Jad Adams (Institute of English, School of Advanced Study, University of London)

‘Yesternight’: The Alexandrine and Memory in Dowson’s Cynara poem

This paper aims to unravel the meanings of time and foreboding in *Non sum qualis eram bona sub regno Cynarae*, in order to understand what gives the enduring resonance to a work which has been called the archetypal poem of the decadence.

Chris Snodgrass wrote of Dowson’s poetic world in terms of the ‘intimation of paralysis and purposelessness’ of his art; a suspicion that art itself is not a spiritual salvation, but ‘primarily disguised egoism, a mere projection of desire, arbitrary fiction rather than distilled essence.’ He describes how the ‘linguistic repetition and parallelism’ Dowson employs contributes to the closed structure of the work.

This paper will address the ways in which the archaic language and multiple pasts in the poem speak to the varied meanings of decadence. The mastery of the poem also resides in its scansion and metrical structure. The Alexandrine form was taken by Dowson from La Pléïad, the sixteenth century group of French poets who Dowson had been studying. This limping, straggling rhythm is peculiarly suited to lyrics about regret and the passage of time.

A look at the Odes of Horace, the source for the title, shows the Roman poet looking ahead, towards a new love which is going to be a disaster, because he does not have the strength to cope with it, as he had with a previous lover. The reference to the Latin poem of proleptic regret adds another dimension to the layers of meaning in Dowson’s work. These classical Latin references are not recondite but part of a very public discourse with the classics: W.E.Gladstone published his translation of the Odes in 1894, he had been working on them while prime minister.

It also takes us to Rome and how the sense of irrevocable and irreversible loss in the poem fits in with contemporary comparisons of the British with the Romans and the inevitable loss of empire.

In an even more terrifying manifestation of decadence (meaning decline) the late nineteenth century acceptance of Darwinism and understanding of physics points to the working out of and, ultimately, the loss of all humanity and all human artefacts in an amoral entropy. As Arthur Balfour, Leader of the House of Commons when the poem was written, said in his lecture ‘Decadence’: it was not just imperial decadence, but the entire loss of human civilisation was the fate that beckoned: ‘Man will go down into the pit and all his thoughts will perish. Matter will know itself no longer.’ Against this background, the speaker of the Cynara poem is a cosmic figure taking a fleeting moment of pleasure from the consuming decay.

Bio: Jad Adams is an Associate Research Fellow at the Institute of English, School of Advanced Study, University of London. His books include *Madder Music, Stronger Wine, The Life of Ernest Dowson* (2000) *Kipling* (2005) and *Hideous Absinthe: A History of the Devil in a Bottle* (2004). He has written papers on couples: the Crackanthorpes, the Cunninghame Grahams, and the Clarke Halls; and on a number of individual characters of the 1890s. www.jadadams.co.uk
On reading Gustave Flaubert’s *La Tentation de Sainte Antoine*, Jean des Esseintes quotes Chimera while ‘shivering sensations raced through his frame’: “New perfumes I seek, stranger flowers I seek, pleasures not yet discovered.” Des Esseintes identifies with Chimera’s need ‘to leap beyond the confines of thought, to grope towards the mists of elusive, unattainable art.’ Huysmans’s protagonist essentially yearns to sexually merge with the very textures of words; his orgasmic shudders stem precisely from the impossibility to realise the senses within the novelistic space of ever ‘new’ stylistic configurations (‘pleasures not yet discovered’).

Andrea Sperelli in D’Annunzio’s *Il piacere* (The Child of Pleasure) (1889) genders and sexualises art by considering it his ‘only faithful mistress’. Edward Dayne in George Moore’s *Confessions of a Young Man* (1886/1888) can be ‘thrilled and driven to pleasure’ by a literary text: ‘[t]his is of course pure sensualism’, he asserts. Arthur Machen in *The Hill of Dreams* (1895–7; publ. 1907) goes as far as to re-enact Moore’s articulations of erotic textuality: Lucian Taylor performs sadomasochistic rituals whilst steeped in the ecstasies of creating and reading his own texts.

Roland Barthes in *Le Plaisir du Texte* (1975) propagates the idea that ‘the text has a human form’, that it is an ‘anagram’ of our ‘erotic body’. Susan Sontag aligns Barthes with Wilde and the Aesthetes. His eroticisation of the text, his ‘sexy sentences’, puts him on a par with Huysmans, Moore, D’Annunzio, and Machen. The text as a sexual instrument is associated with the notion of the dangerous and poisonous influence of the ‘fatal book’: Dowling’s fatal ‘seductiveness of style’ and Ben Hutchinson’s ‘erotics of style’ consider the rhetorical implications of Decadent ‘style’ as having an erotic effect on the reader. In this presentation, I will suggest that the ‘eroticised text’ is not just a metaphor for style, but a peculiarly and perversely literal concept. By establishing a context informed by the paradigms above and focusing on Machen’s novel, I will move to fin-de-siècle poetry by such figures as Arthur Symons, Ernest Dowson, and Olive Custance. Some of these poets wrote in order to recreate and relive their past sexual adventures; hence their poetry is a kind of erotic performance to begin with.

I will investigate the idea of the ‘text’ as an erotic object for coition – often gendered – and as unattainable object of desire. Through its anti-discursive and anti-mimetic ‘style’, the Decadent text aspires to be a tactile body. However, to use terms that are both textual and fleshly, the text is a corpus of sinuous lines that paradoxically appeals to our senses but remains out of reach. The language of this eroticised text, I will argue, is entirely fetishistic: because of its stylistic fragmentation (as in Bourget’s famous definition of Decadence), its words and clauses are titillating, synecdochic fetishes that stand out and become ends in themselves. I will claim that the eroticised text operates also in reverse: the physical body is textualised, as Peter Greenaway’s film *The Pillow Book* (1996) demonstrates, to use a more recent instance. Notably, in D. G. Rossetti’s poem ‘Jenny’ the eponymous prostitute is a ‘half-read’ book, a ‘vile text’. The woman-as-text metaphor was cultivated by the Metaphysical poets. But in Decadence this is more than a metaphor: the sensual dancers and demimondaines that populate some of the poetry of the 1890s are living texts who are ‘read’, penetrated or textually analysed and deciphered, through their maquillaged, enigmatic flesh.

Bio: Kostas Boyiopoulos is Teaching Associate at the Department of English Studies, Durham University. His main research specialisms are fin-de-siècle Decadence and Aestheticism, and Anglo-Continental literary transactions. He is the author of a forthcoming monograph, *The Decadent Image: The Poetry of Wilde, Symons, and Dowson* (Edinburgh UP, 2014/5); part of the research for this project was funded by the Friends of Princeton University Library Research Grant. He is also the co-editor of two forthcoming books: *The Decadent Short Story: An Annotated Anthology* (Edinburgh UP, 2014) and the essay collection *Decadent Romanticism* (Ashgate, 2014). He has published a number of articles on Arthur Machen, Wilde, C. P. Cavafy, and others. He was the principal co-organiser of the recent international conference *Maverick Voices and Modernity, 1890 – 1939* (5–6/7/2013) at Durham University.
Oscar Wilde and French Decadence: Rachilde, The Picture of Dorian Gray, and Salomé

There are many connections of people and ideas between Oscar Wilde’s work, Paris, and French literature, but one that is surprisingly little known is Wilde’s personal and professional relationship with the only female French Decadent writer, Rachilde (née Marguerite Eymery, 1860-1953). Although not a household name today except to scholars and enthusiasts of French fin-de-siècle literature, Rachilde was a central player on the Parisian writing and publishing scene in the 1890s. The author of several scandalous decadent novels with a reputation for outrageous gender play and sadomasochistic imagery, especially Monsieur Vénus (1884), La Marquise de Sade (1887), and various Symbolist plays, including The Crystal Spider (1892). Rachilde held vibrant weekly literary salons in the 1880s and 1890s that brought together the most cutting-edge writers and journalists of the day. She also published, together with her husband Alfred Vallette, the influential journal Mercure de France, which quickly became an established voice for many of Rachilde’s friends and other writers associated with the Decadent, Symbolist, and anarchist movements. Wilde read Monsieur Vénus before writing The Picture of Dorian Gray and Salomé, and there are numerous unexplored personal and professional connections between Rachilde and Wilde. This paper lays out some of these, focusing on their literary connection and its importance to interpreting anew Wilde’s intricate ties with Paris.

