RE-EVALUATION OF THE NOTION "DECADENCE" WITH SPECIAL

REFERENCE TO OSCAR WILDE, ANDRÉ GIDE AND MAX BROD

by

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ABSTRACT

The notion of "decadence" has been reduced to clichés
since its emergence in mid-19th century France. The purpose
of this study is first to show the emergence of the word
"decadence;" second to consider its migrations across
national boundaries, and finally to look at some of the
transformations of the discourse surrounding "decadence."
At the same time, the thesis examines processes towards the
institutionalization of terminology. These processes in
turn are linked to a conceptual inflation, for the term
"decadence" is associated with many variants, interpretations
and definitions. The thesis intends to demystify the multi-
plicity of applications of the concept "decadence" while re-
evaluating its various contents according to their socio-
historical presuppositions. The Saussurian structure of
signifier and signified is used to explain this cultural
phenomenon. However, this thesis deals not only with
several authors' interpretations of "decadence," but also
with certain critical attempts to define these interpreta-
tions.

By exploring The Picture of Dorian Gray by Oscar Wilde,
André Gide's Paludes, as well as Max Brod's "Indifferentismus"
in his novel Schloß Nornepygge, the thesis examines three

examples of particular literary and aesthetic variants of this genre of "decadence." This study analyses the structure of the process involved in the development of the notion "decadence" and its critical appraisal without pretending to furnish a re-definition.

RÉSUMÉ

Dès son apparition en France au milieu du 19e siècle,
la notion de "décadence" a été repoussée au stage de cliché.
Le but de cette étude est de montrer tout d'abord l'émer-
gence du mot "décadence", de porter une attention particu-
lière sur son cheminement par delà les frontières nationales
et, enfin, de stigmatiser quelques transformations du dis-
cours se rapportant à la "décadence". Parallèlement, la
thèse examine les processus menant à l'institutionalisation
de la terminologie. Les processus sont, dans leur concept,
reliés à une inflation, car le terme "décadence" est associé
à plusieurs variantes, interprétations et définitions.
L'intention de cette thèse est de démystifier la multiplicité
d'emploi du concept "décadence" tout en réévaluant ses diffé-
rents contenus selon leur présuppositions socio-historiques.
La structure saussurienne du signifiant et du signifié est
utilisée pour expliquer cé phénomène culturel. Cependant,
cette thèse ne traite pas seulement des multiples interpré-
tations des auteurs du terme "décadence", mais également de
certaines tentatives critiques pour définir ces interprétations.

En analysant l'ouvrage d'Oscar Wilde, The Picture of
Dorian Gray, Paludes d'André Gide, ainsi que l'"Indifferentismus"
de Max Brod dans son roman Schloß Nornepygge, cette thèse

cherche à montrer des exemples de variantes littéraires et
esthétiques particulières de ce genre de "décadence".
Cette étude analyse la structure du processus qui est impli-
qué dans le développement de la notion de "décadence" ainsi
que l'évaluation critique de cette notion sans prétendre de
la redéfinir.

In memory of my mother

Ingeborg Habermann

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INTRODUCTION

Terminological inflation is an increasing problem in modern criticism. Words or terms are continuously invented to suit individual ideas; they are transformed by application to other material, and often are entered as neologisms into dictionaries, and a process of the institutionalization of terminology has taken place. This is a process which needs to be demystified with special attention to the lack of conceptual precision in particular discourses.·

The discourse surrounding "decadence" is a typical example of such a process of institutionalization. This concept is associated with an immense number of variants and clichés; thus the original meaning of "decadence" is hidden by labels. However, a growing interest in this cultural phenomenon and its connotations has produced, especially in recent years, an astonishing number of re-editions and new publications. But instead of clarifying the concept, the attempts in most cases continue to mystify the meaning or rather the meanings of "decadence."

This thesis tries to analyse the structure of the process involved in the development of the notion "decadence" and its critical appraisal without pretending to furnish a re-definition. The first chapter examines the etymological

emergence of the term "decadence" and its 19th century interpretations. Chapter two looks at various transformations and traces migrations of "decadence" across France, England and the German speaking nations. Specific examples from Oscar Wilde, André Gide and Max Brod elucidate some artistic applications of the term (chapter three to five). Finally, I shall set the practice of the creative artist and his interpretations of "decadence" against the practice of the critic, who uses the institutionalized terminology either without questioning it, or tries for better or for worse to introduce a new definition (chapter six). What must be examined, above all, are the individual socio-historical contexts which determine the meaning of each interpretation of the notion "decadence." The differences in point of view must always be recognized: the analyses of "decadence" by 19th century contemporaries belong to a realm different from the point of view of most critical perspectives and of this thesis.

If one looks at the emergence of "décadence" as a cultural movement in "fin de siècle" France, two aspects are characteristic: First, it is interesting to note that the popularization of the word "décadence" and its immediate variants can be attributed to a marginal group of journalists and newly emerging poets, as in the case of Anatole Baju, who launched a terminology in order to synthesize something that was happening around them in society. Slightly less marginal

were the groups of journalists and intellectuals who intro-
duced the notion of "décadence" in England and the German
speaking nations. Yet the basic pattern remained the same.
The fundamental set of traits and labels of the "fin de
siècle" meaning of "décadence" was established by less im-
portant writers.

Secondly, the more important implications of "decadence"
are crystallised by the influential interpretations and appli-
cations of creative artists. The traits set out by Anatole
Baju in his articles, for example, become insignificant when
put beside the works of André Gide, where "décadence" takes
on substantial meaning. Similarly, "decadence" is used in
a more symbolical sense by Oscar Wilde than by his journalis-
tic contemporaries, and the same applies to Max Brod. It is
through the exceptional artist that the symbolic essence of
the notion "decadence" emerges.

With regard to these criteria, the critic can trace in-
herent transformations of the notion and explain migrations
within the particular socio-historical context. However,
in a contemporary analysis of the "fin de siècle" period,
the modern critic should avoid repeating both invented
variants of the term "decadence," and controversial 19th
century applications of it. One has to be prudent in one's
use of "decadence," i.e. one must be aware of the metalanguage
that is involved in the terminology, as well as in one's own
socio-historical standpoint. Hence, I do not attempt merely

to demystify the notion of "decadence" but also to clarify
the critical process it has brought about. I should like
to draw attention to the structures behind the emergence of
this cultural phenomenon and then examine its historical
and contemporary interpretations respectively.

I do not intend to create the impression that "decadence"
was the major movement in Europe of the "fin de siècle." Un-
doubtedly, the importance of "décadence" in France surpassed
its European followers. Also the aesthetic principles that
dominated the notion in France varied from those in England,
Germany or Austria. However, outside the French circles it
became more apparent that this cultural movement represented
a marginal group of artists and intellectuals who wanted to
be distinguished form either naturalists, realists, im-
pressionists, symbolists or from new-romanticists, and ex-
pressionists.

Nevertheless, in France, too, artists out-grew and
questioned the contents of the notion even while it was
most popular. André Gide is an example of this trend in
his work Paludes. Although this narrative still belongs to,
the genre of "decadent" texts, it is more an ironic study
of them than a serious contribution to the ideology. Des-
pite the fact that Gide's earlier work constituted an
aesthetic quest and adhered to the concept of l'art pour
l'art, I chose the short novel Paludes in order to illustrate
the impact of "decadent" influences and their possible

consequences on young artists like him. For the majority

of the authors of "decadent" literature this movement was

but a youthful phase--with exceptions like Oscar Wilde or

later symbolists--which they would abandon in time. Gide,

however, distanced himself from the movement while it was

still at its height, which makes him an interesting case--

study.

Different in that respect is my choice of the English

literary representative and his narrative, both of which

stand for the epitome of "decadence" in England: Oscar

Wilde and The Picture of Dorian Gray. The author as well

as his work incarnate "decadent" aestheticism and the doc-

trine of art for art's sake. The fascination with Oscar

Wilde, of course, is due to the circumstances of his life,

since he not only wrote about his form of "decadence" but

lived and embodied it as well.

