

Tracing the Genealogy of Literary Movements: Realism, Naturalism, Decadence

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Abstract

This paper explores the descent of various 19th century movements namely Realism, Naturalism, and Decadence and argues that as discursive practices in literature, these forms have been in use since the evolution of fiction, though it lacked a formal, theoretical regimentation of its form. Within the ontological and epistemological paradigms, the paper dwells upon the zeitgeist that shaped up the emergence and ossification of these movements, apart from tracing its influence in various European and transatlantic countries.

Key Words: Realism, Naturalism, Decadence, Literary Movements, fiction

Once the optimum form of anything has been achieved, further development of it is by definition impossible; thereafter, there can only be (at best) a proliferation of different instances of that optimum form. (Heath, xvi)

When Alexander Pushkin, the Russian Literary stalwart and Marie Henri Bayle, the French critic and novelist forged ahead of the romantic aesthetics and poetics of idealism, Pushkin through his intentional authorial expansion of the poetic idiom of Russian Literature, and Bayle by introducing in his *Le Rouge et le Noir* (The Red and The Black) such characters with sharp profundity and “serious investigation into the human cause” (Ford, 165) and deep psychological insights; the literary circles and connoisseurs of arts ratified the style of writing which depicted the pathos of common life. As an ideological paradigm, the realist movement

began in different art forms, at the hands of such painters in France around 1830s as Gustave Courbet, Jean-François Millet, Camille Corot, Champfleury who outrightly rejected the academic regulations and conventions of the previous aesthetics and exotic preferences of the romantic age, and portrayed instead the pitiable struggles of the common laity, often on the peripheries of class spectrum. During the eighteenth century, the dominant arts and literary writings of the times catered to the tastes of the feudal and the bourgeoisie, incorporating aristocratic and elitist values, legends and chivalric romance, the social matrices of men and women with extraordinary moralities, actions and sensibilities. In fact, much before the term became a fashion, as a discursive practice in literature, it has been in use long before it was formalized as a theory. As Robert E. Spiller reinstated, “it is as old as fiction itself”. English novelists such as Daniel Defoe, Henry Fielding, Tobias Smollett, and Charles Dickens, Walter Scott and later redeemed by George Eliot, Thomas Hardy, Bennett to demonstrate the characters imbibing realistic normativities and quotidian values that governed the lives of commonplace people, things, life, and its accouterments.

An ontological and epistemological discourse on the plausibility, quiddity and the philosophy of realism is variegated and complex, which nonetheless demands a continuous assessment of its modalities in ethics, aesthetics, science and semantics, the chapter however only delineates the paradigmatic shifts in literary realism and art criticism within its zeitgeist. The national and intellectual spirit of the age saw discoveries and progress in Science, with the philosophical refashioning of religion, chiefly with Positivist Philosophy of Auguste Comte in his work *The Course in Positive Philosophy* from 1830-1842. The progress in society based on the accumulated truths derived from empiricism, emphasized the need to look ahead of the speculative tendencies of absolute knowledge, thereby shifting from the metaphysical and intuitions of the interpretative agents. French Positivists such as Ernest Renan, David Strauss and Ludwig Feuerbach, German Hegelians or post-Hegelian cohorts significantly contributed to positivist theories in other walks of life. The positivist *outlook* also entered the circles of men of letter, scholars, historians and scientists. With its logic, the

antecedent romanticism, imagination, intrasubjective visions were now seen as “part of the epistemology of pure selfishness” (69) eluding the social and scientific rationality of milieu and its micro and macro subjectivities. Imagination and contemplative inventive, fancies and visions was seen as phantasmagorical and individualistic and unhealthy to function in the material world. Rejecting the principles of the ideal Nature, the need to minutely present the essential features of the tangible world, with its everyday complexities and characters’ complacency, became the desideratum of the new demand for the discursive literary writings. The unifying troupes of sincerity in expression instead of the hyperbolic fancies, truthfulness of experience instead of sham appearances, strength of character instead of mellifluous dramatic personae were to be embraced in a bid to discover the structural constructs of the socio-cultural, biological and physiological forms of evolution and being.