**Bio:** Petra Dierkes-Thrun is a Lecturer in the Comparative Literature Department and the Program for Feminist, Gender and Sexuality Studies at Stanford University and the author of Salome's Modernity: Oscar Wilde and the Aesthetics of Transgression (University of Michigan Press, 2011). Recent publications include articles on Oscar Wilde, Arthur Symons, Stéphane Mallarmé, Richard Strauss, Victoria Cross, and fin-de-siècle realism. Her research and teaching interests range across comparative fin-de-siècle and modernist studies (including literature, visual arts, cinema, opera, and dance), feminist and LGBTQ studies, and digital pedagogy in the humanities. Petra co-edits the international online journal The Latchkey: Journal of New Woman Studies (Rivendale Press) and serves as editorial board member for Rodopi’s Dialogue series as well as advisory editor for gender studies for boundary2.org (Duke University Press).

Rita Dirks Heath (Ambrose University College, Calgary, Alberta)

Second-Hand Sacramentalism: Dorian’s Borrowed Sensations

Dorian's failure in The Picture of Dorian Gray is that he lets himself be influenced, first by Lord Henry and then by the "yellow book," or by Joris-Karl Huysmans’ A Rebours/Against Nature. Encouraged by Lord Henry to experience every sensation, Dorian follows suit and gains a range of experiences but exercises no individuality. Dorian comes to see Huysmans’ novel as "the story of his own life, written before he had lived it" and Des Esseintes as "a kind of prefiguring type of himself." I argue that Wilde’s protagonist is never his own person; and, most importantly for my paper, Dorian does not experience either genuine artistic or religious feeling.

Des Esseintes' desire to surround himself with religious objects, not for the sake of religion, but for the sake of immersing himself in the refined, the rare, the artistic results in his realization that there is a connection between sacred objects, the sensations around them, and genuine religious feeling. At first, as many Decadents, Des Esseintes was attracted to the ritualistic, mysterious, and sensuous art of the Catholic church, sans foi. However, in the contemplation of his "decorations" while turning his bedroom "into a facsimile of a monastery cell," he finds "genuine feeling for those who were shut up in religious houses." As Des Esseintes fills his sanctuary at Fontenay with venerated Catholic objects, he begins to understand the correspondence between the outward adoration of the holy and the holiness of things in themselves, or sacramentalism.

Dorian arranges his living quarters like Des Esseintes, dresses himself the dandy as per the French protagonist’s instructions, albeit foppishly and half-seriously. Like Des Esseintes before him, Dorian studies jewels, perfumes, and Catholicism. Ecclesiastical vestments and sacred objects occupy a special place of reverence in Dorian’s house, just as in Des Esseintes’. However, it is a second-hand adoration, one not stemming from himself, but appropriated from the French protagonist. Whereas Des Esseintes’ contemplation...
of sacred objects leads him to conversion and the contemplative life of a monk (in Huysmans’ following novel *En Rade/En Route*), Dorian remains on the surface of things, experiencing someone else’s emotions and life. Without Dorian’s individual choices for his own life the presence of sacramental objects becomes either empty fetishism or slavish emulation of Des Esseintes. Wilde’s Dorian does not see, as a sacramentalist would, the principle or correspondence between the art or sacred objects and the absolute world, or as symbols of God’s presence. Dorian does not get God nor art—he simply takes his place before the sacred objects and vestments in the same way as he, in turn, poses before the painter. Dorian becomes divided instead of becoming one whole personality growing into itself. He allows Basil and Lord Henry to render his life into art for their sake. Upon looking at Basil’s painting, Dorian reveals a fundamental confusion: “Am I really like that?” Agency and subjectivity overlap at this crucial moment, further emphasized by Lord Henry’s own recognition of such a split: “Which Dorian? The one who is pouring tea for us, or the one in the picture?” Dorian emulates Des Esseintes and loses himself; he tries to please Lord Henry and becomes divided. Dorian completely disengages himself from the Wildean “Be Thyself” dictum; his life ends in murder and suicide.

**Bio:** Rita Dirks Heath is associate professor of English at Ambrose University College. She received her Ph.D. in 2002; her dissertation title is *The Symbolist Novel as Secular Scripture: Huysmans, Wilde, and Bely*. She is co-editor of *Peter Svarich, Memoirs, 1877-1904* (1999). Her research and specialty teaching interests include Modernism, Literary Theory, and Women’s Literature. Currently she is working on the novels of Miriam Toews, having presented papers on *A Complicated Kindness* recently at the MLA Congress in Los Angeles and at Trinity College in Dublin. She has a forthcoming article on *A Complicated Kindness* the *Journal of Mennonite Studies*.

**Katharine Easterby (University of Liverpool)**

‘*Unnecessary things are our only necessities*: Male Narcissists’ Obsession with Objects in *The Picture of Dorian Gray* and *The Diary of a Nobody*

**Bio:** Katharine Easterby recently completed her Ph.D. in the Department of English at the University of Liverpool. Her thesis (‘*A Lifelong Romance*: Male Narcissism in *Fin-de-Siècle Culture*) argues that pathological self-obsession is a defining feature of depictions of masculinity in late nineteenth-century ‘decadent’ and ‘middle-brow’ literature and illustrations. She is particularly interested in the works of Oscar Wilde, J.-K. Huysmans, Jean Lorrain, George and Weedon Grossmith, Jerome K. Jerome, and Max Beerbohm. She is currently converting her thesis into a monograph.

**Nick Freeman (Loughborough University)**

**Symons, Whistler and Ways of Seeing**

This paper examines some of the ways in which Arthur Symons (1865-1945) responded to the example of one of his favourite painters, James McNeill Whistler, in poetry, fiction and essays from the early 1890s to his ill-fated collaboration with the photographer, Alvin Langdon Coburn, *London: A Book of Aspects* (1909). It will be especially concerned with how Whistler’s art (and writings about art) taught Symons how he might break away from a concern with external detail that the poet and the artist saw as the hallmark of Victorian realism. Reworking Whistler’s ‘memory method’, Symons trained his eyes and imagination to perceive the world very differently in poems (*Silhouettes* [1892]), urban evocations (*Cities* [1903]) and short stories (‘*The Death of Peter Waydelin*’ [1905]), but he as he moved towards a symbolist aesthetic, he gradually came to wonder whether Whistler’s concern with surfaces was blinding him to deeper understandings of reality.

In examining these concerns, I am less interested in rehearsing the familiar accounts of Symons’s influences and his movement away from ‘Decadence’ towards more determinedly impressionist or symbolist styles than I am in examining how Symons looked at cities, landscapes, women and art. What did he see, and why might he have seen it as he did? In what ways could Whistler’s art, and the artistic practices behind it, inform the writing of poetry and prose? Were Symons’s uses of Whistler markedly different from those of Wilde and the other
writers he influenced? And how did Symons respond to the Whistlerian persona, with its dandified style, mocking laugh and appetite for verbal duels? Considering these questions offers an opportunity to think more generally about decadent formulations of looking, seeing and vision, as well as stressing decadence’s characteristic fondness for interdisciplinary collaboration and experiment.

Bio: Dr Nick Freeman is a Senior Lecturer in English at Loughborough University. He has published widely on late Victorian literature and art, and is the author of two monographs, *Conceiving the City: London, Literature and Art* (Oxford UP, 2007) and *1895: Drama, Disaster and Disgrace* (Edinburgh UP, 2011). He has a particular interest in Arthur Symons and is currently preparing an edition of his *Spiritual Adventures* for the MHRA.

Hellen Giblin-Jowett (Newcastle University)

**Orchids that can knack you in a fight: hot-house flowers and Darwin at the fin de siècle**

The influence of Baudelaire’s *Les Fleurs du Mal* (1857) cast a long shadow over fictional representations of hot-house flowers in nineteenth-century fiction, as sexualised exotic blooms either knock men flat or gobble them up in stories of the 1880s and 1890s by J.-K. Huysmans, Vernon Lee, H. G. Wells and Oscar Wilde. Previous analyses of hot-house flowers have dwelled on the cultivation by Joseph Paxton of ‘Victoria’ lilies, and their role in determining the structure of the Crystal Palace, as well as inscribing domestic conservatories as ‘feminine’. This paper locates the vampire orchid trope alongside other popularisations of hot-house building, heating and furnishing in British amateur horticultural magazines from the fin de siècle. Building on observations by Munich (1993), Laird (2005) and Bradstreet (2006) of the effect of shifting florographical conventions upon constructions of gender at the fin de siècle, this paper also traces the trope to Charles Darwin’s explanation of sexual selection in *On the various contrivances by which British and foreign orchids are fertilised by insects, and on the good effects of intercrossing* (1862). It argues that Darwin’s example of the orchid (demonstrating the peaceful co-existence of male, female and hermaphrodite blossoms on one stem) offered gardeners and writers a radical and compelling narrative for describing the varieties of human desire.