With Max Brod and his novel Schloß Nornepygge I wish

to introduce a very particular interpretation of the notion

of "decadence," which should, however, not be mistaken for

a typical form of "decadence" in Germany. It is rather an

example of a migration of the notion to the boundaries of

German language territories, Prague belonging to the Austrian

Empire at the time. But, since Max Brod contributed his in-

dividual terminology to the already large variety of forms

of "decadence," he is of specific interest. Brod developed

the term "Indifferentismus," the meaning of which he

exemplified in two collections of novellas, <u>Tod den Toten</u> and <u>Experimente</u> in addition to the novel mentioned above. Chapter five provides examples of all three works so that the philosophical span of "indifferentism" might become clear. I also hope to revive the interest in this author who has unfortunately been very neglected if not ignored by editors and critics, and who seems to be known for the most part as the editor of Kafka's works. That he published eighty-two books himself is a little known fact.

Consequently, considering that the term "decadence" adapted itself to each distinct "Zeitgeist," I believe that the various concepts serve as paradigms of communicability as models by which specific individuals identified themselves and their time. In order to clarify this development I apply the Saussurian concepts of signifier and signified, the signifier representing the term "decadence" and the signified the numerous variants, concepts, labels and clichés of "decadence" as well as its critical interpretations within their methodological framework. Using these Saussurian tools facilitates a differentiation of the confusing terminological mixture and it clarifies the cultural phenomenon with its multiplicity of often incompatible variations without re-ducing the essential meaning of the notion "decadence." Yet, this structure should not be confused with a new definition of "decadence." In that respect the oppositional scheme of the final chapter of this work depicts symptomatic

interrelationships between artistic concepts and critical

transformations or attempts at re-definition. It does not

represent a new version. I wish to re-evaluate the notion

of "decadence" as an entity instead of concentrating on

only one of its aspects.

To conclude, I should like to express my hope that the

re-evaluation of the notion of "decadence" in the present

thesis, although by no means exhaustive, can be useful to

the reader interested in this field of research.

CHAPTER I

An astonishing interest in the art and literature of
the "fin de siècle" or "Jahrhundertwende" has dominated the
book- as well as the antiques market in recent years. An-
tique shops filled their windows with Jugendstil or Art Nou-
veau vases, Wilhelmenian Pickel-hats, medals or even washing
basins. Jugendstil calendars adorn a good citizen's living-
room wall and the acquisition of stained-glass Art Nouveau
lamps has become almost a "must." At the same time the
number of publications on the phenomena encompassing the
"fin de siècle" period in history has increased. Not only
are there many new editions of forgotten authors but also a
vast amount of critical material, which, on the one hand,
attempts to analyze this very phenomenon or, on the other,
deals directly with the neglected literature. "Garten-
laubenliteratur" is the "hit" in Germany, for example.
English and French stories and poems of the 1890s are
published, anthologies of drama, prose, lyric poetry and
art, are compiled in a variety of European countries.
Critics have become interested again in Oscar Wilde, Hugo
von Hofmannsthal, Joris-Karl Huysmans or d'Annunzio. Nos-
talgia is "à la mode" and so are terms such as "l'art pour
l'art," "aestheticism," "fin de siècle," "Art Nouveau," "dé-
cadence," "symbolism," "impressionism" or "new romanticism."

Richard Gilman tells of his experiences with the word "decadence" in his 1979 publication[1]:

> 'We're very decadent, you know,' a bored-looking young man tells a reporter at a discothèque. 'But if we weren't decadent, we'd be something else.' 'Decadence rules!' a rock singer announces. 'It's so lovely, so unlimited, so natural.' A review of a book on the Rolling Stones speaks of the 'lyrical decadence' of one of their tours. A talk-show host thinks Playboy and Hugh Hefner decadent but adds that theirs is a 'benevolent' kind. On a more complex level a critic says of a novelist that his 'use of decadence' is skillful and absorbing.

In search for an explanation of this sudden nostalgia, Marianne Kesting believes:

> . . . diese Nostalgie scheint einer Skepsis gegenueber der technischindustriellen Gesellschaft entsprungen, deren Fortschrittlichkeit sichtbar mit unwiderbringlichen Lebens- und Umweltverlusten gekoppelt ist und selbst das sonst weidlich kritisierte Gestern noch liebenswuerdiger und begehrenswerter erscheinen laesst als das atomare Morgen.[2]

Scepticism towards modern society is certainly a leading factor in today's revival of the "fin de siècle." The dangers

immanent in this concentration on the "liebenswuerdige
Gestern" become particularly evident in the massive scholar-
ly fascination that has grown up around "decadence." Roger
Bauer calls it "une vogue aussi étonnante qu'inquiétante."
And he continues with the following warning:

> Le vif intérêt encore porté de nos jours au XIXe
> siècle finissant (d'innombrables colloques et pu-
> blications en font foi) prouve incontestablement
> que cette attirance, signe d'une secrète sympathie
> ou complicité, n'a point encore cessé de jouer,
> et la naïve simplicité avec laquelle on croit
> pouvoir devoir prendre à la lettre les formules
> en question cache et recouvre d'étranges sollici-
> tations.[3]

In other words, what becomes apparent, in many of the critical
endeavours is the lack of conceptual clarity in view of the
vast terminological accumulation available. The dilemma of
the critic is evident in the over-usage of terminology,
such as the word "decadence," without a clear definition and
contextual framework. Thus what have become "à la mode"
are not only porcelaine washing basins with pink rose
patterns, but also a process of word migration. The modern
reader is confronted with a terminological inflation, i.e.
word invention and transformation for individual purposes.
By this I mean a process of conceptual application of the
term "decadence," for example, on subjects of different

natures, which is justified by its prior institutionaliza-
tion. As a result the word "decadence" is suitable for
pot-bellies as well as for Rimbaud across national bounda-
ries. At the same time the narrational grammar of each in-
dividual applicant demands a shift of the previously insti-
tutionalized definition and its context, for each re-occur-
rence of the term in question implies a transformation of
the etymologically original intention.

In that context I would like to concentrate here on
the word "decadence," which seems to be a prime example of
this process. By studying the phenomenon of "decadence" I
shall attempt to describe "une affection de l'imaginaire
collectif" and I shall try at the same time not to become
victim of "cette autre maladie de l'esprit contemporain:
l'excès de confiance en l'histoire." I hope to clarify some
of the rules of the communicatability of a particular term
and the inherent ideological processes. The main concern
here will be the emergence and the diffusion of a notion,
not a re-definition. The word "decadence" is often asso-
ciated with a couple of typical clichés: first, the de-
cline of the Roman Empire, and second, the flourishing yet
perverted Second Empire in France. "Decadence" means fat
and drunken Romans, absorbed in orgies with voluptuous long-
haired women; the archetypal syndrome of the Roman decline.
The Empire finally succumbed to its decadence and collapsed
in the year 410. The second image is the 19th century

French dandy-aesthete who is twirling his gold-headed cane as he leers over his absinthe at a still voluptuous woman strolling down the boulevard. Generally, these creatures also succumb to their decadence and die ugly and alienated deaths such as Joris-Karl Huysmans, for example, who according to Edith Hartnett "died atrociously, of a disease that caused the lower half of his face to putrefy and fall away in chunks. His eyes became so horribly infected that his lids had to be sewn shut."[5] George Ross Ridge dwells on the weather conditions that accompanied Huysmans' funeral: "A light rain fell as he was lowered to his eternal rest."[6] According to the same critic Huysmans died on May 12, 1907, of cancer of the mouth and jaw, whereas Hans Jürgen Greif believes that Huysmans lived until 1908 and suffered of cancer of the larynx.[7] This variety of associations with the term "decadence" inevitably leads to confusion and to questioning of its meanings. Therefore I shall pretend here for the moment not to know anything about the word "decadence" and consult a number of dictionaries in the hope that ignorance might turn into knowledge.

Being on the North American continent I shall consult The American Heritage Dictionary of 1970: decadence is, "a process, condition, or period of deterioration; decay (Vulgar Latin: decadere, to decay), decadent adj.- decadently adv."[8] Thus "decadence" comes from Latin, but what exactly is deteriorating is left to the reader's

imagination. A more expanded edition of the same dictiona-
ry elaborates on the definition as well as on the etymology;
decadence could also be called decadency and it is a dete-
rioration "as in morals or art; . . . (Old French, from
Medieval Latin décadentia, from Vulgar Latin décadere . . .)."
The rotten morals and art, however, are specified under the
adjective "decadent   1. A person in a condition or process
of mental or moral decay. 2. A member of a group of French
and English writers of the 19th century, who often sought
inspiration in the morbid, neurotic, or macabre and tended
toward overrefinement of style." As a result one learns that
there existed "decadent" writers, but who they were remains
unclear.