While the foundational rehabilitations of the aesthetics of realism were already done by Courbet, the rejections of his earlier paintings especially: an “intensely lifelike, non-idealized nudes, including a scandalous close-up of an adult woman’s genitalia labeled “L’Origine du Monde” (“The Origin of the World”) by the “official French Universal Exhibition,” Courbet had “set up his own Pavillion du Réalisme near the official exhibition site” (Barrish, 14), as a mark of protest for an aesthetics which was here to stay on the landscape of arts and literature for a sustained period of a century in the literary periodization. The movement further received a jostle and a further refinement at the hands of the French novelist Honore’ de Balzac, whose writing of a series called *La Comédie Humaine* (*The Human Comedy*), of about ninety volumes (1829– 48) was a remarkable feature of European prose tradition during the lifetime. As Trever states,

Balzac in the Preface to *The Human Comedy* fully identified himself with the new 'scientific' approach to the social sphere promoted by the sciences *humaines*, an approach that banishes ideals and moral standards in favor of a recognition of the 'facts' of self-interest, personal appetite and force *majeure*. . . . Recording the political, financial and

sexual energies that propelled this world forced Balzac to adopt a complexity of perspectives, becoming, in the process, 'more or less patient or perceptive painter of human types, a narrator of the dramas of private life, the archaeologist of social furniture, the cataloger of professions, the recorder of good and evil', positions that were to be acquitted with such self-effacing realism that the reader might well believe that not Balzac but 'French society would be the real author' of his novels. (72)

Gustave Flaubert's *Madam Bovary* was another seminal work in the predominant literary Realism classification, which demonstrated the intrinsic and psychological mapping of the characters situating them within the problematic social tastes and aesthetic preferences of the French society, navigating the devastating effect of the mass productions of romantic literary thought for the central character Emma Bovary. One of the popular adultery tragedies, the grim subjectivity of Emma Bovary appealed to the international literary communities and creative writers across the cultural forms, with "Bovaryism", a term given by Jules de Gaultier to designate the template of characters falling for illusory imagination. For critics "Emma became the female version of Don Quixote, as his most closest and perfect reincarnation" (Stara 134). Balzac commented of the Bovaryism:

[...] by reading charms and novels, the woman, creature even more likely than us to get excited, must experience intoxicating ecstasies. She creates an ideal existence near which everything pales, she does not take long to realize this voluptuous life, to try to transform the magic in her. Involuntarily, it passes from the spirit to the letter and from the soul to the senses.

Theodore Fontane, the German novelist, with his remarkable *Effi Briest* brought the tragic narration of Effi for the pursuit of social canons of the Germanic society and have also influenced *Buddenbrooks* by Thomas Mann. Though the literary movement Germany catered to the political opinion and conflicts, but the *Young Germany* often resorted to sober

representations of realism through the fiction. Similarly Gottfried Keller published *Green Henry*, a hybridized mix of autobiography and fiction and Bildungsroman, which propelled literary realism across the German soil. The poetic realism in Italy, especially at the hands of the prolific oeuvre of Grazia Deledda, a notable Italian woman writer, realistically depicted the Sardinian ethos, the western Mediterranean island of Sardinia with the geographical descriptions and indigenous bonds with the place of origins and nurturing. Apart from contributing significantly to the Sardinian Literature, she was a mainstream writer of prominence whose aficionados included Benito Mussolini, Luigi Capuana and Giovanni Verga, although Capuana, Verga were the exponents of *Verismo*, based on Positivist ideals, but inevitably inspired by the Naturalism of Emile Zola and Maupassant.