Bio: Hellen Giblin-Jowett is working on a thesis called ‘Olfaction and the olfactory in supernatural fiction of the fin de siècle’ at Newcastle University. This study maps out the appearances of odour and odour-related themes in supernatural fiction of the late nineteenth century. It tracks the association of odour with categorical indeterminacy and shows how new forms of public hygiene and the novel formulations of a nascent perfume industry had contributed to descriptions of indescribability in works by authors including Richard Marsh, Vernon Lee, Arthur Machen and Oscar Wilde. See more at www.ncl.ac.uk/elll/study/postgraduate/students/HellenGiblin-Jowett

Jessica Gossling (Goldsmiths, University of London)

**‘Things worldly and things spiritual’: The motif of the hot-house in J.-K. Huysmans’s *A rebours***

The connection between a person’s life and their surroundings is central to Huysmans’s works and the lives of his characters are, like his own, filled with artefacts, flowers and books. In an ‘Academy Portrait’ of Huysmans (published in *The Academy*, 22 October 1898), Huysmans is described in his study, where ‘things worldly and things spiritual lie side by side, marking the two extremes of his life.’ This duality is reflective of Huysmans’s journey to faith, which is depicted in his works in terms of a fascination for opposite states; vice and devotion. This oscillation between states becomes particularly apparent in *A rebours* (1884) in which the villa, its location and the objects within it reflect the conflicting desires of Des Esseintes.

*A rebours* is a very interesting novel, not least for its structural and spatial oddities, and the ways in which the novel and the villa are experiments in compartmentalisation and interiority have been variously commented on. These interpretations range from descriptions of the novel as a series of impressionistic reactions to visual stimuli, to a ‘log book’ of experiences. However, no-one has commented on the organising principle and metaphor of the hot-house and the way it is used by Huysmans in this text to explore
correspondent and liminal space. While there is no actual hot-house in the novel, the exotic flowers that enter the villa in Chapter Eight are mostly dead by Chapter Nine, this spatial metaphor articulates a particular structural complexity that belongs to the whole text. This complexity is related to the theme of the novel; artifice versus nature. On the one hand the hot-house is a compartmentalised space of scientific experiment and curatorship and, on the other, it suggests imaginary spaces, dream realms and spatial correspondences, as alluded to earlier in the century by Charles Baudelaire. In A rebours, the hot-house marks both a departure in novel form and becomes more of a metaphor for mental space; gesturing towards the dreamscapes and the imagination that were to become a source of interest for the Symbolists.

The hot-house is a dynamic space of growth, profusion and excess. Similarly, the villa space in A rebours is not a static display case with collections arranged neatly and gathering dust. It is a space of objects and subjective states, moods and unconscious desires and fears. Rather than reading the villa space in A rebours as a hermetically sealed space of retreat, my paper will suggest that Huysmans’s novel is an example of the Decadent interest in the correspondences between the body and the mind.

Bio: Jessica Gossling is a PhD student in the Department of English and Comparative Literature at Goldsmiths, University of London. Her research interests are interdisciplinary, concentrating on the literature and the visual arts of the nineteenth-century in England and France. Her thesis examines representations of space in Decadent literature from 1884 to 1900, and focuses on reoccurring tropes in selected works of Charles Baudelaire, Joris-Karl Huysmans, Aubrey Beardsley, and Arthur Symons.

Melanie Hawthorne (Texas A&M University)

Nice Smells: Renée Vivien and the Olfactory

This illustrated presentation examines the role of the olfactory in locating the decadence of Renée Vivien (Pauline Tarn, 1877-1909). The title plays on the fact that while Vivien herself sought out "nice (i.e., pleasant) smells" (the scent of flowers such as lilies is often evoked in her poetry, for example), the town of Nice where she often stayed itself frequently offers less than agreeable smells to the nose: fish markets, traffic pollution, the body odours associated with a hot climate and so on all combine to make it a "smelly" city. I argue that Vivien's choices in positioning herself in that city (literally, where she chose to live) in relation to its olfactory opportunities reveal certain decadent traits and help define her decadent sensibilities.

While maintaining a primary residence in Paris, Vivien also spent part of the year during the first decade of the twentieth century in Nice, in a rented villa. In this presentation, I offer an illustrated reading of the location of that villa (up on a hill away from the town centre, surrounded by flowering plants such as jasmine, roses, and orange blossom) that uses geography as a way to situate mental states (psychogeography), and in particular to locate Vivien on a "decadent" map of Nice. I trace the history of Nice itself (from Italian port to French resort), showing how the social centre shifted from east to west as the city became a popular vacation destination at the fin de siècle. But while the seafront became the focus of recreational activities (along with the adjacent casinos and parks) Vivien chose to live "eccentrically," that is she lived at some distance from the social centre of the city. Vivien's position "on the edge" geographically echoes the marginal social position she chose during her life and the aesthetic position she has occupied since her premature death in 1909.

Bio: Melanie Hawthorne is currently a professor of French in the Department of International Studies at Texas A&M University in College Station, Texas. She received her degrees from Oxford University and the The University of Michigan. She is the author of Rachilde and French Women's Authorship: From Decadence to Modernism (University of Nebraska Press, 2001)--which received a national award (the Aldo and Jeanne Scaglione Prize for French and Francophone Studies for 2001 given by the Modern Language Association of America)--along with articles, edited books, and translations. Her most recent publication is Finding the Woman Who Didn’t Exist: The Curious Life of Gisèle d’Estoc (University of Nebraska Press, 2013). She was named a Cornerstone Professor in the College of Liberal Arts in 2013.
Dancing the Image: A comparative study of the dance metaphor and kinaesthetics in the poetry of Stéphane Mallarmé and Arthur Symons

Symbolist aesthetes of the fin-de-siècle were obsessed with finding ways to re-create the virtuality and sensuality of dance by the means of language. This paper will demonstrate how two major Symbolist poets, Stéphane Mallarmé and Arthur Symons, use dance as a metaphor as well as a conceptual and structural element in their poetry. In so-called transposition d’art, they explore dance, an image set in motion by ‘movement of bodies through space and time,’ to capture its unique characteristics, namely fleetingness, virtuality and suggestiveness, in poetic language. Language is made to express an undefined sensual moment of transience in which subject and form merge. Taking different approaches, Mallarmé and Symons succeed in incorporating the essence of dance into their work to different extents. Mallarmé creates a conceptual enigma for his poetic theory in his Hérodiade [Herodias] (fully published in 1896) as a non-dancing dancer. Imagery and form capture the fleeting moment in linguistic gestures, mimicking the oscillation of physical movement between presence and absence in dance. In Un coup de dés jamais n’abolira le hasard (1897) [A Dice Throw At Any Time Never Will Abolish Chance] he experiments with formal aspects of abstraction as choreographic movement. In doing so he adopts the techniques of dance, which can be kinaesthetically experienced on the page. This ‘choreographic potential of writing’, as Dee Reynolds terms it, actively engages the reader, who himself is to create and experience a dance of signs. In contrast, Symons introduces the dancer as metaphorical subject matter. Unlike Mallarmé’s attempts to equate the dancer and the metaphor of dance, Symons’ treatment of the metaphor ranges in his collection of music hall poems London Nights (1895), Silhouettes (1896) and Images of Good and Evil (1899) from dance as an abstract metaphor for the fleetingness of life, the dancer as eroticised female body to the dancer as a mysterious ontological Decadent image of escapism. Symons experiments less with outward Symbolist form but rather reconsiders poetic language to describe the moment of the intangible. The paper takes a look at Loie Fuller’s dance, Mallarmé’s respective poetics and contemporary painters that all reward the reader -as well as Mallarmé and Symons’ poetry- with the sensual as well as intellectual engagement in the kinaesthetics of dance. While Mallarmé evokes a kinaesthetic movement predominantly by his investment in abstracted form, Symons emphasises the metaphysical elements of dance as a literal and figurative metaphor of transgression. Despite Mallarmé and Symons’ different treatments of the dance trope, both provide the groundwork for Modernist poets regarding the re-creation of spatial virtuality and kinaesthetics of language. For example Yeats, Pound and Eliot develop the Symbolist paradox of poetry and dance in its potential of being ‘both concrete and obscure, as Kermode put it. Mallarmé and Symons even anticipate a Post-modernist standard in connecting dance and literature that reaches, as Mark Franko states, an unmatched level of ‘mobility, intermediacy, multiplicity, reflexivity.’ It is through these characteristics that fin-de-siècle poets pioneered edge-cutting experimentation and shaped today’s self-understood intertextuality of disciplines in the arts.