Webster's Third New International Dictionary of the
English Language, 1961, further confuses by adding to "deca-
dence," "decadency" and "decadent," the term "decadentism."
All that is given here, however, is that the word's origin
is French: décadentisme. Under "decadent" Webster's 1966
edition says for example, "one characterized by or exhibit-
ing the qualities of those who are degenerating to a lower
type or of an age that is on the decline. 2: one of a
group of late 19th century French and English writers whose
subjects often tended toward the artificial and abnormal
and whose style was marked especially by refinement and
subtlety." So far degeneration and artificiality are main
criteria of the definition of "decadence."

Larousse du XXe siècle, 1929, gives a rather thorough
description of the word and its variants, however no etymo-
logy. "Décadence: . . . État de ce qui tombe, tend à sa
ruine; commencement de dégradation, de destruction;" this
introductory definition is followed by examples, synonyms,
antonyms, and an encyclopedic entry in the socio-historical
context. A special paragraph is dedicated to "décadence et
chute de l'Empire romain, par Gibbon." Only under "déca-
dent," however, does Larousse specify "décadence des moeurs,
des lettres, des arts." The definition says: "c'est dit,
à la fin du XIXe siècle, d'artistes ou littérateurs qui se
plaisaient dans les extrêmes raffinements du symbolisme,
par réaction contre la raideur des Parnassiens." Without
further specifying what is meant here by "Parnassiens,"
the encyclopedic entry continues: "Le terme de décadent
fut, dit-on, suggéré par l'amusant volume de parodies: les
Déliquescences d'Adoré Floupelte (1885), oeuvre de G.
Vicaire et H. Beauclair. Lancé par la critique contre les
symbolistes, il fut adopté par eux et approuvé par
Verlaine . . . Anatole Baju fonda la revue le Décadent qui
parut de 1886 à 1889 (31 numéros), à laquelle collaborèrent
Verlaine, Maurice du Plessys, Ernest Raynaud, Jean Lorrain,
Laurent Tailhade. Le groupe des Décadents se réclamait de
Baudelaire, Barbey d'Aurevilly, Villiers de l'Isle-Adam,
Stéphane Mallarmé, Tristan Corbière. Mais le 'décadisme'

comme doctrine ne subsista guère, et se fondit dans le mouvement plus vaste du symbolisme." Thus quite a number of French authors during the 1880s were "decadent," had a doctrine, a journal and were one group that did not last long. It is interesting to note that Larousse does not mention J.K. Huysmans or Georges Rodenbach. On the other hand the dictionary augments the vocabulary by the words "décadentisme," "décadisme," "décadiste" and "décadentiste," the first one being the quality of being decadent, the second a synonym of the first, and the last two describing the members of the decadent "school."

The Grand Larousse de la langue française, 1972, shows an entirely different picture. The word "décadence" receives an etymological explanation and three definitions with examples in the socio-historical context, which in-cludes inevitably "les derniers siècles de l'Empire romain." However, even the adjective "décadent" is described in a linguistic frame-work: "de décadence; 1516, G. Michel de Tours, dans saison décadente, vieillesse (pour un homme); 1546, Rabelais, au sens de "affaibli, décrépit"; sens 1, 25 août 1874, Journ. officiel; sens 2, 1890, Dict. général. 1.) . . . 2.) se dit d'une forme d'art qui est le signe d'un déclin de la civilisation: Poésie décadente." Sub-category: "membre d'une école littéraire et philosophique de la fin du XIXe s." There is no mention of names,

contextual particularities or other countries.

Let me shift to dictionaries in the German language. In Deutsches Woerterbuch by Jacob und Wilhelm Grimm, 1860 (first edition; no earlier German dictionary available), "Dekadenz" is not listed. The Duden of 1976 lists "dekadent" and "Dekadenz", the first being explained as "franz. décadent: infolge kultureller Ueberfeinerung entartet; kulturell im Verfall begriffen" with examples from Ceram and Remarque; the second entry says: "(franz. décadence mlat. decadentia, zu lat. de=von, weg und cadere=fallen, sinken) Kultureller Niedergang mit typischen Entartungs-erscheihungen in den Lebensgewohnheiten und Lebens-anspruechen; Verfall, Entartung." The dictionary does not go beyond cultural deterioration and degeneration. The literary form of "décadence" is not even touched upon. Der grosse Herder, 1953, presents a more encompassing definition: "Dekadenz, die (vom franz. décadence=Verfall, Niedergang), Zustand erschoepfter Kultur, bz. fuer die Lit. des ausgehenden 19. Jh. (Fin de siècle), durch die Missachtung herkoemmlicher Sitten und Gebraeuche, von Nietzsche als europ. Kulturerscheinung erkannt. Ein radikales L'art pour l'art, das sich in der gesamtem Kunst in nervoeser, kuenstl. ueberreizter, krankhaft mueder, das Sinnliche ueberbetonter Gestaltung aeussert (Natu-ralismus, Impressionismus). Schriftsteller: Oscar Wilde,

P. Verlaine, H. Bank, A. Schnitzler. Malerei: H. Toulouse-
Lautrec, Fr. Rops." Here the etymology is limited to
French derivation, the cultural condition is not rotten but
just tired, and the reader must know what "fin de siècle,"
"l'art pour l'art," "Naturalismus" and "Impressionismus"
mean. However, the term is seen in a wider context, and
for the first time up to now, authors from England, France,
Germany and Austria are mentioned. Should "decadence" be
found outside France and the Roman Empire after all?

The last dictionary to be consulted here is, of course,
the Oxford English Dictionary. The etymology edition of
1966 defines decadence as a "state of decay. XVI. - F
décadence - med. L. decadentia, f. decadere - decay. So
decadent XIX.F décadent (used spec. 1884 by Maurice Barrès
to designate a French movement)." Another name, another
date to identify the same term. (For the Dutch Ernst
Klein in his Comprehensive Etymological Dictionary of the
English Language, 1966, it is rather Verlaine's verse "Je
suis l'empire à la fin de la décadence" which marks the
point). In 1933, the Oxford English Dictionary adds after
a thorough etymological entry of "decadence": "the process
of falling away or declining (from a prior state of ex-
cellence, vitality, prosperity, etc.); decay; impaired or
deteriorated condition." The definitions are illustrated
by a variety of examples; under entry b) we find the

reference that the term is specifically "applied to a particular period of decline in art, lit. etc." The "etc." is further elaborated under "Decadent" point 2): "Said of a French school which affects to belong to an age of decadence in literature and art." No time precision, no authors and artists mentioned, no European context, and the examples of the whole entry all date between 1500 and 1890. However, the vocabulary is again enriched by two words: "Decadency" can also be used as "decaydency," and "decadescent" indicates a tendency to or beginning of decay. The following variety of words emerges: In French: décadence, décadent, décadentisme, décadisme, décadiste, décadentiste. In English: decadence, decadency, decaydency, decadent, decadently, decadentism, decadescent, and--decadentistic (the latter word, however, does not seem to exist in any dictionary so far consulted; it is used by the Italian philosopher Norberto Bobbio).[9] Surprisingly enough, the German list is very short; it is limited to the noun "Dekadenz" and its derivative "dekadent."

