bound Slave, Apollo of Piombino*, and Polykleitos's *Doryphoros* from ancient Greece (40). Like Virgil, who guides Dante through the Inferno (41), Okamura continues the tour of the floors decorated by all the other artefacts from various styles and ages. They include statues displaying Count Ugolino's agonistic cannibalism, a melancholic Victor Hugo, Satyricon flirting with a Nymph, a man in despair, and the kissing couple of Botticelli's *Primavera* (*ibidem*). In the garden, there are *tableaux vivants* of Jean-Auguste-Dominique Ingres' *The Source*, Giorgione's

Venus, and Lucas Cranach the Elder's *Nymph*. The exhibition displays the subjects of each painting, including real naked girls with blond hair and blue eyes (42). This living artwork suggests that Tanizaki's fascination with exoticism was inspired by his French predecessor, which became popular in Japan as *katsujin-ga* 活人画 (living human picture), a theatrical entertainment introduced to Japan in 1887.[6] In his next stopover at the bath house, the narrator sees the marble interior surrounded by another imitation of Roman murals and mucosal reliefs. On the oval-shaped floor, the expressions of a myriad centaurs echo Okamura's own laughing and crying faces.In the bathtub, numerous mermaids wear glittering leotards that resemble tails and fins (43-44). Once again, such artifice merely exhibits an assortment of imitations. Without any coherence or unity, the entire property realizes the pan-world view of civilization in the name of "art" (*geijutsu* 芸術) (44). And yet, the nonsensical collection of art pieces is not entirely unlike Poe's "The Domain of Arnheim", whose finale unravels Ellison's "Paradise" by virtue of the profusion of architectural variants, natural landscapes, plants, and flowers:

> […] unspringing confusedly amid all, a mass of semi-Gothic, semi-Saracenic architecture sustaining itself as if by miracle in the air; glittering in the red sunlight with a hundred oriels, minarets, and pinnacles, and seeming the phantom handiwork, conjointly, of the Sylphs, of the Fairies, of the Genni, and of the Gnomes. (Poe 1984, 870)

The incantatory listing of images might be what Tanizaki intended to emulate. Ellison's garden paradise in the passage is governed by an ineffable serenity and sense of integration. All the elements stand against a quaint background of natural beauty, implicitly blending them into the ambience as the narrator's vision and sense of smell are invoked in the scene. The resulting sense of awe subtly fuses Gothic and Romantic images without any unsettling sense of disorder.

Despite its similar narrative strategy of juxtaposition, such an elegant and elusive amalgamation of nature and manmade structures is not present in *The Golden Death*. During the final phase of the property tour, the narrator becomes a stunned spectator to Okamura's ultimate art. After squandering all his money on an extravaganza of copied artwork and buildings, Okamura finally utilizes his own body and assumes the guises of various characters. To this end, he performs a dance with Russian theatrical costumes designed by Léon Bakst that turns out to be Pan (lesser Greek god with a semi-human upper body and goat legs) and the fairy of roses. By painting his body black, Okamura then assumes the guise of a slave who appears in the dance of Scheherazade in *One Thousand and One Nights*. Dissatisfied with these costume plays, he ultimately resorts to transforming his own body into "art". Surrounded by handsome men and women dressed as Buddhist disciples (Bodhisattva and demons), Okamura plates his body with gold and becomes Tathagata Buddha (*nyorai* 如来 in Japanese), or "the one who has thus come" or "the one who has attained enlightenment". He excitedly guzzles liquor and insanely dances the night away, alluding to Dionysiac Bacchanalia. At the end of the exuberant festival, the story concludes abruptly. The next morning, Okamura is found dead on the floor, as the gold plate around his body has prevented the skin from breathing.The narrator reports the death as follows:

[6] *Katsujin-ga* in Japan was initially performed by Western actors in the late nineteenth century. It was later re-introduced by children's writer Iwaya Sazanami (1870-1933) after returning from Germany in 1902. See chapter *Katsujin-ga to taiwa* 活人画ｔと対話 (Tableau Vivant and Dialogues) (Tomita 1998). Later in the Taishō period (1912-26) through the post-WWII period of the 1950s, *katsujin-ga* became a popular attraction in the form of *gakubuchi-shō* 額縁ショー (picture-frame show), where nude models posed to illustrate famous historical episodes or paintings.