Bio: Katharina Herold trained and worked as a theatre director at the prestigious Münchner Kammerspiele in Munich, Germany, before embarking on a BA degree in English and Comparative Literature at Goldsmiths University of London. She is currently reading for an MSt English Literature 1830-1914 at Oxford University. Her research interests are interdisciplinary projects involving performance theory (in particular Opera and theatre), Orientalism, English, French and German Fin de siècle Literature. Her upcoming thesis will investigate the ways in which Oriental literature at the run of the century adopts the status of an exotic commodity good on the Western literary stage (Said).
Kate Hext (University of Exeter)

Ben Hecht and the Fragments of Decadent Dreaming in 1920s Chicago

This paper considers the afterlife of Decadent dreaming in the works of Ben Hecht (1894-1964), a figure whose Decadent fiction has been all-but forgotten at the same time as his later screenplays have made him one of the most famous writers of Hollywood's 'Golden Age'. Consideration of dreaming in Hecht's work opens a dialogue about the meaning and scope of Decadence in the 1920s, and begins to illustrate how Decadent tropes influenced early Hollywood films.

Hecht's Joycian collection of short stories, One Thousand and One Afternoons in Chicago (1922), develops his various early influences -- Charles Baudelaire, Arthur Symons, Ronald Firbank, and H.L. Mencken -- into a meditation on the possibility of Decadent sensual pleasure amongst working class people of the modern American metropolis. For dream-states permeate the 59 stories of this collection. These span from Hecht's evocation of the city wreathed in fog and thus transformed into a impressionistic and amoral dream-world, to the 'slavey' who spends her days off imagining a Decadent death, and to the penniless immigrant who fantasises of being a Baudelairean dandy. Hecht's dream-states transform Chicago into unreality and create in its stead an all-encompassing vision of life lived for art pour l'art and sensual impressions. Yet these visions are bounded by the insistent realities of life for those who work in the city. Without the privileges stipulated by Arthur Symons' as the necessary conditions for the Decadent -- either being a criminal or having independent wealth -- Hecht's protagonists must content themselves with mere fragments of Decadence, dreamed in stolen moments before they must return to 'the ashes of life'.

This paper will situate Hecht in the context of Decadent sensuality in America (and particularly within 1910s-1920s Chicago) whilst focusing on the scenarios and stylistics of three stories within One Thousand and One Afternoons in Chicago: 'Fog Patterns', 'Nirvana', and 'The Snob'. Taking a long view, its discussion of Ben Hecht's fragmented and impoverished depiction of Decadent considers the meaning and scope of Decadence in the 1920s and looks ahead to how the Decadent sensuality of Hecht's early fiction would go onto shape his Hollywood screenplays.

Bio: Kate Hext is a Lecturer in English at the University of Exeter. Her first monograph is Walter Pater: Individualism and Aesthetic Philosophy (Edinburgh UP, 2013). Her main research project at present focuses on how the Decadent Movement influenced the aesthetics of early Hollywood.

Winnie M Li (Goldsmiths, University of London)

“A Lamp of Moorish Workmanship”: Illuminating Sexual Otherness through Orientalism in The Picture of Dorian Gray

In Oscar Wilde’s novel, the hideous portrait revealing the true nature of Dorian Gray is discovered by his friend Basil, who holds aloft a unique lamp: “a rather curious one of Moorish workmanship, made of dull silver inlaid with arabesques of burnished steel, and studded with coarse turquoises.” Dorian subsequently murders Basil to hide his secret, but worries that the lamp, being so unusual in its luxury, might be missed by Basil’s servant.

Thus, the lamp becomes a potent and dangerous symbol — not just of the illumination which threatens to expose Dorian Gray for what he is — but also of the role that Orientalized material luxury plays in Wilde’s story of hedonism and hidden sexual otherness.

In this paper, I examine what has been called “Wilde’s gay-affirming and gay-occluding Orientalism” (Sedgwick, Epistemology of the Closet, 175), studying his use of non-Western art and aesthetics in Dorian Gray as a coding for homosexuality. Dorian and his friends inhabit a world filled with “beautiful things that one can touch and handle…old brocades, green bronzes, lacquer-work, carved ivories, exquisite surroundings.” This sign system allows Wilde’s Victorian characters to couch their homosexuality in a worship of aesthetics, sensualities, and a fascination with the exotic. Ultimately, Wilde’s coding hinges on a conception of the Orient
as a timeless place of immobility, eternity, and preservation by the Westerner -- a notion which in turn crystallizes Dorian’s obsession with the preservation of youth and beauty.

Using close readings of the text, I argue that the proliferation of Oriental goods provides Dorian with an aestheticized escape from the real world and the passage of time. In his essay “The Decay of Lying” (1889), Wilde wrote that European art history involved “the struggle between Orientalism, with its frank rejection of imitation...its dislike of the actual representation of any object in Nature, and our own imitative spirit” (Marez 265). Wilde thus appreciated Oriental art because it was anti-mimetic and anti-naturalist, seeking instead to freeze the natural flow of time in a static, abstracted tableau.

In Wilde’s novel, Oriental art creates that tableau, and in so doing, offers an exotic portal to otherness and sensuality, a diversion from the straight, normal world of heterosexuality and ageing into a world of suspended beauty and uninhibited homosexual desire. Sedgwick writes that “Victorians drew the borders of male homosexual culture to include exclusively, and almost exhaustively, the Mediterranean and the economically exploitable Third World” (183). It is only too telling of Victorian society, that both Wilde and his characters were forced to submerge their story of sexual otherness in the external, material rubric of a racial Otherness — of the Orient. When Edward Said writes of a “bad sort of eternality” which is attributed to the timeless Orient, we can surely think of Dorian’s own “bad sort of eternality.” This very eternality lies at the heart of the hedonist’s quest for sensual experience — and ultimately, finds itself exposed by the lamp of Moorish workmanship in Wilde’s text.

Bio:
Winnie M. Li is a full-time MA student in Creative & Life Writing at Goldsmiths. Previously, she earned her BA in Folklore and Mythology at Harvard University. She was selected as a George Mitchell Scholar to pursue an MA in English at the National University of Ireland, Cork, where she focused on Gender and Sexuality in Irish Writing. In her fiction and creative nonfiction writing, Winnie often explores gender roles, postcolonial identities, LGBT issues, and the role of the media in shaping them. Prior to enrolling at Goldsmiths, she worked for 12 years in the film industry as an Oscar-nominated producer, development executive, and film festival programmer. She is currently at work on a literary novel. www.winniemli.com

Sara Lyons (University of Kent)

‘I am Fire and Burn Myself’: Heraclitus and Swinburne's Firebrand Poetics in Atalanta in Calydon

This paper argues that the pre-Socratic philosopher Heraclitus (c. 535 — c. 475 BCE) stands behind Swinburne's first major experiment in decadent poetics, his neo-classical drama Atalanta in Calydon (1865). Swinburne uses the classical myth of Meleager and the burning brand that both symbolises and determines his mortality to imagine a Heraclitean universe of fire and ceaseless flux where all things melt into their opposites. The major protagonists of the drama all persistently use the metaphor of fire to conceptualise the paradoxes of their embodiment; a large part of the play consists of them marveling or lamenting that their tears, breath, faces, limbs, flesh, speech, hearts, hands, or wombs are at once kindling, flame, and ash, or are fire and are on fire simultaneously, and that they cannot distinguish joy from torment, tenderness from violence, or vitality from self-destruction.

In his Psychoanalysis of Fire (1938), Gaston Bachelard writes that 'among all phenomena, [fire] is really the only one to which there can be so definitely attributed the opposing values of good and evil. It shines in Paradise. It burns in Hell. It is gentleness and torture. It is cookery and it is apocalypse ... It is a tutelary and a terrible divinity, both good and bad. It can contradict itself; thus it is one of the principles of universal explanation'. Although Bachelard does not discuss Heraclitus, the perception that fire is the master metaphor for contradiction is closely associated with his name. Heraclitus famously uses fire as a metaphor for the doctrine of the coincidence of opposites — a doctrine Plato and Aristotle claimed violated the cardinal philosophical law of non-contradiction. However, there is a long tradition of interpretation suggesting that fire is not just a metaphor in Heraclitus's work; some infer from his fragments that he believed it to be the matrix and fabric of all things.