Two further genres of reference material shall quickly be glanced at: the encyclopaedia and the dictionary of literary terms. Generally speaking, an encyclopaedia gives a much more extended account of the term listed than ordinary dictionaries, provided that the term is listed. The Encyclopaedia Britannica of 1910, for example;

does not mention "decadence," however, it contains a long
entry for "dandy," under which the whole British history
of the word is summarized with specific reference to the
"dandyism" of Beau Brummel. No connection to "decadence"
is made and, interestingly, the Encyclopaedia says that
"after 1825 'dandy' lost its invidious meaning, and came
to be applied generally to those who were neat in dress
rather than to those guilty of effeminacy." No reference
to Oscar Wilde is made. The Encyclopaedia Britannica of
1973 lists neither "decadence" nor "dandy," but the New
Encyclopaedia Britannica of 1974 has an entry for "Deca-
dents" (plural of noun "decadent"): "poets of the end of
the 19th cent., incl. the French Symbolist poets in parti-
cular and their contemporaries in Engl., the later genera-
tion of the Aesthetic movement; both groups aspired to set
literature and art free from the claims of life, and in
both, the freedom of some members' morals helped to enlarge
the connotation of the term . . . . /which/ is almost equi-
valent to fin de siècle." As to France, Verlaine is men-
tioned in connection with Gabriel Vicaire and Henri
Beauclair, Baju's journal, Beaudelaire's influence, and the
contributions of Rimbaud, Mallarmé, Corbière, as well as
Huysmans. In the last paragraph, it is mentioned that
England also had quite an extended movement. In addition
to Oscar Wilde, the encyclopaedia refers to Arthur Symons,

Ernest Dowson, Lionel Johnson and the Yellow Book.
"Decadence" in Germany or Italy is not included. The
Encyclopedia Americana of 1979 has an entry for the same
plural noun and attempts to render a socio-historical in-
terpretation. It says, "the name /decadents/ . . . was
adopted defiantly (my underlining) by a group of French
writers in the 1880's to assert their scorn for the mate-
rialism of the new industrial society. The term 'symbolism'
is also applied to this group. By the mid-19th cent.,
conflicting beliefs had produced a loss of unity of purpose
and direction in European society; critical rationality had
taken away faith; and the new ironic view of man and of
civilization had often caused a neurotic paralysis of will
. . . Writers, especially the French, became fascinated by
many of the new trends that seemed most perverse." This
encyclopaedia talks of "European society" when at the same
time, criticism of materialism seems to have occurred only
in France. Still, the concept of the movement is elaborated
and all names stated so far are listed. Yet English "deca-
dence" is limited to Oscar Wilde.

In Germany Der Neue Brockhaus, 1968, as well as
Brockhaus Enzyklopaedie, also 1968, give thorough defini-
tions of "Dekadenz," the latter being an extended version
of the first: Etymology, cultural history, philosophical
trends, literary movements, socio-political teachings,

religious meaning, or genetic tendencies. Representatives
of decadent literature in France, England, Denmark, Russia
and Germany are listed; the phenomenon is placed in a wider
European context for the first time in this research.
Meyers Enzyklopaedisches Lexikon, 1972, concentrates on
"Dekadenzdichtung" which is introduced with its cultural,
philosophical and historical tendencies. The definition
of "Dekadenzdichtung" clarifies the variety of interpreta-
tions and trends involved with the phenomenon and even ex-
tends the countries listed by Belgium and Italy. A rela-
tively rounded picture of the meanings of the word "deca-
dence" begins to emerge.

A thorough account of "decadence" appears in the Great
Soviet Encyclopedia, 1970. However, the entry only refers
to "decadence" as a cultural phenomenon without stressing
the fact that there was an individual tradition of the
notion as well as a specific genre of art. Furthermore,
the entry also neglects etymology, yet it emphatically
turns against the process of labelling:

> Decadence, the general name for crisis phenomena
> of bourgeois culture in the late 19th and early
> 20th century, marked by individualism and by atti-
> tudes of hopelessness and aversion to life. . . .
> As a characteristic trend of the times, decadence
> cannot be categorized under any one current or
> group of several currents in art. The attitudes
> of decadence affected the works of a sizable

> segment of artists in the late 19th and early
> 20th century, including many major masters of
> the arts whose work as a whole cannot be
> reduced to decadence.

This paragraph is followed by so far the largest list of authors influenced by the motives of decadence, a choice which is not limited to the 1890s.

The last genre of reference book to be dealt with here should be the one most close to the discipline of literary studies, namely the dictionary of literary terms. In Karl Beckson and Arthur Ganz's Literary Terms, 1960, the classical and the traditional concepts of "decadence" are listed. The authors seem to oppose decadent aesthetics and classical aesthetics, but it should be clear that although those two variants seem incompatible, their differences do not exclude one another:

> In its most general sense, the term decadence
> refers to any period in art or literature which
> is in decline as contrasted with a former age of
> excellence, as, for example, the "silver age" of
> Latin literature (Tacitus, Martial, Lucan, etc.)
> as opposed to the preceding "golden age" (Virgil,
> Horace, Ovid, etc.). More specifically, Deca-
> dence designates a literary movement originating
> in nineteenth-century France which emphasized the

autonomy of art, the hostility of the artist to

bourgeois society, the superiority of artifice

to nature, and the quest for new sensations.

Reference is made to Baudelaire and Gautier as being in-

fluential on "the young decadents," who are not identified.

One paragraph is dedicated to A Rebours and another to the

movement in England with George Moore, Arthur Symons, Oscar

Wilde, Ernest Dowson, and Aubrey Beardsley. No etymology

is given, no other variants of the term. A.F. Scott's

Current Literary Terms, 1965, tries to furnish a fool-

proof concise definition:

> decadence: Latin decadere, to fall, to decay.
> A decline in values, or the decline of the qua-
> lity of an art or literature after a period of
> greatness. This is shown in the state of English
> drama after Shakespeare, and in the literary
> movement of the nineties in France.

Trapped by its conciseness, Scott's definition combines the

significance of "decadence" in the 16th century with the

implications of the term in the 19th century and thereby

re-emphasises the confusion of the meaning of "decadence."

Shakespeare's artistic qualities were superior in the

classical sense, to those of his successors, and the cul-

tural presuppositions of his time resulted in a lowering

of artistic standards. However, the 19th century

interpretations of "decadence," rather than being related to the aftermaths of an aesthetic peak, represented an individual aesthetic movement with different cultural presuppositions. The same sort of superficiality is present in Harry Shaw's Dictionary of Literary Terms, 1972, which says:

> In a general sense, decadence refers to any period in literary or art history considered inferior to a preceding period. The period following Shakespeare, for example, was notable for such decadent qualities as sensationalism, loss of poetic power, and a lowered standard of morality.

A Dictionary of Literary Terms by J.A. Cuddon, 1977, has a slightly more extended entry; however, it remains within the same pattern. The author begins with the period of decline in art or literature which has been applied to the Alexandrine period and to the period after the death of Augustus and which in modern times is used for the late nineteenth-century symbolist movement in France. Typicalities of that movement such as "the need for sensationalism and melodrama, egocentricity, the bizarre, the artificial . . ." are mentioned without reference to authors; a few examples of French poetry are given. As far as England is concerned, we read that the "cult did not much catch on"--except for Oscar Wilde. In her book Motive der Weltliteratur. Ein

<u>Lexikon dichtungsgeschichtlicher Laengsschnitte</u>, 1976,
Elisabeth Frenzel seems to be against pseudo-precise,
stereotyped terminology; she suggests replacing "der
Dekadente" with "der Missvergnuegte," yet in the end she
applies the word "Dekadenz" without any further definitions.
She explains her choice of term with the following sentence:

> Mit einem etwas altvaeterischen Ausdruck soll
> moeglichst weitmaschig ein Typ umgrenzt sein, der
> in den neuzeitlichen Jhtn. mit leichten Varianten
> und wechselnden Vorzeichen und Bezeichnungen
> auftritt und streckenweise zu einer zeittypischen
> modischen Erscheinung wurde.

Later she says that the fin de siècle hero is "vor allem
durch Dekadenz gekennzeichnet," without any elaboration as
to what she thinks the meaning of the word should be.   Her
alternative, "der Missvergnuegte," becomes redundant.

A more thorough account of "Dekadenzdichtung" is given
in Gerb von Wilpert's <u>Sachwoerterbuch der Literatur</u>, 1969.
It resembles an encyclopedic entry and is the only one of
that genre chosen here that gives constructive information.
Wilpert covers the most important writers during the time
span in question placing them in their cultural and philo-
sophical context.   He elaborates with references to authors
from the romantic and post-romantic periods up to Faulkner
and mentions Gibbon's historical interpretation.

Hence four genres of reference books have been covered: language-, etymological- and literary dictionaries as well as encyclopedias. I have read the entry about "decadence" in 38 different volumes. The result is not enlightening. The variety of terms which derive from the original word is exasperating, and so are the subsequent variables in meaning and context. The question that arises is how can one account for such a maze of definitions, and whether there is such a thing as one meaning, one definition, one "decadence." What has to be remembered here, above all, is the fact that by attempting to analyze the phenomenon of word formation and the different usages of concepts, we question ourselves; it is we who are concerned here in the sense that we establish, conserve and live with our practices. Therefore, the process I am trying to clarify in this thesis is our own practice.