> Everyone including Bodhisattva, Lohans, evil ogres, and rakshasas wept, stayed down on their knee at the golden corpse. The scene actualized the image of the Buddha who enters Nirvana, suggesting the fact that he keeps dedicating the body to his own ideal of art even after he died. I had never seen such a beautiful corpse of a human being. I had never seen the human death so cheerful and solemn as his that is absolutely free of the shadow of 'sorrow'. (Tanizaki 2005, 46)

Alongside this description, the narrator extols Okamura's body as an artwork that is precarious, illusory, and fated to evaporate with his death: he was "a genuine artist" who obsessively invested all his energy and passion in art (*ibidem*). As foreshadowed by his contempt for scientific studies, Okamura's efforts are diametrically opposed to rationality, objectivity, and pragmatism. Consciously appropriating *fin de siècle* decadents' pursuit of aesthetic ideals, Okamura wagered his life for art for art's sake. Finally, the narrator concludes his friend's memoir by raising a question: "[D]o people in our society consider the man [like him] in high esteem as an artist?" (*ibidem*) The answer is not given by the narrator and is thus provocatively left to the reader.

Whereas its reductive depiction of aesthetics is undeniable, *The Golden Death* attests to Tanizaki's strong affinity with *fin de siècle* decadence and Aestheticism through the narcissistic protagonist who wagers his life for art. The novella commemorates the author's fascination with the decadent leitmotif of the connection between nature and manmade artificiality. Here we recall the same valence of fascination in Richard Gilman, who succinctly interprets Des Esseintes's Baudelairean traits and creative impulse in *À Rebours*: his human drive that "carr[ies] on at its most artificial […] [and] 'invented' [ways]" and attitudes "refractory to imposed moral and social obligations" (1980, 105). The virtue of his daring thus lies in the ability to replace life with artifice, which is underpinned by "the distinctive mark of human genius"(*ibidem*). The rebellious artistry of the prodigy is a notable attribute passed down to the protagonist in *The Golden Death*. Both Des Esseintes and Okamura are undoubtedly audacious mavericks, whose temperaments are quite foreign to Poe's pensive and rather introverted Ellison in "The Domain of Arnheim", even if these works might be considered eremitic literature.

Indeed, the surface plot of *The Golden Death* could be taken as a case of literary adaptation, since Tanizaki borrows Poe's utopia-building project as an archetypal narrative frame. However, unlike Ellison's ideal world of serenity inhabited by sacred spirits, Okamura's artificial paradise more clearly inherits the legacies of Baudelaire and Huysmans, who envisioned the paradise as the effects of stimulants consumed for escaping the unbearable pain and boredom of reality. In lieu of wine, opium, or hashish, the abused stimulant for Okamura is wealth – for granted, presumably from the labouring classes under the Meiji Restoration. The pretextual condition of wealth provides him with an exquisite space filled with nightmarishly vivid artefacts that mirror an ecstatic and yet delusional inner world, as narcotics mirror for Baudelaire. Similar to Baudelaire's cry, "Anywhere! anywhere! provided that it is out of this world!" (1975, 39), *The Golden Death* embraces the same urge; Baudelaire's modern man abuses narcotics while Tanizaki's abuses wealth. Okamura can take refuge only in the artificial paradise, a macabre universe where the roles of the artist, the artwork, and the recipient are all assumed by Okamura himself. It actualizes not the sustainable materiality of paradise, but rather cynically embodies, as Mishima states, "the ultimate contempt for intellectual cognition" (Mishima 2000, 214) at the cost of his life.