Atalanta in Calydon is often considered one of Swinburne's darkest, if most dazzling, works. Critics tend to
characterise its poetics as 'sadomasochistic' and 'pessimistic', and to invoke the Marquis de Sade and Arthur Schopenhauer when discussing it. This critical tendency stems in part from the anti-theistic rage articulated by the play's chorus, who seem to berate the Old Testament God for his perversity — an anachronism that critics from the Victorian age down to the present have often felt mars Swinburne's otherwise remarkably painstaking classicism, and reveals his decadent preoccupation with scandalising the bourgeois. Without denying the sadomasochistic character of Swinburne's poetics, this paper suggests that to define his thinking as 'pessimistic' misreads the play's paradoxes, which assert not the essential negativity of existence but the idea that the positive cannot be sifted from the negative because all things are internally tied to their opposites. My paper will explore how this logic inspires Swinburne to represent bodily experience and the senses in terms of paradoxical fire imagery in Atalanta in Calydon. I will also explore the relationship between the play's Heraclitean poetics and its blasphemies, and suggest that its reputation as a decadent work emerges partly from Swinburne's effort to transvalue the Christian distinction between purifying fires of Heaven and the punitive fires of Hell.

**Bio:** Sara Lyons is a lecturer in Victorian Literature at the University of Kent. She is currently at work on her first monograph, *Algernon Charles Swinburne and Walter Pater: Victorian Aestheticism, Doubt, and Secularisation* (forthcoming from Legenda, 2015). She has published various book chapters and journal articles on nineteenth-century aestheticism and decadence, and also has an essay on the literary genealogy of Max Weber's disenchantment concept forthcoming in *Modern Language Review*, October 2014.

**Catherine Maxwell (Queen Mary, University of London)**

**Carnal Flowers, Charnel Flowers: Perfume in the Decadent Literary Imagination**

**Bio:** Catherine Maxwell is Professor of Victorian Literature at Queen Mary, University of London. Her publications include the monographs *The Female Sublime from Milton to Swinburne: Bearing Blindness* (Manchester University Press, 2001), *Swinburne* in the British Council series *Writers and Their Work* (Northcote House, 2006), and *Second Sight: The Visionary Imagination in Late Victorian Literature* (Manchester University Press, 2008). Her most recent book is the essay collection *Algernon Charles Swinburne: Unofficial Laureate*, co-edited with Stefano Evangelista and published by Manchester University Press in March 2013. She has published essays on Shelley, Browning, Christina and Dante Gabriel Rossetti, George Eliot, Ruskin, Swinburne, Thomas Hardy, Theodore Watts-Dunton, Arthur Symons, John Addington Symonds, and Vernon Lee. She is currently working on a monograph on perfume in Victorian literary culture contracted to Oxford University Press and has recently been awarded a 2 year Leverhulme Major Research Fellowship for this project starting in September 2014.

**Alex Murray (University of Exeter)**

‘A mad carnival of the senses’: James Huneker and the Illusion of Synaesthetic Decadence

In his memoirs the journalist, novelist, music critic and American celebrant of Decadence, James Gibbons Huneker made the following boast: ‘I saw music, heard colour, tasted architecture, smelt sculpture and fingered perfume. A mad carnival of the senses.’ Synaesthesia is a common trope in Huneker’s writing – we find perfume symphonies and chromatic painting – yet to what extent is synaesthesia ever ‘real’ for a Decadent? In this paper I will suggest that Huneker’s synaesthetic Decadence was never meant to be taken seriously. From the perfume fugue of ‘The Eighth Deadly Sin’ to the symphonic apocalypse of ‘The Piper of Dreams’, all of Huneker’s synaesthesia is self-consciously a parody of other great writers of sensual confusion, particularly Nietzsche and Huysmans. Huneker is, however, not plagiarising his synesthetic forebears as much as pointing to the illusion that one can ever ‘represent’ synaesthesia. No two synaesthetics can ever have identical synesthetic experiences, and the nature of synaesthesia only ever experiential, never representational. Synaesthesia in Huneker marks both a limit point to literary form as well as functioning as an allegory for all
attempts at verisimilitude; experimental art has always been about the impossibility of understanding and giving voice to experience and illusory synaesthesia becomes in Huneker’s work a master-trope of Decadent aesthetics.

Bio: Alex Murray teaches in the Department of English at the University of Exeter. He writes on late-Victorian literature, specifically travel and place-based writing. He has recently edited, with Jason Hall, Decadent Poetics: Literature and Form at the British Fin de Siècle (Palgrave, 2013) and is currently completing a monograph titled ‘Landscapes of Decadence: Literature and Place, 1880-1925’.

Sarah Parker (University of Stirling)

Bittersweet: Michael Field’s Sapphic Palate

‘the sea-water of the Lesbian grape become somewhat brackish in the cup’
(Walter Pater, Greek Studies)

This paper seeks to explore the ‘flavours’ of female homoeroticism in the poetic works of Michael Field (Katherine Bradley and Edith Cooper). My paper will examine the juxtaposition of ‘bitter’ and ‘sweet’ flavours across Michael Field’s oeuvre, asking whether these tastes can be seen to reflect Bradley and Cooper’s engagement with the Ancient Greek poetess Sappho, their direct poetic precursors (such as Algernon Charles Swinburne) and their own ambiguously lesbian sexuality.

Synaesthesia itself has long been connected with sexual inversion (the late-nineteenth century term for homosexuality). Havelock Ellis, for example, connected sexual inversion to ‘colour-hearing’. Ellis and other late-nineteenth century sexologists believed that the invert was a hypersensitive, often creative individual, and linked both hypersensitivity and sexual ‘perversity’ to the theories of congenital degeneration popularised by Max Nordau (1892). In recent scholarship, critics such as Catherine Maxwell, Laurel Brake and Cassandra Laity have linked the synaesthetic imagery of nineteenth-century writers such as Swinburne, Oscar Wilde and Walter Pater to homoerotic desire – suggesting that the blurring of boundaries between the senses can be linked to the blurring of boundaries of gender and sexuality.

My paper on Michael Field’s Sapphic appetites will address two neglected aspects of this discussion. Firstly, whilst connections have been drawn between theories of synaesthesia and male homoeroticism, links between female homoeroticism and the senses have been less frequently drawn. Secondly, whilst scent, visual stimuli (particularly colour) and to a lesser extent, sound (particularly music) have featured in this dialogue, taste and flavour has figured less prominently. Flavours nonetheless pervade Michael Field’s poetic work, starting with their debut volume Long Ago (1889) in which these collaborating poets expand on Sappho’s fragments. For example, in Poem III, Sappho longs for ‘Honey, clear, soothing, nectarous, sweet’, while elsewhere she laments her ‘bitter’ pain (Poem XVII). Bradley and Cooper continue to use this juxtaposition of flavours in their late work, including the transitional volume Wild Honey from Various Thyme (1908) and their later religious poetry.

In my paper, I will draw out these two opposing flavours in Michael Field’s work – the honey, nectar, sweetness, and bee imagery, on the one hand, which is addictive and (eventually) cloying, and the bitter, salt, sweat, tears and sea-spray flavours, which frequently figure the bitterness and tragedy of unrequited or impossible love. Bradley and Cooper’s repertoire of flavours is drawn from a distinctly Sapphic palate – specifically Sappho’s famous fragment regarding ‘Eros...Bittersweet’ – mediated through Swinburne, who links such flavours to explicitly erotic scenarios in poems such as ‘Fragoletta’ (‘O bitterness of things too sweet!’) and ‘Anactoria’ (‘That I could drink thy veins as wine, and eat / Thy breasts like honey!’). My paper will suggest that Michael Field inherit this Sapphic palate from Swinburne and use it to represent the pleasures and pains of homoerotic love, whilst also signalling their Sapphic inheritance as women poets and their own homoerotic love.