As far as the etymology of the word "decadence" is concerned, one can draw the general conclusion from the information obtained that "décadence" is a relatively recent word, formed in French and derived from the Latin verb "de-cadere." According to Roger Bauer it seems to be a rather arbitrary latinism, "puisque decadentia n'existe pas dans la langue classique et n'est attesté que tardivement (sous cette forme): au commencement du XVe siècle, à en croire Du Cange."[10] Nevertheless, some dictionaries derive

the noun from "decadentia" as if it were the Medieval Latin source. It is not clear whether the English and the German words for "décadence" were derived from the French form or, as in France, from the Latin source. Most German dictionaries refer to the French word, whereas in English references, early occurrences of the word "decadence" are mentioned without French connections. It seems certain that the word appeared and was used after the 15th century in the French and English languages. I must point out, however, that of the two terminological applications, namely the aesthetic meaning of decadence and the cultural or historico-philosophical one, the latter was predominant in early usage. This might account for the paradox which the Byzantinian Empire, for example, represents for historians, since in that context "decadence" meant high aesthetic quality in arts and letters but moral and political decline. The two forms also apply for the adjective "decadent" which has a less complicated history according to the dictionary information obtained. The adjective "decadent" was invented during the 19th century to designate a French intellectual and artistic movement. It was derived from the word "décadence". However, the word was used as early as the 18th century--in the sense of decay or decline from a previous condition of excellence in the English as well as the French language. In Germany, the application of the French term "décadence" has been common since the romantic period.

The first introduction of the German form "Dekadenz," or, for that matter "dekadent," seems to be unclear. The only word with a more or less precise etymology is "décadence." As for "décadisme," "décadent," "décadentisme," "décadiste" or "décadentiste" and English "decadency," "decaydency," "decadent," "decadently," "decadescent," "decadentism," "decadentistic," the etymology is left to our imagination.

Implied in the etymological background are, of course, the semantics of the word, the variations of which have become apparent through the present dictionary search. This leads back to the questions of whether there is the possibility of only one meaning to the word and how to account for the terminology inflation with which the reader is confronted. I should like to begin the discussion with a quote from Bakhtine. He says: "Le mot n'est pas une chose, mais le milieu toujours dynamique, toujours changeant, dans lequel s'effectue l'échange dialogique."[11] Disregarding Bakhtine's intentions and his particular critical context, this sentence shows two important factors of social discourse: that of linguistic dynamism and that of presuppositions to such dynamism, which is to be seen in sociocultural communicability. The inquiry into the term "decadence" through a variety of dictionaries has revealed a dynamism that includes the emergence of a word, its migrations and transformations throughout different cultures,

and various intellectual or non-intellectual currents or
fashions. It has been noticed that the word "decadence"
is indeed ". . . le milieu toujours dynamique . . ." of
an exchange which has maintained its significance for
centuries. Inevitably, the word has adapted itself to
each distinct "Zeitgeist" since its Latin or rather French
emergence. Therefore, the term "decadence" must involve
concepts which are recognizable, for the dynamic exchange
leads towards their acceptability. This process is one
of infiltration of fragmentary axioms such as the clichés
mentioned before. The conditions of intelligibility
provided by those discourses, however, "reinforce the
acceptance of dominant ideologemes while furthering
their dissemination throughout the social matrix."[12] As
a consequence of the acceptability of the individual con-
cepts, the discourse around "decadence" has led to its
institutionalization. Therefore, the various concepts of
"decadence" serve as paradigms of communicability, as
models by which specific communities justify their ideals
or their prejudices. Such a development can best be exem-
plified with an expanded Saussurian structure. The term
"décadence" or "décadent" represents the signifier (le
signifiant); the signified (le signifié) then relates to the
variety of often incompatible concepts of "décadence." In
other words, the signifier has a multiplicity of signifieds,
a multiplicity of paradigms of communicability.

Notes

[1] Richard Gilman, Decadence. The Strange Life of an Epithet (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1979), p. 24.

[2] Marianne Kesting, bookreview of Hans Hinterhäuser's Fin de siècle. Gestalten und Mythen, 1975 in Romanische Forschungen, ed. Fritz Schalk, vol. 89 (Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann, 1977), p. 513.

[3] Roger Bauer, "'Fin de siècle' et 'décadence' comme catégories littéraires," in Neohelicon III, 3-4, ed. Miklos Szapolcsi and György M. Vajda (Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó, 1975), pp. 69-70.

[4] René Étiemble, Le Mythe de Rimbaud (Paris: Gallimard, 1952), p. 55.

[5] Edith Hartnett, "J.K. Huysmans: A Study in Decadence," in The American Scholar, vol. 46, ed. Joseph Epstein (Washington: United Chapters of Phi Beta Kappa, 1977), p. 376.

[6] George Ross Ridge, Joris-Karl Huysmans (New York: Twayne Publishers, Inc., 1968), p. 38.

[7] Hans Jürgen Greif, Huysmans' "A Rebours" und die Dekadenz (Bonn: Bouvier Verlag, 1971), p. 11.

[8] See bibliography of dictionaries for details.

[9] Norberto Bobbio, The Philosophy of Decadentism. A Study in Existentialism. (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1948), p. 22.

[10] Roger Bauer, "'Décadence': Histoire d'un Mot et d'une Idée," in Cahiers Roumains d'Etudes Littéraires, vol. 1, ed. Romul Munteanu (Bucarest: Editions Univers, 1978), p. 55.

[11] Mikhaïl Bakhtine, La Poétique de Dostoievski (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1970), p. 263.

[12] Marc Angenot, "The Discourse of Prehistoric Anthropology: Emergence, Narrative Paradigms, Ideology" (Montréal: McGill, 1979), p. 48.

CHAPTER II

The concept of "décadence" represented one paradigm,
one model of communicability during the 1880s in the
sense that groups of artists felt the need for the insti-
tutionalization of their ideology, an ideology which was
directed against bourgeois civilization and which restlessly
searched for new modes of expression. Artificiality became
the dominant note for these artists; it appeared in their
metaphors, similes, and vocabulary, in their paintings as
well as in their life-styles. They represented a "mixture
of decayed realism and exacerbated romanticism."[1] They
turned against nineteenth century scientific rationalism,
materialism and moralism, as well as against the limitations
of naturalism.

France seemed to have been the initiator of the over-
all movement. Although the same tendencies had been
present in other European countries, it was the French
artist who triggered the notion of "decadence" in England
or Germany, for example. Political events were perhaps
the cause of this sudden anti-movement in France: "the
crushing defeat suffered by France in the Franco-Prussian
War (1870-71), the horrors of the Commune (1871), and the
overthrow of the old order by the Third Republic which
followed."[2]

However, prior to the inauguration of an official "decadent" school, it is noteworthy that the concept passed through stages of development in France. At around 1850, as Carter pointed out, "decadence ceased to be a literary pose and became a serious preoccupation."[3] As indicated above, a fusion of the artificial and the modern took place which distinguished the notion from that of romanticism. "Decadence" became an identifiable signified of a specific signifier. The socio-historical context of this particular point in time shaped a meaning of the notion and at the same time ensured its durability, a process Richard Gilman points out in the following way:

> Words take on life from a particular environment and time, but certain of them live on beyond their proper course and duration . . . Certain words of a moral or behavioural kind, judgmental words, continue to insinuate themselves into contexts where they injure meaning and bring about confusion, since they carry with them a previousness, something once true, something, that is to say, once applicable.[4]

Here the whole problem of the factors of terminological inflation seems to be tackled and the path of the decadent sensibility outlined. "Decadence" in its nineteenth century application had already an aspect of previousness inherent

in its meaning which led artists to clarify their intentions by transforming the word according to their proper identities, which, of course, today accumulated to a multiplicity of "previousness" of signifieds.