In United States Henry James, with his Jamesinian concept of human experience became the forerunner of American Realism, although William Dean Howells' early works and break through the sentimental novel tradition was seen as inducing fresh inclinations in prose preferences. *The Rise of Silas Lapham* in 1885 by Howell, a complete representative of the American realism, depicted the rag-to-riches, rise and decline narrative of Silas Lapham transpiring with his moral propensities. The years of Civil War, cultural and political conflicts, racial antipathies, emergence of newer economic structures, technological advancement and its rapid habitation dynamism, Southern Reconstruction, labor movement and demands, the set-up of new industries, rise of Financial giants, the establishment of transatlantic railroads etc. the writers of the age depicted deeper insights into the outward and intrinsic shifting ethos of the American society. The characters from middle classes, poor, alcoholic, orphans, peddlers, prostitutes, Buskers, in the class matrix formed the central protagonists operating with a social bustling with several problems. Mark Twain, Stephen Crane, Samuel Clemens, Henry James explored the literary troupes which were based on the dichotomies and expediencies of 'the old world' and 'the new world', the shift from agrarian culture to the mercantile culture, the experiences of expatriates, émigré chronicles, the new

found freedom of the youth, the psychological pitfalls of social selections, and other thought experiments of the dynamic American society.

The rise of realism found its bloom in the extensive prolific capacities of prose than the condensed nuanced expressions in poetry, for poetry was in search for a better poetic form and mode, the earlier romantic and Victorian subject matters were grossly exaggerated and incompetent to voice the dilemmas of its present. The harsh realities of the social metamorphosis couldn't find a fertile ground to sow the seeds for effective poetics. Though the Parnassian School of poetry emerged in France which published anthologies in 1866 and again in 1869 and 1876, including poems by Charles Leconte de Lisle, Théodore de Banville, Sully Prudhomme, Stéphane Mallarmé, Paul Verlaine, François Coppée, Nina de Callias, and José María de Heredia. Drama, on the other hand, witnessed a shift from the mellifluous artificialities of the tradition of Melodrama to realistic, bona-fide depictions of the experiences of man. In Russia, Turgenev, Leo Tolstoy, Dostoevski, Gogol, Anton Chekhov; in Scandinavia it was Bjorson, Ibsen and Brandes, Hauptmann in Germany found an experimentation of romantic and melodramatic.

The limitations and criticism of realism was directed towards the idea of representation and truth of such knowledge. As Trever observes, the novelist Theodore Fontane categorically endorsed "a certain propriety in his or her art: no 'naked reproduction of everyday existence'; no blatant propaganda on behalf of the oppressed and dispossessed. (72) While Dickens in England, Dostoevsky in Russia, Henry James in America catapulted it as "vehicle for awakening social conscience" (72). "Dickens was fully aware of the moral complications of an art-form that necessarily had to engage, if it were to carry out its mission of enlightenment, with what contemporary readerships would have classified as the sordid and the immoral. But he defended it as not just approximating to the highest "clause of mimetic fidelity"(72) as also a benchmark for gauging the dynamics of true morality in an "pervasively immoral world"(72).

II

Naturalism, as an offshoot of realist movement in literature, found its germination during the emergence of realist proponents, only with expanded horizons and complex variables of representation of life in literature. It was an outgrowth, expansion and elaboration of probing the limitations of realism. The predicament of modern man now shifted to being caught between the forces of nature and the mechanical, and the inherent struggles in adapting to the challenges posed by the environment rather than being ravaged completely by it. Working under complex urban systems, the measure of success or failure of characters in the literary naturalism, depended upon their ability to decipher, disentangle the complexities and overcoming them with their prudence. The early naturalists emphasized different social environments: man-made, utilitarian, mechanical, institutional, heredity while emphasizing the toils of economic and social determinism based on Darwinism. As for religion, the intellectual and creative world witnessed an antipodal shift towards the *atheistic* naturalism confidently treading on the optimism of scientific naturalism. Darwinian revolution of theory of ‘origins’ posed a threat to the deep-seated traditional doctrinal hegemony for the Victorian faith, while the objective interpretation of Bible in “Higher Criticism” led to questioning the domination of religion with the intend of debunking the myth of God. Apart from it, Hippolyte Taine the French critic and historian, Thomas Henry Huxley biologist and anthropologist, Karl Marx, Comte and Sigmund Freud contributed to the previous tenets and values of the traditional Western society in various intellectual and philosophical domains,. Taine’s philosophy, particularly, held the environment, collective cultural dispositions and ethos of the society as unknown, running unconsciously and permeating through everyday lives of the people, the individual therefore a product of his circumstantial history. Philip Rahv, about Naturalism, asserted:

. . . It is that type of realism in which the individual is portrayed not merely as subordinate to his background but as wholly determined by it--that type of

realism, in other words, in which the environment displaces its inhabitants in the role of the hero. (584)

As part of French literary invention, naturalism has largely been directed by the theoretical formulations of Emile Zola, who, in the role of the artist, declared:

“ . . . We [novelists] operate on the characters, the passions, on the human and social data, in the same way that the chemist and the physicist operate on living beings. Determinism dominates everything.” The zeitgeist of the age, particularly in France was a “historical process that saw the movement from a landed to an urban economy, saw the rise of the bourgeoisie and at least the appearance of republican government, and that was ultimately founded upon empirical/scientific assumptions about reality which, coupled with the new technology and power of money (new banks and credit theories), led to the impulse of nationalism and rise of empire.”

It was as if the artist assumed the role of a philosopher, the historian, the doctor and the scientist and a biologist. As a biologist, the novelist collects his samples and specimen, as a historian he/she chronicles the milieu, as doctor the novelist goes on to describe candidly the problematics of the anatomies, diseases, ills and others, as a scientist he tests the veritability of his hypothesis by way of placing his characters within certain man-made conditions.

In his lifetime, Emile Zola was inspired by Balzac's *La Comédie Humaine* when he produced the *Les Rougon-Macquart* a cycle of twenty novels. The confluence of the elements of naturalism such as genealogy, environment, external political and feudal empire, a scientific novel, novel of defeat etc. on the principle of synthesis, are blended harmoniously. The indomitable stature of Zola's work presupposes other writers of the age. Of Zola's oeuvre, Wells' explained, Zola aimed “to cover all France. The family-tree of the *Rougon-Macquart*, affixed to *Une Page d'Amour*, exhibits representatives of this family within three generations, in almost every social sphere. *La Fortune des Rougon*, *La Conquête*

de Plassans, *La Faute de l' Abbe` Mouret* show us life in provincial towns. The farm furnishes the scene of *La Terre*, and, in a measure, for *La Joie de Vivre*. *Germinal* introduces us to a great miners' strike; *Le Ventre de Paris* tells of the Paris market gardens and the Halles. *La Cur`e* deals with the financial debauchery that followed the coup d'etat, and *Son Excellence Eugene Rougon* takes up the parable of political corruption. *Nana* introduces the inner shrine of the goddess of lubricity those who care to see its foulness, while *L' Assommoir* is a temperance tale of the Paris workmen. The small shop-keepers are represented in *Pot-Bouille*, and the great establishments like *Au Bon Marche* and *Au Louvre* are spread before us in *Au Bonheur des Dames*. *La Bete Humaine* is a railroad epic, *De` uvre* deals with artist life, *E` Argent* with the stock exchange, *La De`ba`cle* with the army, which takes, whether he will or no, a considerable place in every Frenchman's life. Religious mysticism forms the subject of that exquisite idyll. Passionate jealousy is analyzed in *Une Page d` Amour*, celi`bacy in *La Faute de l' Abbe` Mouret* and clerical ambition in *La Conquete de Plassans* (386, 387)