Adrian Paterson (National University of Ireland, Galway)

A sense of music: Yeats, Symons, Mallarmé

Probably the characteristic *maladie* of the fin-de-siècle is synaesthesia. Its use becomes something of an obsession among self-described decadents and the poets of the Rhymers Club, and provides as much ground for research as it does for atmospheric poetry. But as a more thorough-going symbolism takes hold in nineties poets, it is in the possibilities of musical language and the impossibilities of silent music that are found a revelatory, revolutionary poetics. This paper adopts the task of exploring metaphorically and philosophically what is a very particular heightening and refinement of sensuous experience, and asks exactly how music is perceived, and in turn described, in the language and formal patterns of poetry of the period. It traces in particular the musical preoccupations of Stéphane Mallarmé as seen through the translations of Arthur Symons and the prism of his *The Symbolist Movement in Literature* and *Studies in Seven Arts*, and their effects on the poetry of W.B.Yeats. Such cultural transmissions have long been seen as the key to the poetry of, say, Symons’s *Silhouettes* and *London Nights* and Yeats’s *The Wind Among the Reeds*, but the operation of music on the senses and on the mind reveals musical principles, metaphoric connections, and magical philosophies that have not as yet been fully explored. These musical preoccupations abound with sensuous, synaesthetic description but also with orders (and odours) beyond those directly perceived by the senses. As this paper shows, drawing on numerology, the musical languages of symbolism, and the paradox of unheard or silent music, becomes a central method for both Mallarmé and Yeats, defining, for a time, a new poetics. Localized synaesthesia was anyway defined by such as Baudelaire, Verlaine, and Symons, as a Wagnerian concept expressed in miniature; Mallarmé’s quieter but perhaps no less influential conception of a sacred book has at its heart a strange sense of a silent music, expressed in fragments, as his essay ‘Crise en Vers’ makes clear. Examining Symons’ extracts, translations, and refinements of this text, and uncovering the intervention of the Yeats family friend Frederick York Powell at Mallarmé’s Oxford lecture, it becomes possible to trace its emergence in Yeats’s critical writings. Moreover considering also Symons’s poetic translations and original poems of the period, it is clear that *The Wind Among the Reeds*’ mysterious, contradictory relationship to the senses and to its own poetic language has much of its origin in Mallarméan conceptions of the sensuous and beyond-sensuous apprehension of music.

Bio: Adrian Paterson is Lecturer in English at the National University of Ireland, Galway. A graduate of Worcester College, Oxford, and Trinity College, Dublin, he completed an IRC-funded Research Fellowship at the Moore Institute at NUI Galway entitled Perfect Pitch: Music in Irish Poetry from Moore to Muldoon; a monograph *Words for Music: W.B.Yeats and Musical Sense* is in press. He has published widely on nineteenth and twentieth century literature, from Morris to Mallarmé and from Thomas Moore to Ezra Pound, with a particular interest in artistic interactions of the fin-de-siècle and modernist periods.
Robert Thomson Pruett (Independent Scholar)

Le démon de l’Analogie: The Faustian Contract of Artifice in Rodenbach’s Bruges-la-Morte

This study examines Georges Rodenbach’s Bruges-la-Morte, published in 1892 and considered to be the first ‘photo-novel’. Where prior scholarship has emphasized the role of the psycho-geography, this short paper conceives the novel’s pervasive themes of sensory artifice and mirroring in terms of a Faustian compulsion to supersede the laws of nature. This is achieved by exploring various forms of ritual in the narrative, wherein demonic and pious scenes of resurrection intersect. Rodenbach’s central character, the widower Hugues Viane, resigns himself to a solitary life in Bruges where he covetously preserves the memory and material possessions of his dead wife. When he miraculously encounters her doppelgänger, I argue, it occurs as an act of conjuration which confounds the conjurer. Particular emphasis is placed on the crisis of perverse and divine notions of ‘resemblance’, natural and unnatural love, which this study links to the novel’s devises of setting. Namely, it is as an a satanically revived nun in Meyerbreer’s opera ‘Robert le diable’ that Jane Scott, the double, first appears. A counterpoint to this is the Catholic atmosphere of Bruges on the eve of its Procession of the Holy Blood. The ceremony, which represents the pious aspect of resurrection, celebrates the vial of the Blood of Christ, Bruges’s relic which is thought to liquify on that day each year. Appropriately, Hugues preserves his own relic—a lock of his wife’s hair, monastically kept in a glass case among other objects from her life. While many critics consider Bruges-la-Morte to be a Symbolist novel, I propose that it stands in meaningful context with the anxieties of Decadent fiction. I argue that this is due largely to the self-conscious and conflicted manner in which artificial and symbolic beauty is confronted, tantamount to a crisis of good and evil not unlike Huysmans’s A rebours. Although it is a major theme in the novel, this oscillation between the sacred and sinful implications of Hugues’s resurrected passion has yet to receive serious attention. This study uses the original French text of Bruges-la-Morte with all its photographs, relevant material of the period as well as contemporary research.

Bio: A Goldsmiths alumnus, Robert Pruett’s ongoing research focuses on the role played by Medievalism and Catholicism in fin-de-siècle literature. As a specialist on Huysmans, he has recently guest lectured at The Evergreen State College and regularly contributes to its immersive French Studies program in Paris, Brittany, and Lyons. He has recently received the Goldsmiths Comparative Literature Prize.

Patricia Pulham (University of Portsmouth)

Poetry, Tactility and Eroticism in Arthur O’Shaughnessy’s Thoughts in Marble

Arthur O’Shaughnessy (1844-1881) published four volumes of poetry in his lifetime: An Epic of Women in 1870, Lays of France in 1872, Music and Moonlight in 1874, and Songs of a Worker, which was published posthumously, yet his work has received little critical attention. In her preface to Arthur O’Shaughnessy His Life and His Work, published in 1894, Louise Chandler suggested that O’Shaughnessy had been unjustly neglected, little read save by certain poets and critics. The same can still be said today: an MLA search yields only a handful of items consisting of scattered entries that include four articles written between 1939 and 1970; a mention in the 1985 edition Dictionary of Literary Biography: Victorian Poets after 1850; a 1954 dissertation by Sanford M. Goldstein from the University of Wisconsin, and more recently, a 2012 article by Jordan Kistler of King’s College London who has also completed a doctoral thesis on his work. Yet, as this paper will argue, O’Shaughnessy’s work, like that of many other minor poets, has more to say than its peripheral relationship to more important figures such as Dante Gabriel Rossetti, Swinburne and William Morris might imply. Writing in the Academy after O’Shaughnessy’s death, Edmund Gosse finds his ‘exquisite’ poetry ‘full of odour and melody’ (qtd. in Moulton, pp.13-14). Noted for an olfactory and aural sensuality that at times recalls the work of Swinburne and Rossetti, in Thoughts in Marble, a series of poems published in Songs of a Worker, O’Shaughnessy creates a peculiarly tactile poetry that is simultaneously cerebral and physical. Inspired by his study of the masterpieces of ancient sculpture which he took up with great zest shortly before his death, and imbued with an erotic
tactility, O’Shaughnessy asked that his poems should be read as ‘thoughts in marble, or poems of form’, and pointed out that it would therefore ‘be unjustifiable to look in them for a sense which is not inherent in the purest Parian’. From O’Shaughnessy’s protestations and instructions, it is clear that the Thoughts in Marble series is very much informed by Gautier’s tenet, ‘art for art’s sake’, and its development in Parnassian poetry, but this paper will argue that in addition to its concern with form and Gautier’s philosophy of art, the sensual aspect of O’Shaughnessy’s series – combining sight and touch - deserves to be seriously considered alongside the work of other proto-Decadent poets and situated firmly within the aesthetic traditions of the late-Victorian period.

Bio: Patricia Pulham is Reader in Victorian Literature at the University of Portsmouth. Her interests centre on nineteenth, and twentieth-century literature, art and culture, with a particular focus on Decadent writing (especially Vernon Lee), sensation and crime fiction, queer studies, and the neo-Victorian novel. She is the author of Art and the Transitional Object in Vernon Lee’s Supernatural Tales, (Ashgate Press, 2008) and has co-edited two collections on Lee’s work: Hauntings and Other Fantastic Tales (Broadview Press, 2006), the first annotated edition of selected short stories by Vernon Lee, and Vernon Lee: Decadence, Ethics, Aesthetics (Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), the first collection of critical essays on Lee’s work. In addition, she has published on a range of other nineteenth-century writers including Wilkie Collins, Thomas Hardy, Oscar Wilde and Olive Custance. Most recently, she co-edited ‘Decadent Crossings’, a Special Issue of Symbiosis, 16.2. (October, 2012) and wrote a volume on Spiritualism in Literature for the collection: Spiritualism, 1840-1930, published by Routledge in December 2013. She is currently writing a monograph on the sculptural body in nineteenth-century literature which will be published by Edinburgh University Press in 2015.