Mid-19th century manifestations of "decadence" reveal an essential contradiction in which the aesthete is trapped: On the one hand a hatred of modern civilization and on the other a love of the refinements modern civilization made possible; on the one hand artifice was adored while at the same time applied science (the source of artifice) was detested. According to Carter the "decadent" writers inherited

> Romanticism's contempt for the bourgeois doctrines
> of the nineteenth century--mercantilism, progress,
> utility, industrialism, etc.--and they had a quite
> legitimate horror of their own for the mediocrity
> of the century's official art.[5]

Part of this contempt finds its antipode in the early nineteenth century impact of English dandyism. Beau Georges Brummell (1778-1840) was the most influential representative of the Dandy for the 19th century. Barbey d'Aurevilly, however, warns that "le Dandysme n'étant pas l'invention d'un homme, mais la conséquence d'un certain état de société qui existait avant Brummell."[6] It is not my intention here to give a history of the word "dandyism" but I merely wish

to point out its influence and connections with the deca-
dent sensibility of the 19th century.[7] D'Aurevilly further
clarifies:

> . . . ce qui fait le Dandy, c'est l'indépendence.
> . . . Tout Dandy est un oseur, mais un oseur qui
> a du tact, qui s'arrête à temps et qui trouve,
> entre l'originalité et l'excentricité, le fameux
> point d'intersection de Pascal. . . . Le Dandysme
> est toute une manière d'être et l'on n'est pas que
> par le côté matériellement visible. C'est une
> manière d'être, entièrement composée de nuances,
> comme il arrive toujours dans les sociétés très
> vieilles et très civilisées, où la comédie devient
> si rare et où la convenance triomphe à peine de
> l'ennui.[8]

This sense of independence and distinction from general
society, this aesthetic entertainment in order to overcome
boredom later became typical of artists in France. Thus
around 1830 the English influence in matters of life style
had its impact on Parisian manners. "Manger, boire, se
vêtir, s'amuser comme les Anglais, c'était se distinguer
de la foule."[9] However, the interpretation of this dandyism
in both countries varied. "Pour les Anglais, dandyism a
rarement été autre chose qu'un synonyme de fatuité exclu-
sive, pour les Français dandysme a désigné toute une façon

de vivre."[10]   In both cases dandyism was consecrated to
literature, yet the English dandy was far from being as
glorious as the French dandy--with the exception of Oscar
Wilde later on in the century. The influence of English
literature on the development of literary dandyism in
France was minimal and almost limited to the works of Lord
Byron. In France, however, the type of the dandy was used
by Stendhal, Musset, Mérimée and Balzac. Then Théophile
Gautier created a literary dandyism that became an aesthetic
doctrine leading also towards the "decadent" school.
"Gautier imagina de créer par son art des mondes où pourraient
se réfugier tout ceux qui dégoûtait la vie quotidienne,
mondes où l'on apprend à connaître et à savourer une multi-
tude de sensations inaccessibles à la masse."[11] Gautier
found acceptance,and writers like Baudelaire, Barbey
d'Aurevilly, Huysmans or Bourget followed this direction, as
well as Gide. Hence, to conclude, the migration of the con-
cept of the dandy had an important impact on the fluctuations
of cultural phenomena in 19th century France, especially the
emergence of the "decadent" movement.

A further term that seems to be intertwined with the
notion of "decadence" at the end of the 1800s is the concept
of symbolism. Noël Richard says in the introduction to his
book Le Mouvement Décadent: "L'année 1885-86 peut être con-
sidérée comme la ligne de partage entre la décadence et le

symbolisme, du moins si l'on considère la décadence comme le stade préliminaire du symbolisme."[12] A similar opinion is shown by Anna Balakian who believes that ". . . the 'decadent' spirit without which the purely technical changes that symbolism brought to prosody would have no great significance."[13] For her the quality called "decadence" gave symbolism its style, its ability to convey the mood of the time via the symbol-image. In any case, it should be clear that both tendencies were not mutually exclusive but that they co-existed in the last two decades of the 19th century. Generally it is assumed, however, that "symbolism" related primarily to poetry and was concerned with aesthetics, whereas "decadence" related more to prose and presumably reflected the deterioration of a system of ethics.

Gustave Kahn as a subjective critic of his own time believes that "décadence" was a mood and that symbolism created new forms, rejecting the old. 1885 is also his point of departure: "En 1885, il y avait des décadents et des symbolistes."[14] This fallacy of periodization and classification should be eliminated. Pierrot warns that it is "assurément inexacte de prétendre que, dans le domaine poétique, l'inspiration spécifiquement décadente ait disparu avec l'apparition, dans les années 1885-1886, du terme de Symbolisme . . ."[15] As Balakian reminds the reader, "the one could not exist without the other,"[16] and René Etiemble

mentions in ironic despair that "l'opinion bientôt mêlera puis confondra les deux tendances."[17] In many cases artists, following the influence of Mallarmé, preferred to call themselves "symbolist" rather than "decadent." This individual choice, however, did not abolish the impregnation of the ensemble of the poetic movement with the decadent sensibility. ". . . on commettrait une grave erreur de perspective," says Pierrot, "en se bornant à considérer la Décadence comme un simple avatar du mouvement poétique: en réalité, cette même Décadence constitue le dénominateur commun de toutes les tendances littéraires qui se manifestaient dans les vingt dernières années du siècle."[18]

The list of parallel terms could be continued but the intention merely was to point out that a variety of "isms" played influential roles on a general cultural phenomenon. In this context "dandyism" or "symbolism" are part of the signifier/signified structure, representing signifieds of almost incompatible natures yet serving the same original paradigm.

A manifestation of the fallacy that "decadence" ended in 1885 took place with the institutionalization of a decadent school and a journal by Anatole Baju in 1886. In spite of the short life of the periodical Le Décadent—it appeared from 10.4.86 to 15.4.89—the initiative proved the need of a group of individuals to obtain acceptance of their

ideological and artistic endeavour. Richard underscores this development: "Dès lors, tous les jeunes poètes auraient dû logiquement s'enrôler sous l'oriflamme du symbole. Il n'en fut rien. C'est même en 1886 que se fonde un journal intitulé Le Décadent . . ."[19] Hence it becomes apparent that two processes of institutionalization took place. The first, described in chapter one, exemplified the factors inherent in the emergence of the term "decadence" and the fusion of meanings with institutions. The second represents the identification of individuals with particular meanings of "decadence" as a concept and the process of making a paradigm identifiable. The former institutionalizes as content that which has already been accepted in theory, what the latter tries to institutionalize in practice therewith demanding acceptability. What we shall look at here, therefore, is the reverse of the process previously described.

"Decadence" in the 1880s in France was not only an atmosphere but it was becoming more and more a serious designation in art and literature. For Anatole Baju, an undistinguished writer on the whole, the time for a synthesis of the different currents of the époque was ripe. He observed: "La littérature décadente synthétise l'esprit de notre époque, c'est-à-dire celui de l'élite intellectuelle de la société moderne. . . . La littérature décadente se propose de refléter l'image de ce monde spleenétique."[20]

Together with Maurice du Plessys and other friends--most of whom adhered strongly to the dandyism of the time--Baju decided to found a journal in order to be able to fully propagate these synthesized aesthetics. Despite the refusal of printers the first series of the journal Le Décadent littéraire (35 numbers appearing weekly from April 10 to December 4, 1886) became known rapidly among the intellectual Parisiens. The group had taken its own initiative.

> A défaut d'imprimeur, les Décadents composeraient eux-mêmes leur journal. Baju s'en alla donc acheter au kilo casses et caractères, une presse à bras, bref tout un matériel d'imprimerie élémentaire. A l'insu du concierge il hissa le tout morceau par morceau, jusqu'à sa chambre, juchée au sixième étage de l'immeuble situé 5 bis rue Lamartine.[21]

In this romantic setting with angry neighbours knocking at the walls and others remaining furiously sleepless the printing of an idea took place.