Nearly every artistic statement in *The Golden Death* consciously relates relates to decadent elements, including imitation, dandyism, artificial paradise, art for art's sake, and sensory stimulation and indulgence. Simultaneously, all his actions and beliefs appear as harsh indictments of scientific positivism, mass mediocrity, and reflect a personal determination to distance himself from the collectivism of modern society. This valence of psychic reactions is of course nothing new in Japan; however, *fin de siècle* decadent discourses presented them as a new literary mo-

tif and style, galvanizing the creativity of Aestheticist writers. This is particularly the case, as pointed out by Regenia Gagnier, who correlates the emergence of decadent literature with most non-Western traditions that are in conflict with modernization while undergoing processes of change (2015, 12). To the same extent, in light of Désiré Nisard, Paul Bourget, and Havelock Ellis, who viewed decadent individuals as a decomposed social element of an organic whole, Tanizaki, at least in his early career, found decadent literature an effective avenue for resisting "the collective imposition of identity" (18) typical of the new nation.

What the artificial paradise displays in *The Golden Death*, then, are the candid records of how Japan experienced the influx of Western culture and civilization in the early twentieth century. Its Occidentalism, or rather its infatuation with the West, lacks a cohesive consumption of European artefacts, and is complemented only by the crude materiality of art. Such a consumption of art can be ironically equated to an atavistic return to mass consumerism. The novella's *tour de force* lies in its contempt for the Japanese self, a foregrounded "artist" who failed to digest the West and its artefacts. Japan might have belatedly participated in Western cultural and literary modernity, for which the author could not help admitting retrospective shame; even so, the novella epitomizes a metaphorical *res gestae*, which suggests the un-documentable reality of consuming the Other's art.

There are also points of disjunction in *The Golden Death* with *fin de siècle* decadent literature. The novella implicitly charts the obsolescence of Japanese literature while commemorating the advent of anti-naturalist discourses "as a leading challenge to the entrenched presence of Japanese Naturalism", which reductively insisted on "the unity of literal and literary truth" (Ito 1991, 31). Through writers returning from Europe and the United States, notably Mori Ōgai 森鴎外 (1862-1922), Ueda Bin 上田敏 (1874-1916), and Nagai Kafū (1879-1959), the following generation represented by Tanizaki gained substantial exposure to Western literature in translation. Through possession and consumption, like his protagonists, Tanizaki admired the West as a somewhat essentialized totality (63). Consequently, Western artefacts in *The Golden Death* indicate the author's exotic fetishism; his proclivity for the cultural Other is not a fiction but rather the essentialized practice of Occidentalism. In this regard, Okamura's fanatical degree of collection is almost derivative of the hermitage dreamed of by Des Esseintes, but this is not necessarily a pejorative deficiency of creativity *per se*. The distastefully copied artworks in Okamura's vast property prompt an autotoxemia of the Other's cultural production, even if Tanizaki originally only intended to display his erudition at the time. Likewise, the plethora of imitative paintings and sculptures mirrors the negative tendency shared among Japanese writers of the time. In light of Max Nordau's *Degeneration*, it could be a sign of a criminal tendency that resorts to "disseminating counterfeit copies […]" (1993, 32). However, once the act becomes a stoic labour, as Okamura's project suggests, the act of replicating artwork can signify a conscious mimicry of *fin de siècle* decadent heroes. The gigantic ambition rooted in the misanthropy of Des Esseintes is unmistakably prevalent in Okamura's characterization. While both are heirs to fortunes passed down from their families, Des Esseintes' feebleness in physique, hypochondria, and melancholy are completely foreign to Okamura. Like Des Esseintes, the Japanese protagonist does not display outright abhorrence for the masses and the bourgeoisie, setting social conditions aside from his concern. Yet both pursue the secluded life of a hermit, and their escapist urge to create an artificial paradise is a notion that derives from Baudelaire.