Liz Renes (University of York)

‘The Mystery of White Things’: Aestheticism, Obsession and Female Corporeal Whiteness

When John Singer Sargent exhibited his portrait of Madame X in the 1884 Salon, audiences cried that she resembled a corpse. Indeed, the potash of chlorate mixture gave her skin a lavender tinge, which contrasted strikingly with the dyed red henna in her hair. This eccentric combination is what ultimately incited in Sargent a desire to paint this ‘great beauty,’ a work that many argue was the downfall of his Parisian career. Susan Sidlauskas’s article about Madame X’s whiteness has explored her unnaturalness in the context of late nineteenth century cosmetic practices and the performativity of social identity. Yet aside from perhaps a flair for the dramatic, I wish to return to what I consider to be Sargent’s main focus for the painting – the expanse and ‘indecent’ exposure of her pristine skin. Instead of viewing this simply as artistic license (as it does contrast quite beautifully against the darkness of dress and display), it is possible to see it as representative of an altogether different obsession; Aestheticism’s fascination with the whiteness of the sculptural body and its implications of desire and deity, described by Pater as a ‘white light…purged from the empty angry, blood like stains of action and passion, [to] reveal, not what is accidental in man, but the god in him…”

Pater’s discussions on the white sculptural body are typically grounded in the context of a homosexual subculture within Aestheticism as they explored the male nude through the acceptable confines of Platonic and Classical ideals. What is little discussed, however, is how these ideas of whiteness, hardness, stone, desire and gaze translate when applied to images of the female sculptural body. Art history seems limited to addressing such issues under the repetitive application of the myths of Medusa, Galatea and the ‘uncanny’ notions of Freud. The aim of my work, however, will be to explore this notion of the female sculptural body by returning back to its roots within Aesthetic texts, first beginning with Vernon Lee’s symbolic negation of whiteness in her 1908 ‘Beauty and Sanity’ from Lauris Nobilis while also addressing the theme in works by Oscar Wilde and Henry James, significantly in the latter’s representation of the erotic pull of the Juno statue in his 1874 ‘The Last of the Valerii.’ These works will provide the basis for the primary aim of my presentation; the exploration of the themes present in the whiteness of the feminine sculptural body in Sargent’s Madame X. My recent discovery of a letter noting Sargent’s reading of, and interest in, Pater in 1881 will support my assertion that Sargent’s fascination with female skin here is a deliberate visual representation of his engagement with the Aesthetic concept of the white sculptural body as metaphor for non-normative passion. Ultimately, Madame X,
in her columnar form and expanse of skin, will act as Sargent’s own ‘Classical nude,’ one which challenges the boundaries between Aesthetic associations of marble and whiteness with an inherently (male) homosexual desire.

Bio: Liz Renes is a current PhD candidate at the University of York, working under Dr. Liz Prettejohn. Her thesis project The ‘Curious’ John Singer Sargent: Cosmopolitan Aesthetics, is now in its third year of development. Her previous educational background includes an MA in Fine and Decorative Art from Sotheby’s Institute of Art, London and a BA in Art History from New College of Florida. Her current academic interests include nineteenth-century cosmopolitan artists and writers and their relationship to the discussion of beauty and visual aesthetics occurring in France, England and the US during the last quarter of the nineteenth century.

David Rose (Oscholars)

Voluptuousness and Nature

‘The first duty in life is to be as artificial as possible. What the second duty is no one has as yet discovered.’ By making this the first of his ‘Phrases and Philosophies for the use of the young’, Oscar Wilde announced for the coming generation a programme that not only turned its back on naturalism, but in its latter half appears to reject Nature itself as an inspiration. This simultaneous repudiation of both Naturalism and Romanticism leaves Wilde, no mean artificer, in curious alliance, not only with the Æsthetes but also with the Victorian urge to dominate Nature as their railways bound the countryside in fetters of iron. But the conquest of Nature also required its assimilation, and in this paper I plan to argue against Wilde’s wellcrafted phrase and to suggest that such assimilation took the form of first recognising the voluptuousness of Nature and then, ex haec hypothesi, harnessing it to the twin projects of Decadence and Æstheticism through an overdeveloped sensory experience. By pitching Wilde, Huysmans, and Mirbeau against Zola, Kipling and Conrad, with some help from Millet, Sargent, Alma-Tadema, and others I hope in the necessarily narrow compass of a conference paper to put down waymarks for further and wider discussion.

Ery Shin (University of Oxford)

Bowing Down as Rising Up: Decadence and Spatiality in Nightwood

Writing in the context of a fin de siècle discourse of degeneration, decadence, Freudianism, and Christian martyrdom, Djuna Barnes revels in queer suffering: queers extravagantly lose (themselves), fail, and suffer, yet such ordeals aren’t without value. Everyone suffers, and life is suffering for Barnes, but not everyone luxuriates in suffering the way her queers do in Nightwood. The pleasure with which Nightwood’s characters emotionally wound others and are wounded, in fact, well accords with the West’s historical exaltation of suffering. Aristotelian attitudes stress the aesthetic delight derived from suffering, whereas Christianity shifts the focus from art to religion, in which suffering in the tradition of Christ proves oneself to the divine. If love, then, is taken as a spiritual order, those lovers who are willing to suffer the most for their faith authenticate their commitment. By those terms, Barnes’ queers attain a dignity known to few, their unhappiness being so intense. But Barnes’ linking queer masochism with martyrdom isn’t among the therapeutic psychoanalytic practices discussed in Ann Cvetkovich’s An Archive of Feelings, but a gesture more in line with Gilles Deleuze’s sexual politicizing in “Coldness and Cruelty.” Barnes isn’t so much working through homophobia-related traumas by, as Cvetkovich puts it, “acting them out,” but refusing any healing or closure as such. Her men and women cling to their anguish and spiritually elevate themselves in the process, which, in a symbolic fashion, undercuts those institutions that would have them suffer in ignominy and cowardice for all time. Their spiral downward propels their cause upward, and such reciprocity complicates an otherwise more straightforward exposé on impossible love and being. This isn’t to say suffering provides a decisive way out for the queer. Barnes’ despair
is too relentless to earn total redemption for her romantic outsiders. Yet a certain spiritual ascent can still be derived through pain.

Barnes even incorporates the reciprocal relation between suffering and sublimation into her decadent spatial aesthetic. Evoking Sacher-Masoch’s sense of suspension and dilapidated luxury, Nightwood’s spaces are partitioned around vertical and horizontal axes, the former facilitating affective inversions, that is, bowing down as rising up can only unfold along the perpendicular. Nodding to Kenneth Burke’s commentary on the novel’s pivotal movement, the literal “turning, turning towards or turning away” from homosexual alterity, this paper consequently explores another kind of kinesis: seesawing (or the lack thereof) and its connotations.

Barnes favours decadent, dimly-lit interiors cluttered with once exquisite objects. Nightwood’s domestic spaces meticulously reflect this preference, resembling the insides of mausolea more than homes. They showcase what Dana Seitler describes as a “catalog of degeneration, distilling with confused clarity the decomposition of the modern.” Nightwood’s entire landscape seems to bow down and inward, collapsing upon itself in a flurry of “melancholy red velvet,” dust, and rococo furniture. Hedvig delivers Felix “upon a canopied bed of a rich spectacular crimson”; Count Onatorio Altamonte decorates his mansion with “living statues”; “heavy velvet hangings” cover hotel windows; Nora’s American property contains “ruined gardens,” a “burial ground,” and a “decaying chapel” filled with “mouldering psalm books” and “dusty benches”; a “cloud of dust” rises from carriage upholstery; a faceless woman in an imagined photograph “lean[s] against a drape of Scotch velvet”; a beggar’s hair is “gray with the dust of years.” Everything recedes into darkness, and everywhere becomes a “museum” of some “encounter,” because already dead for ages. Within this graveyard, a downward movement that transmutes into an insurgence against puritanical regimes most poignantly materializes in Nora and Robin’s spatial interactions.

Bio: Ery Shin is a doctoral candidate in English literature at the University of Oxford. Among her areas of interest are modernism, queer theory, and phenomenology. Her dissertation approaches the modernism of Djuna Barnes and Gertrude Stein through queer theories and representations of loss and embodiment.