Just as ingenious as the setting are the semantics of Le Décadent. According to Roger Bauer the term was invented by the Goncourt brothers: ". . . c'est sous la plume des Goncourt qu'il est d'abord attesté."[22] He calls the word a linguistic monster, because

> morphologiquement, 'décadent' fait penser . . . à

un participe présent (substantivé, car l'usage
adjectival n'est attesté qu'ultérieurement). Mais
l'infinitif décader (ou son équivalent latin)
n'existe pas, ou plutôt n'existe pas encore puis-
que Anatole Baju ne l'inventera qu'en 1885 . . ."[23]

Bauer further calls Baju's statements to explain the choice

of "décadent" "de véritables cabrioles verbales et étymo-

logiques."[24] He points out that the three neologisms "déca-

dent, décader, décadisme" practically derive from Baju. In-

deed, Ernest Raynaud, from his contemporary point of view,

attests to the formation of one of the "linguistic monsters"

in his book La mêlée symboliste, when he tells the

following anecdote:

> Verlaine venait de réhabiliter le mot décadent.
> Plus tard, Baju proposera, pour couper court à
> toute équivoque, d'atténuer la brutalité du mot
> en son dérivé: décadisme. Le maître, amusé,
> exultera: "Bravo! décadisme est un mot de génie,
> une trouvaille amusante et qui restera. Ce bar-
> barisme est une miraculeuse enseigne. Il est
> court, commode, sonne littéraire, sans pédanterie,
> enfin fait balle et fera trou!" Et en effet le
> décadisme a fait trou.[25]

Clearly "décadence" had a specific signification for

the group around Baju. In the October 16, 1886 issue of

Le Décadent Baju explains:

> Nous ne sommes pas des Décadents au sens absolu
> du mot, c'est là un sobriquet: mais des Quintes-
> sents. Dédaignant la compilation naturaliste des
> faits de la vie matérielle, nous n'y prenons que
> ce qu'il y a de rare, d'intime, de secret. Notre
> but consiste à éveiller le plus grand nombre de
> sensations possible avec la moindre quantité de
> mots. Notre style doit être rare et tourmenté,
> parce que la banalité est l'épouvantail de cette
> fin dé siècle, et nous devons rajeunir des vocables
> tombés en désuétude ou en créer de nouveaux pour
> noter l'idée dans la complexité de ses nuances
> les plus fugaces. Peu nous importe que les foules
> ne nous comprennent pas. L'écrivain, soucieux de
> son art, doit faire abstraction de leur existence.
> C'est à elles de s'élever vers lui, non à lui de
> s'abaisser vers elles.[26]

This declaration refers to the élitist stand of the "decadent"
artist who again separates himself from a more general artis-
tic élite. Baju believes in the constant ascension of the
élite and the stagnation of the ignorant plebeians. Only
the intelligentsia will progress in history. His creativity
is an aristocratic one denying mental capacity to anybody
outside of it. The notion of l'art pour l'art, the aesthetic
life-style, an idealistic-anarchistic political attitude--

that is the enigma of the "decadent" world view around Baju. These "decadents" despise the bourgeoisie and its values as well as democracy. They hate the mediocre and turn to the exceptional. The journal is an example of this type of thinking.

Part of the profession of a "decadent" artist seems to have been the mystification of his own identity. Although numerous and also famous poets of the time collaborated with Baju, his first intense collaborators were his own pseudonyms. Richard gives the impressive list of Pierre Vareilles, Louis Villatte, Hector Fayolles, Raoul Vague.[27] More renowned contributors were the poets Paul Verlaine, Stéphane Mallarmé, Barbey d'Aurevilly among several other authors like Malato de Corné, Rachilde, Charles Evendale, Ernest Raynaud, Miguel Fernandez.

However, Le Décadent encountered difficulties and No. 35 of December 4, 1886 was the last publication of the journal. Reasons for the termination remain speculative. Either a weekly appearance was too frequent and too demanding or critical influence too strong and the emerging conflict between "symbolists" and "decadents" too decisive. Whatever the reasons might have been Le Décadent represented one of the first periodicals of the new aesthetic notion and served as model for many other publications.

Yet, Baju did not give up. One year later he replaced

the journal with a new Le Décadent—this time in form of a
magazine. This "Revue littéraire bi-mensuelle" was finally
printed professionally. It had 16 pages and lasted from
December 1887 to May 1889. The magazine served Baju to in-
tensify his reflections on the essence of the "decadent"
movement which by then he called "L'Ecole décadente" under
the title of which he also published a small book, highly
praised in the magazine. He says:

> Ce livre est le résumé historique du mouvement
> littéraire de notre époque. Origine de la nouvelle
> école, esthétique des décadents, personnalités mar-
> quantes de la jeune génération, tout y est: c'est
> la Bible des Jeunes.[28]

As authors of the "decadent" school should be considered
Jean Moréas, Paul Verlaine, Stéphane Mallarmé, Henri de
Régnier, Gustave Kahn, Francis Vielé-Griffin, Laurent
Tailhade, Charles Vignier, Jean Ajalbert, Jules Laforgue,
Stuart Merrill, Ernest Raynaud, Ephraïm Mikhaël,[29] regard-
less of whether their work appeared in Baju's publications
or not. Another contributor who should not be forgotten is
Arthur Rimbaud; the problem is that the poems published
under his name were false Rimbauds and merely served
publicity purposes. "Pour répondre à la curiosité du pu-
blic et rendre notre doctrine plus saisissable, nous avions
tenté d'incarner en Arthur Rimbaud le type idéal du Déca-
dent."[30] The true authors were mainly Ernest Raynaud,

Maurice du Plessys and Laurent Tailhade. Rimbaud became
a mystification.

Regardless of their practices or tactics Baju and his
school were established as an institution and their works
were accepted among the public. In order to pursue this
process, all he needed was a leader--himself--, readers
and a magazine. However, this reverse process of accepta-
bility had its flaws.

> . . . Baju ignorait sans doute qu'une "école
> littéraire" n'est qu'un cadre scolaire et super-
> ficiel; il oubliait que l'originalité est la con-
> dition même du talent et que la contrainte des
> règles paralyse tout essor.[31]

Still, the idea and the strength of conviction to pursue the
idea were factors that justify the effort even though it was
not to last.

Naturally, "la décadence" was not limited to the group
around Anatole Baju alone. His circle of friends mainly
wrote poems and theoretical essays; some important novelists
who represent a second series of "decadent" productions which
were influential even prior to Baju's publications should
also be pointed to. The most important author among the
novelists of that particular period was Joris-Karl Huysmans.
Maurice Barrès also names Catulle Mendès, Pierre Loti,
Francis Poictevin and the Goncourts[32] to whom we should
add Georges Rodenbach, Barbey d'Aurevilly and Théophile

Gautier. Their narratives evolved around topics such as
the decomposition and degeneration of existence, of a social
class or of an individual. In a hostile and ignorant
society many of their heroes were aristocratic creatures
who attempted to redefine the essence of life through iso-
lating excentricities. As aesthetes they were hypersensitive,
highly sensual, they cherished the artificial and they neces-
sarily belonged to an intellectual élite. In many cases
these heroes embodied the institutionalized doctrine of
Baju whereas their authors belonged to a general class of
society not necessarily living "decadent" lives--an ambi-
guity worth noting which will re-occur in the subsequent
chapters.

     A question that remains unanswered at the moment is whether
this particular signified of the signifier "décadence," the cul-
tural phenomenon, the particular "Geisteshaltung," had any
European parallels at that time or whether it was merely a
French phenomenon. Indeed, a similar process of institu-
tionalization took place in England during the "Nineties"
(as well as in Germany), represented by the Rhymers' Club
and two journals The Yellow Book and The Savoy. The term
"décadence" was introduced in England by George Moore who
had experienced its influence on the artistic movement
during his stay in Paris 1884-85. Yet, whereas the concept
of "décadence" had served to establish art as an autonomous
discipline in France, its interpretation in England soon

took a different shape.

> Als Ausdruck künstlerischer Haltung wird er nach
> und nach mit Amoralismus und Aesthetentum einge-
> färbt, vermeintlich ganz im Sinn des l'art pour
> l'art--Gedankens eines W. Pater . . . [˝décadence˝]
> wird . . . vor allem als Synonym für krankhaften
> Schönheitskult und hedonistische Leidenschaften,
> wie sie Wilde in The Picture of Dorian Gray
> darstellt, aufgefasst . . .[33]

The strong shift to the moral aspect of the term brings the
movement to its early fall at the end of the nineties. In
France, on the other hand, "décadence" was able to crystal-
lize a specific aesthetics which made it remain an important
paradigm in cultural history. The English group of artists
was incapable of bridging the gulf between the world of art
and everyday life. They followed Baudelaire and Gautier or
the dandyism of authors of Le Décadent, but they stagnated
at this stage of French "décadence" and did not see the dif-
ferentiation that a Huysmans or a Mallarmé made. Instead of
transforming experiences, the English artist still identified
with them when socio-historical presuppositions had already
shifted.

The "decadent" movement in England began with the
initiative of some young poets who decided to found a lite-
rary group, the Rhymers' Club (1891-1894). This club united
the most varied temperaments and strongly diversified

aspirations such as artists like W.B. Yeats, T.W. Rolleston, Lionel Johnson, Ernest Rhys, Arthur Symons, John Davidson, Richard Le Gallienne, Ernest Dowson, Victor Plarr, later Theodore Wratislaw, John Gray, and a few minor "passers-by."[34] Contrary to the French school the club did not have a program.