In United States, the naturalists' theory was well-utilized and found bolder ways to depict the grim and hideous factual realities of American life. It found itself emerging in Theodore Dreiser's creative inklings, foremost in *Sister Carrie* in 1900. Dreiser characters in *Sister Carrie* move within the deterministic framework of human conditions, wherein Caroline Meeber, initially goes unpunished for her moral and ethical transgressions, caught in the material vagaries of city life while her alter-ego in *Hurstwood* ends up in a life of penury and commits suicide. Other specific set of prose and storytellers associated with naturalism include Frank Norris, John Dos Passos, Kate Chopin in the United States, Alphonse Daudet and Guy de Maupassant in France, and George Moore and George Gissing in England. Kate Chopin's *The Awakening* and short-stories such as *The Storm* were deliberate attempts at fusing naturalism in alignment with the concerns of feminism racial discrimination and women of color etc. In the theater, Naturalism founds itself strictly following the propositions provided by Zola and that is: a) the play must depict the visceral component, characters in

their flesh and blood, b) The causal actions of the characters, their aspirations/motivations/ruminations must be affected directly by the forces of heredity and environment and Darwinian Determinism c) It must be a realistic/realist representation of the events and not the phantasmagoria. Contextualizing Zola's theories, Richard Lehan comments:

. . . Zola picked up where Dickens left off -moving us away from sentiment (the power of the human heart to address social evil) to a commercial/industrial world driven by the power of its own mechanisms, creating both the splendor of Haus Haussmann's Paris and the degradation of the industrial slums. Later Norris, who was influenced by Zola, and Dreiser, who was not, would show the same historical process at work in New York, Chicago, and San Francisco. In this context, naturalism is more than a literary movement, more than just the workings of shared assumptions about heredity and environment, and it becomes inseparable from the historical processes of modernism, which moves us away from the land to the city, away from the world of craft to the world of factories, away from the manor house/cottage to the townhouse/tenement, away from the lord of the manor to the city speculator, away from the domination by the aristocracy to the domination by the high bourgeoisie who had begun to control political and financial institutions (parliament and national banks of credit) in the name of national policy and imperial longings.

Similarly the theme of Wilderness and combating such forces of unknown/invisible wilderness functioned well for Rudyard Kipling in *Captains Courageous* (1897) which captures the metamorphosis of Harvey Cheyne, a sickly man who accidentally is picked up a fishing group who transform this weakling to self-reliant, strong individual ready to take on the world. This formulaic depiction was also to be found in Frank Morris's *Moran of the Lady Letty*, Jack London's *The Sea-Wolf*. The variety of naturalistic themes also included candid medicinal practices, physical sciences with the emphasize on the systematic and

empirical observance of data. body anatomy, activities involving sexual frankness for instance in Zola's *Nana*.

Henrik Ibsen's play *Ghosts* (1881), with its diegesis upon genealogy, explored the dramatic naturalism of environment apart from the issues of incest, acute social tensions, consciousness of moral injustices and the anatomized study of the psychological dynamics of human relationships led by August Strindberg, Gerhart Hauptmann, and Maxim Gorky. The other dramatists of the age and cohort such as Anton Chekhov wrote some plays which can be seen having the influence of naturalist thesis as narrative premises in a somewhat looser sense, the realistic plays of Anton Chekhov are sometimes grouped with the naturalist phase of European drama at the turn of the century.

By the turn of the century, writers increasingly found pessimistic naturalism to be precisely a substitute for naturalism, reality which consisted of too many details of condor, at times obscenity through the multi-hued characters and their life-situations. As with other forms of art this literary movement came with its limitations too. Realistic and environmental can become the material for arts but it can neither become aesthetics nor can become art. The translational and affect-torial value of such art/art forms are also confined to the evaluations of philosophical representations. Zola emphasized that:

Man is not alone: he lives in society, in a social condition: and consequently, for us novelists, the social condition increasingly modifies the phenomenon. Indeed our great study is just there, a reciprocal effect of society upon the individual and the individual on society. . . . We are not yet able to prove that the social condition is . . . physical and chemical. . . . We can act upon the social condition, in acting upon the phenomena of which we have made ourselves masters of men. And this is what constitutes the experimental novel: to possess a knowledge of the mechanism of the phenomena inherent in man, to show the masking of the intellectual and sensory manifestations under the influence of heredity and environment, such as physiology shall give them to

us, then finally to exhibit man living in a social condition produced by himself, which modifies daily, and in the heart of which he himself experiences a continual transformation. Thus, then, we lean on physiology: we take man from the hand of the physiologist solely in order to continue the solution of the problem, and to solve scientifically how men behave when they are in society. (45)

The very emphasis on the physiological found itself caught in the flummox of mechanistic and technical, the world of external being with the characters having no self-will at all. The godless world ruled by evil forces of determinism, with man being trapped helplessly in pain and grim tragedy formed the kaleidoscope of the bleak literary universe which the novelists of the successive age Proust, Joyce, Woolf, increasingly found unable to cater to the *life of mind*. Nietzsche in this regard has popularly stated that "the smallest fragment in the world is infinite. What does one see, and paint, or write? what at one wishes to see, and what one can see". Thus the very fissures in the theorisation of naturalism glaringly revealed a lack of illumination or resolution to the moral dilemmas of the characters with the literary writer refusing to provide any possible 'depuration' or 'ab-reaction' in the materialization of naturalist phenomena and aggressive pursuit of scientism by means was inadequate to shift arts upon the encumbrance of symbolism and emblematic representation.

III

The collapse of the traditional Western value system led to a general skepticism on the religious credence of an aghast society which saw itself swaying towards the unbridled perversion, apathy, slippery moralities and unchecked licentiousness. In arts and Literature, this expression took the forms of rebel against the previous conventions, here, in the case of European Aesthetics, against naturalism. The "fin de siècle" registered the artistic, moral, cultural and social inheritance of the past and gravitated towards a highly refined linguistic style and craftsmanship, disconnected from the rest of the society. The cultural parallels between the decline of Roman empire, with every vestige of cultural and moral integrity was

lost, was seen in close approximation to the “fin de siècle” in France, Germany, Italy, England, Scandinavian and other countries. This decline became a model for the creative artist to be imitated to express the passions of the age. As a matter of literary movement, much like its predecessors it rejected conventions and modes of the bygone writers by regarding them as inadequate, anomalous and incompetent. “If Zola shocked by the coarseness and candor of his revelations of life in the raw in the lower depths, Huysmans and his followers scandalized readers by their more delicate but equally lascivious intimations of far more sophisticated sins” (Stromberg xxiii). Huysmans himself was disgusted by the harsh and vulgar realities of naturalism and realism and seek solace in private and delicate forms of aesthetic experience. The pessimistic moods and uncertainties were a gift of the precursors and to this experiment was added the subversion of traditional literary conventions in pursuit of a lavish and sensual expression. The theoretical tenets of Baudelaire and Gautier influenced the writers of the age J.K Huysmans’ *A’ Rebours* (1884, Translated as *Against the Grain*) exhibited an immense and deeper effect upon the literary decadence. It was “. . . a demand for wider ranges, newer emotional and spiritual territories, fresh woods and pastures” (239). Arthur Symons, in his critical chapter on movement “The Decadence” described this shift as:

The decadent movement in English art was the final outcome of the Romantic Movement which began at the dawn of the nineteenth century. It was the mortal ripening of that flower which blossomed upon the ruins of the French Revolution, heralding not only the rights of man, which was an abstraction savoring more of the classic ideal, but the rights of personality, of unique, varied and varying men. The French Romanticists, led by Victor Hugo, recognized this in the glorification of Napoleon; but fear and hatred in the hearts of the ruling classes in this country and propagated among the people preventing the idea gaining acceptance here. At the same time decadence was neither romantic nor classic: its existence in so far as it was dependent upon either of those art traditions was dependent upon both. The decadents

were romantic in their antagonism to current forms, but they were classic in their insistence upon new. . . far from being nihilistic in aim, they always clung, at times in desperation, to one already established art form or another.