The allegorical death of Dorian Gray also resembles Okamura's death as the sign of decadents who are unable to meet social and moral standards. Mishima, who was an avid reader of Wilde, interprets Dorian Gray's death as an existential impasse – playing dual roles simultaneously as the object of beauty and the subjective spectator (Mishima 2000, 210). The twofold agency

of being both artist and artwork is not sustainable; once the beauty intended by the two is achieved, one of them loses his *raison d'être*. The same fate awaits Okamura when he becomes a Buddha by gilding his body.[7] When the sensory faculties fail, the body (the material foundation of beauty) also stops existing as such and turns out to be a mere object that continues to exist, regardless of the creator's presence or absence. Mishima sums up this point as the novella's thesis:

> Art is entirely something sensual. However, its objectivity is ultimately guaranteed neither by [the subjective] feeling nor receiving. Since it is guaranteed by being felt as well as being received, the ultimate condition of sensual creativity exists only in the death of the self. (211)

This theory formulated by Mishima looks at the Japanese novella from a phenomenological viewpoint of art and an aesthetic of reception. In fact, the philosophical duality of subject and object was one of the *literati*'s concerns and fostered an epochal literary trend. Tsuboi argues that *The Golden Death* is built on the genre called *bunshin shōsetsu* 分身小説 (novel on one's double or alter ego), which recalls Okamura's identification with the artwork in the narrative of creating an ideal doppelgänger (Tsuboi 2009, 81). The double used to be a popular leitmotif in the literature of the Taishō period (1912-26), reflecting sociocultural instabilities and the specific neuroses of erudite urban individuals.[8] While participating in this literary trend, however, Okamura remains an advocate of *fin de siècle* decadence – the man becomes his art's double, and is then killed by the art itself. Like Dorian Gray, Okamura embodies decadent dilettantism and epicureanism whose ludic enterprise rejects all social and moral obligations.

On the other hand, within the context of the transcultural reception of *fin de siècle* decadence, *The Golden Death* affords another angle of interpretation. As a young *littérateur* of the 1910s, when Japan's modernization was synonymous with Westernization, Tanizaki could not help questioning the fate of the country's indigenous aesthetics. This self-reflexive inquiry is prevalent in his acclaimed essay "In Praise of Shadows" (1933), where he reflects on the effects of modern technology (electricity, appliances, and gadgets) on his quotidian space and public life. In lieu of technological benefits, as the traditional Japanese lifestyle is eroded by Western cultural products, its indigenous aesthetic values (as symbolized by the ubiquitous presence of shadow) are also dismissed as obsolete. The advent of a new material reality forced Tanizaki to embrace his homeland's defeat from "having borrowed" modern civilization and cultural values from Others (Tanizaki 2001, 21). Although the essay was written nearly two decades after *The Golden Death* was published, it still testifies to Tanizaki's sense of inferiority in terms of East-West cultural politics. Therefore, given the protagonist's servile obeisance to Western artwork in *The Golden Death*, Tanizaki ultimately disowned the novella and excluded it from his official anthology (Mishima 2000, 200).

The trope of imitation running throughout *The Golden Death* also underpins his abhorrence of the novella. The adaptation of Western literature was a widely employed literary strategy in early twentieth-century Japan, as prominently exemplified by Morita Sōhei's 森田 草平's infamous *Baien* 煤煙 (Sooty Smoke) (1909) based on Gabriele D'Annunzio's *Il trionfo della morte* (1894) and others. Whereas the stylistic adaptation of Poe and Baudelaire was Tanizaki's initial tactic, *The Golden Death* implicitly underwent a semantic shift later in his career.

[7] An anonymous reviewer of this essay keenly pointed out that the fate of gilded Okamura is akin to the death of Des Esseintes' jewelled tortoise, as a result of the owner's attempt to embellish its natural body. An imposition of artificiality on nature seems a common decadent impulse.