Robert Stilling (Florida State University)

‘A Dead Art’: Oscar Wilde, Agha Shahid Ali, and the Dacca Gauzes

In The Picture of Dorian Gray, Oscar Wilde writes of the "exquisite Dacca gauzes” that his protagonist pursues for "over a year," signaling the lengths to which the Victorian dandy would go to acquire fine textiles and other rare, exotic objects. Nearly a hundred years later, Kashmiri-American poet Agha Shahid Ali uses Dorian Gray's quest as a launching point to discuss the legacy of such cloth in his own family, as well as the brutal colonial history that rendered the making of such fabric a "dead art": "In history we learned: the hands / of weavers were amputated, / the looms of Bengal silenced, / and the cotton shipped raw / by the British to England.” This paper examines how Ali redeployes the decadent's sensual pursuit of fine objects to disclose the interwoven history of metropolitan aestheticism and colonial exploitation. I argue that in doing so, however, Ali seeks not to castigate Wilde, but to lay claim on behalf of the colonial subject to the very aesthetic experience Wilde professes. Moreover, I suggest that Ali paradoxically refigures Dorian Gray’s fatal aestheticism to revive in English another "dead art,” that of the ghazal, an Arab-Persian lyric form once popular among court poets of the Mughal Empire, but suppressed after the Sepoy Rebellion as a decadent holdover of the ancien régime. Building on the work of Matthew Potolsky, Regenia Gagnier, Dipesh Chakrabarty, Wai Chee Dimock, and Jahan Ramazani, this paper traces the figure of the Dacca gauzes through Wilde and Ali’s work to sketch a transnational model of decadent poetics, one in which the pursuit of sensual experience challenges the traditional fin-de-siècle periodization of literary decadence and recasts it as a pressing concern for postcolonial, Anglophone poetry.

Bio: Robert Stilling is Assistant Professor of English at Florida State University. His work on Wilde and the artist Yinka Shonibare’s "postcolonial decadence” appeared in the March 2013 issue of PMLA, and an article on decadence and colonial West Indian epic is forthcoming from Victorian Literature and Culture. His current book
Matthew Brinton Tildesley (Hankuk University of Foreign Studies, Seoul, South Korea)

Decadent Sensations: Art, the Body and Sensuality in the “Little Magazines” (1885-1897)

In The Picture of Dorian Gray, Oscar Wilde pits his hero, freshly educated in the ways of the “new hedonism,” against “that harsh, uncomely puritanism that is having, in our own day, its curious revival.” This revival of puritanism is evident in the attempted ban on the Nude in British galleries within The Times in 1885, the successful campaign to close the music halls a few years later (on account of the actresses being synonymous with prostitutes) and the runaway success of Max Nordau’s rabidly puritanical Degeneration in 1895. Over more than a decade, bourgeois mainstream culture, as represented in mainstream publications, certainly displays a distinctly puritanical element within British culture. This puritanism was an explicitly Holy war being waged against the arts and artistic freedom, and to a greater extent, the site of the battle was the human body or representations of the body in art and literature. This paper will show how Dorian Gray is emblematic of an artistic counter culture that is preserved within the pages of the art-centric, manifesto “Little Magazines,” such as The Century Guild Hobby Horse (1884-94), The Dial (1889-1897), The Savoy (1896) and The Pageant 1896-7.

The “Representation of the Nude” was defended in scholarly articles in the Hobby Horse; music halls, their belles and habitués, became the focus of painting, poetry and short story writing in The Yellow Book, among others; and the notable sages George Bernard Shaw and Havelock Ellis locked horns with Nordau within The Savoy. However, the coterie behind The Dial, and later, The Pageant, Charles Shannon, Charles Ricketts, Thomas Sturge Moore and John Gray, defied bourgeois sensibilities with breath-taking alacrity. As well as polemical pieces akin to those in the Hobby Horse and later, The Savoy, The Dial included letterpress and fine art that took the representation of bodily sensuality on the printed page to new heights. Defying contemporary puritanical Protestantism’s espoused outrage at all things bodily, The Dial reveals in bodily sensation. In their artwork, the senses and body are explored and touted, from homosexual kisses and sensual nudes to such works as Shannon’s The Queen of Sheba, which represents a riot of sensory experience within pictorial art. Similarly, Ricketts’ and Moore’s short stories shun traditional narrative and plot techniques, favouring impressionistic details and the static description of bodily sensation, which at times spills over into synaesthesia. As English Protestantism defined the opposition, The Dial-Pageant coterie (who were themselves Anglo-French) use continental Catholicism as a site for defying artistic restriction. In particular, John Gray’s religious poetry in The Dial is singularly sensuous, and even homoerotic, in his exploration of religious experience. Equally, in The Pageant, his story “Light” depicts a simple smith’s wife’s conversion to Rome, and Catholicism’s spiritual truth is experienced within the body and transcendent sensations, rather than Protestantism’s logical and empirical dogma.

The Dial-Pageant continuum (1889-1897) represents a sustained and daring opposition to the puritanism which Wilde identified in late 1880s’ culture. Furthermore, this brave band of deviants continued to defy mainstream bourgeois morality, even after the watershed that was Wilde’s conviction and imprisonment in 1895.

Bio: Dr Matthew Brinton Tildesley is a senior Assistant Professor of English Literature at Hankuk University of Foreign Studies, Seoul, South Korea. Since completing his postgraduate career at Durham University in 2008, Dr Tildesley’s main field of research has been periodical culture of the 1880s and 1890s, Aestheticism, Decadence and Modernism. He has published various articles on authors such as Oscar Wilde, Ernest Dowson, Joseph Conrad, Emile Zola and Virginia Woolf, and in particular his work on The Savoy magazine has enjoyed worldwide success online. In 2008, he contributed 19 entries to the British Library’s Dictionary of Nineteenth Century Journalism, and along with Dr Kostas Boyiopoulos and Dr Yoonjoung Choi, he is currently editing The Decadent Short Story: An Annotated Anthology for Edinburgh University Press, which is due for publication in December 2014.
David Weir (Cooper Union)

Decadent Taste

The concept of aesthetic taste originated in the seventeenth-century by taking the physical sense of taste as an analogue for artistic judgment. Unlike the other senses, taste provides instantaneous verification of goodness or badness. Our eyes may need to adjust to the light; our ears might not be able to discriminate a single voice in the cacophony of a crowded room; but our tongue reacts instantly with gusto or disgust to whatever finds itself inside our mouth. Moreover, with the other senses, touch included, we feel apart from the objects we apprehend. But taste is internal, like the mind, and it is our own, or so we think: we see and hear the same things other people see, but have different tastes. Traditionally, the aesthetic analogy likens beauty and ugliness to delight and disgust, but what happens when disgust delights? The taste for decadence involves precisely such delight in disgust, an attraction to things that people who have normal taste react to with revulsion. This meaning, or something like it, appears in all the classic nineteenth century texts of decadence. Gautier describes Baudelaire’s style as like that of “the Lower Empire, . . . veined with the greenish streaking of decomposition,” which is, paradoxically, a sign of refinement. Normal physical taste is instinctive; therefore, it is animalistic. Only human beings can develop perverse tastes and take delight in disgust. As Gautier also says, depravity is a sign of humanity: it is impossible for animals to “break . . . away from the normal type” because they “are helplessly directed by unchanging instinct.” Arthur Symons, likewise, follows Gautier in describing decadence as a kind of desirable illness, “a new and beautiful and interesting disease.” He mentions la névrose, the “pet malady” of the Goncourt brothers, whose style Huysmans describes—“with delight”—as “high-flavored and spotted with corruption.” The French phrase Symons quotes—“tacheté et faisandé”—is also said to be key to Huysmans’s own style. The latter word, especially, appears in À Rebours whenever Huysmans describes Late Latin literature or the poetry of his contemporaries Verlaine and Mallarmé. Art that has the quality of faisandage is specifically, generically decadent. The word is derived from faisan, “pheasant,” and the adjective faisandé derived from the noun means “gamey.” The meaning in Huysmans, however, is not that Des Esseintes’s taste in literature is analogous to a taste for pheasant or other game, but rather to a taste for meat that is tainted, that is beginning to rot or decay. Decadent taste, then, involves a taste for decay: this tautology is not so simple as it sounds, because such taste must be developed, the senses must be educated to accept something that the person of normal taste would find disgusting. As strange as it sounds, decadent taste finds a partial analogue in the romantic era in the sublime: the taste for terror, an attraction to something fearful or overwhelming. The analogy fails, however, because sublime terror involves nature and decadent taste requires artifice. And that is the final triumph of decadent taste: the transformation of the natural process of decay into an artificial path to aesthetic satisfaction.