In England, modern decadence was a resounding revelation from the French movement which began with Theophile Gautier, Paul Verlaine and Joris Karl Huysmans. Walter Pater's *The Renaissance*, Oscar Wilde's *The Picture of the Dorian Gray*, *Poems and Ballads* by Swinburne, Aubrey Birdsley's Art Nouveau and his illustrations, perverse epigrams of *A Woman No Importance*. The 1894 journal 'The Chameleon' by Oscar Wilde and Douglas; and the fiery, spirited 1894 *The Yellow Book* which shook off all moral codes of the English decency, was utterly rejected for its obscenity, it was seen as "a combination of English rowdyism and French lubricity. . . ." (Beckson xxi). *The Renaissance* a critical thinking module on decadence took into account the beauty of dynamics and flux into life as well as the dynamics and flux of beauty in life. The fleeting impressions were "not the fruit of experience but experience itself, is the end." Instead of just 'Evil for evil's sake' or 'Art for art's sake' Pater insisted "Art comes to your professing frankly to give nothing but the highest quality to your moments as they pass, and simply for these moments' sake." In its specific appeal to cater to the taste of high-brow, *decadence* found echoes with the epochs of Roman and Greek, and the Renaissance Humanism of the fifteenth century. The causal elucidation to the interests in Burckhardt's and Walter Pater's revisionist work on the Renaissance models found cadences with the decadent writer. In Italy, *Decadentismo* appeared in two stages: the first stage welcomed the decadence of France by way of *Scapigliatura* (A Dishevelled bohemian), forerunners of the avant-garde and Decadentism, emerging from the intellectual climate of *Risorgimento* (Italian Resurgence, the consolidation of Italian Peninsula). *Scapigliatura* witnessed most of its conformists dying due to alcoholism, drugs and suicide, while being a testimony to such works as *Fosca* by Igino Ugo, and *Senso* by Camillo Bioto. The second stage of 'Decadentismo' saw the works of Gabriele D' Annunzio, Giovanni Pascoli and Antonio Fogazzaro. In terms of decadent features, D'

Annunzio drew heavily from French Symbolists and British Aestheticism. D' Annunzio's *Ill Piacere*, finds echoes with Joris Karl Huysmans's *A`Rebours*, with character and "plot" parallels, running on the thematics of decadence, much like Des Esseintes. *Ill Piacere* takes into account the journey of Andrea Sperelli, an aesthete, cynical dandy who is only enamored by arts and debauchery, sensuality and veneration for beautiful women, in an aristocratic late nineteenth century Roman society. In a similar fashion, Wilde's Dorian Gray and Huysmans's Duc Jean Des Esseintes have similarities of disposition, artistic tastes, almost aligned with the challenges that extremities of decadence pose to them through murder, or abatement of suicide, graphic violence, disregard of institutions. Both preferred artificial world over the natural and both had contempt towards moralities. The fictional trinity of Des Esseintes, Andrea Sperelli, and Dorian Grey usually would surround themselves within a cocoon and creates for himself a self-consuming hedonism to ultimately glorify the morbid, licentious experience.