[8] The major writers of the Taishō Period, including Akutagawa Ryūnosuke 芥川龍之介, Izumi Kyōka 泉鏡花, and Kajii Motojirō 梶井基次郎, wrote novellas featuring doppelgängers in the conventions of psycho thrillers.

As suggested by his rejection of the novella, the scheme of adaptation turned out to be an imitation – not an intentionally creative act of emulation, but as a fiasco lacking cultural and historical authenticity. Thus, Tanizaki may have regretted the gaudy imagery of the artificial paradise, finally amounting to nothing but a space filled with incoherent artefacts in the form of petty mimicry. His protagonist dreams and dies for an illusory paradise that negates the author's indigenous cultural roots and identity. All the copies in *The Golden Death* mirror a melancholic compromise, concealing the author's psychic dissimulation intertwined with an obsequious display of fascination with the West. The avalanche of imitations merely exhibits an ironic fruit of creativity, implicitly suggesting Tanizaki's (and Japan's) plea for recognition by the Western Other. Such an issue of hierarchical cultural formation recalls Homi K. Bhabha, who spoke in the 1990s on behalf of post-independence India and other post-colonial nations. Without any history of being colonized, however, Japan had a legitimate reason for imitating the principles of *fin de siècle* decadence and Aestheticism as though they were sovereign authorities while following them as progressive models that could modernize the obsolete Japanese prose narrative. Thus, such assimilative attitudes involved a dual process of imitation, which is prevalent in *The Golden Death*. The overall narrative frame borrows the motif of *fin de siècle* pessimism and misanthropy, along with the creation of an artificial paradise as a psychosomatic refuge. In addition to the borrowed archetypal framework, the image of the entire paradise also constitutes an assortment of European artefacts, literally knocked-off objects. To Tanizaki, who never travelled or studied overseas, the fanatical degree of mimicking the Other appears to be a neurotic, an almost masochistic reaction to the West (Ito 1991, 54-55).[9] From the political angle of Bhabha's view, the act of mimicry in *The Golden Death* falls into what he considers "*ironic compromise*" (Bhabha 1994, 122), which implicitly disavows a harmonizing effect of the narrative while carefully masquerading the presence of Otherness. In this regard, Okamura's utopic space enacts a locus of cultural negotiation, masochistically repressing his nativist sensibility in the guise of "paradise".

The strange form of exuberance in *The Golden Death* testifies to cultural politics and utilizes the belated advent of modernity in Japan. With mimicry of the West, the repressive act of imitation needed a psychological outlet: the fictional novella that empirically unifies the subject and the object of art.Tanizaki's later rejection of his novella is not surprising because all the imitations mirror the desperate Japanese self, pathetically wrestling with the absence of its vigorous identity. To this end, *The Golden Death* is not self-indulgent nonsense; the random and discursive collection of foreign artworks effectively stage historical as well as cultural aphasia. Its artistic impasse can be bridged only by the bricolage of dilettantism made of incongruous collections of art. Showcasing the nonsensical layout of copied masterpieces derived from incoherent historical and cultural backgrounds, *The Golden Death* readily repudiates the provenance and authenticity of its own worldview. Yet, the preeminent irony is that even if the novella reveals Japan's partial and selective reception of *fin de siècle* decadence, the notion of decadence still holds paramount importance as the lynchpin of a discursively formed narrative.

[9] Tanizaki's fascination with sadomasochism stems from his exposure to *fin de siècle* decadent sensibilities as well as to works by Leopold von Sacher-Masoch, as was the case among many Japanese writers of the early twentieth century. Also, Tanizaki's lynchpin, Nagai Kafū (1879-1959), who stayed in the United States and France in 1903-1908, played a significant role for Tanizaki. His works such as *America monogatari* あめりか物語 (American Stories) (1908) and *Furansu monogatari* ふらんす物語 (French Stories) (1908) introduced him to the aestheticist literary sensibilities of the West.

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