As with previous literary forms, decadence was not just a novelty and freshness of approach and style. It did not attempt to seek higher truths of life through words and images. In other words, language was seen only a vehicle to human creativity, only serve to materialize fiction in the Poet/writer's hands. The popular voice of his time, Arthur Symons says, it was as if "to fix the last fine shade, the quintessence of things; to fix it fleetingly; to be a disembodied voice, and yet the voice of a human soul; that is the ideal of decadence." The movement overemphasized the form, formal stylized elements such as poetic diction and semantics while critics also points to the act of deliberate breakdown from the conventional literary forms as an element of decadence. It used 'transposition of art techniques and synaesthesia' declared Smith, with the 'The transposition of art techniques is similar to synaesthesia . . .the former attempts to achieve through one art medium what is usually expressed in another, while the latter is the reaction through one sensory perception to a stimulus usually associated with another sense. Synaesthesia was not a literary innovation of this time (striking examples of it are to be found in Homer), but it was exploited more often

and more deliberately by writers of the fin-d-siecle than in any other period in French literature. It was following the famous " Sonnet des voyelles " of Rimbaud that synaesthesia as a literary device especially color-audition-attracted the attention of startled critics, many of whom saw in it a symptom of neurosis"(646).

The poetics of decadence manifested itself through a dissent against the conventions, in a milieu which has denigrated and descended into turpitude and vice. In a such a milieu the decadents emphasized, especially in voice of Baudelaire, Verlaine, Gautier, a poetic process which must involve itself in finding a unique voice and sensibility. This sensibility, as a *non compos mentis*, must be unhinged consciously, so that it is able to produce mysterious visions and flashes of change for the society. Poetry in this manner must be preserved from the profanity of being in the company of masses and therefore must retain its purity of purpose. It must be incumbent on its own and not look for some outward or imported purpose of pleasure and didacticism. The objective to make poetry impersonal yet aesthetic was repeatedly taken by Gautier, who in *L'Art* gave the poetic manifesto of his inspirations, which also became a poetic manual for English Parnassus School of Poets. He urged that only such art which is "purified of irrelevant intrusions of morality and socio-political ideas could resist time."

On the widespread writings of nineteenth century decadence in literature, Gautier opined that "civilizations are organic and go through periods of youth, maturity and old age or decay, finally dying from having exaggerated during the period of decline elements to be found in the period of maturity" (Smith 647). He also drew parallels of Roman and Byzantine period of decadence with that of the French as a nation and French society in the early nineteenth century. According to Gautier 'following the fall of the Second Empire, the parallel between modern France and the late Roman Empire, both overrun by what the French esteemed barbarians, became, apparently, irresistible, so many are the allusions'(648). Similar to Baudelaire, he emphasized the idea of 'supra-natural art' in favor of unnatural and anti-

natural. But, the movement met with a great degree of criticism, and the very characteristics of decadence were found to be incompetent, as James Smith notes:

The decadent writer, whose creative faculties have been impaired through hyper analysis and sterile erudition, lacks the ability to create a really new literary expression. In an attempt to achieve novelty he exaggerates certain elements in the established pattern, especially vocabulary and syntax, upsetting, in the process, the classical balance between form and content. Over-attention to form implies a cult of artifice, and, indeed, decadent taste for the artificial is reflected not only in form but in content, the decadent writer often rejecting nature as model in favor of the anti-natural and the unnatural. In the pursuit of novelty, strange and unusual subjects are treated, and exquisite and rare sensations are described, often through devices like synaesthesia and the transposition of art techniques. Beauty itself is transfigured by the decadents to include elements deriving from the ugly and the morbid. Such a literary expression, often obscure in its oversubtle refinement, reflects an aging civilization, itself dying amidst the unquiet splendors of refined corruption, just as Rome and Byzantium had expired. (651)

Despite the cohesive cohorts of *Le' De'cadence* by Baju and a number of material productions on the crusade, neither the movement nor the group of writers adhered to the principles of the movement for long. The writers either gravitated towards the avant-gardist forms of symbolism or abandoned its tenets for being attacked for the social deviations and perversity. In retrospect, critics have pointed to a sharp decline in artistic abilities when it reached the decadence period. It had nothing novel or ingenious to offer, it rather exaggerated and elaborated the existing patterns of poetic material and prose conventions. The glaring circumvention of its self-imposed constraints had allowed the precocious forms to emerge through subsequent art forms such as in Symbolism in fiction, theater, Music and Visual Arts.

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