> C'est dans un commun amour de la poésie que ses membres trouvent le principe d'unité nécessaire à l'existence de leur groupe. Leur but est simplement de se connaître, d'échanger leurs vues, de s'écouter réciter des vers. Mais, à défaut de programme, ils ont pour eux l'ardeur et la conviction de la jeunesse.[35]

They were visited by Verlaine, influenced by Mallarmé (translated by Symons), George Moore, Oscar Wilde, and J.M. Whistler; Keats, Rossetti and Swinburne were their idols, Walter Pater was their "god," and the principle of art for art's sake was their doctrine. Secretly, of course, "the Rhymers" dreamt of conquering the public, a dream that was realized through the publisher John Lane in 1892 with the Book of the Rhymers' Club. A second Book of the Rhymers' Club was published in 1894, however it meant the last reunion of a group of artists who afterwards separated, since divergent opinions in the course of time had undermined their original solidarity. Although the "Rhymers" had no particular program their importance should not be

underestimated. French aesthetics of the time were intro-
duced to England particularly through Arthur Symons, and his
choice of urban themes meant an innovation in poetry to-
gether with "decadent" stylistics. But above all this group
formed a "decadent" school in England, they defined as a
whole what Pater with his The Renaissance or the Pre-
Raphaelites, for example, had already suggested. The term
and an idea were launched. Farmer mentions also that "l'agi-
tation qui règne dans tous les domaines, les audaces de pen-
sée et d'expression qui envahissent la littérature et la vie
de l'époque, contribueront à accréditer l'idée d'une 'déca-
dence'."[36] With that in mind Arthur Symons became one of
the major inspirators for another conglomeration of per-
sonalities and talents dedicated to the concept of "deca-
dence." From 1894 to 1895 appeared the journal the Yellow
Book, published by John Lane which dealt exclusively with
art and literature--a novelty at the time--and represented
the new generation.

> C'est avec l'apparition du Yellow Book . . . que
> l'Angleterre prend nettement conscience de la
> "décadence". Le terme connaît brusquement une
> fortune extraordinaire; on le rencontre dans tous
> les journaux, toutes les revues. Et, du coup, sa
> signification s'élargit: il ne désigne plus seule-
> ment les extravagances "esthétiques" dont s'était
> moqué le Gallienne, il dépasse l'attitude

artistique chère à Symons, et englobe à présent
toutes les manifestations de l'esprit "fin de
siècle."[37]

With the Yellow Book--following the colour "à la mode"--a
group of new artists emerged and gained public attention.
The literary direction was put in the hands of Henry Harland,
that of the artistic part was given to Aubrey Beardsley.
The talents that shaped the Yellow Book were Ella D'Arcy,
Lulie Thayer, Hubert Crackanthorpe, George Egerton,
Charlotte Mew, H.B. Watson, Victoria Cross for prose; Max
Beerbohm presented essays, and Arthur Symons, Richard Le
Gallienne, Th. Wratislaw, John Davidson (all old Rhymers'
Club members) and Katherine de Mattos furnished poetry. One
of the most original among the above was doubtlessly the
young Aubrey Beardsley, whose drawings were printed together
with other representatives of the "fin-de-siècle" art.
However, all efforts of this "decadent" school could not
stand against increasing public moral outrage. When Oscar
Wilde was arrested, Lane censured his own journal and es-
pecially Beardsley, which drove the latter to leave. The
journal continued until 1897 with adjusted contents. But
despite its brief appearance the Yellow Book represented the
culmination point of the "decadent" spirit in England and
became the most important periodical of the "Nineties."
For a short period of time the most characteristic and
talented artists of the movement had been united,

culminating in a period of scattered tendencies like the
aesthetic and hedonistic cult of Wilde or in a new realism
or in sentimental romanticism or other "isms." As Anatole
Baju had intended with Le Décadent, the Yellow Book insti-
tutionalized a "Geisteshaltung" which led to the accepta-
bility of a paradigm at the end of the nineteenth century.

Still, as in France, a last attempt was to be made.
Once Oscar Wilde's trial was over, avant-garde writers and
painters published the journal The Savoy in 1896, re-apply-
ing the program of the Yellow Book. This brief renaissance
was to last but a year. With its disappearance the decadent
school also found its end. The editor of The Savoy was
Leonard Smithers. Aubrey Beardsley and Arthur Symons took
the directors' positions, and among the collaborators were
such renowned authors as Conrad, Shaw, Yeats, Lionel
Johnson, Fiona Macleod, Havelock Ellis, Edmund Gosse as
well as Dowson and Crackanthorpe; furthermore artists like
Pennell, Horton, Phil May and Conder.

This group followed the ideas of "decadence" in the
realism of their essays, the technique of their poems, the
contents of their drawings. A series of articles was
devoted to Nietzsche, and Baudelaire influenced much of
the poetry together with Verlaine and Mallarmé. However,
the peak of the notion had passed in England and a trans-
formation of the ideals seemed to introduce itself. Farmer
says:

> Au fond, elle /la "décadence"_7 se rend obscurément
> compte qu'elle est déjà un anachronisme, que des
> courants sont venus qui emportent la nation vers
> des conceptions tout opposées à celles qui sem-
> blaient prédominer dans les premières années des
> "Nineties." Incapable de se mettre en harmonie
> avec les tendances de l'heure, elle cherche
> d'autres formes de sentiment et d'expression assez
> proches d'elle pour qu'elle puisse s'y réfugier,
> s'y perdre.[38]

The Savoy had come too late. 1896 marks the end of the
movement. Psychological, cultural, political and social
presuppositions had changed, re-assuring the strength of the
English nation and its people. Romanticism, industrializa-
tion and Darwinism were either outgrown or any doctrine that
dared to compromise the vitality and conscience of the
nation was suppressed. Puritanism and imperialism regained
their dominant positions.

In comparison with Baju's initiative it has become
apparent that the moral impact was much stronger in the
English movement than in France, where an aesthetic evolu-
tion took place that enabled the integration of "decadent"
aspects as part of the French cultural heritage. Anna
Balakian points out in that context that

> what prevents the "decadent" /In France_7 from be-
> coming a neurasthenic, a pathological figure--

i.e., from truly identifying with Huysmans' fic-
tional prototype, Des Esseintes--is that the
"decadent" writer projects his attitude upon art;
he directs the cult of his ego to an exterior sym-
bol, which his highly creative mind is capable of
transforming into a thing of beauty.[39]

This very projection--with minor exceptions like the dandy-
ism of a Maurice du Plessys or a Baudelaire, for example,--
enabled the French notion to maintain itself and continue
to influence cultural developments in Europe. French "déca-
dence" was accepted, institutionalized, and remained accepted,
encouraging transformations and migrations of the notion, a
process which in England hardly took place.

It seems inviting to end this chapter on the note of
French and English "décadence," as many critical--or
reference books do. However, that would negate the opinion
that this very "décadence" was a European cultural phenome-
non (or should one say of Western Civilization, since Poe
and Whitman should not be neglected) not limited to a
Baudelaire alone. Hence I should like to point out a
similar process of institutionalization of an aesthetic
idea as it took place in Germany. "Fin de siècle" in
Germany was a time of transition as far as socio-historical
developments were concerned. Culturally it had followed
the path from romanticism to naturalism, realism and im-
pressionism. But during the 1890s many young artists

identified with a new art form which had evolved its ideology
from the cultural pessimism of Arthur Schopenhauer and
Friedrich Nietzsche as well as from French "décadence" and
"symbolism." At the beginning of the nineties a circle of
intellectuals gathered around the twenty-two year old Stefan
George, developed a program and published their journal
Blätter für die Kunst. This periodical appeared from 1892
to 1919. Collaborators of the journal were, besides George
(who was an important translator of French "symbolists"), Hugo
von Hofmannsthal, Max Dauthendey, Ernst Hardt, Karl Wolfskehl,
Friedrich Wolters, Friedrich Gundolf, Ludwig Klages, Norbert
von Hellingrath, Ernst Bertram, Ernst Kantorowicz, and the
designer Melchior Lechter among others.[40] Their main objec-
tive was "das Wort aus seinem gemeinen alltäglichen Kreis zu
reissen und in eine leuchtende Sphäre zu heben."[41] The new
art wanted "keine Erfindung von Geschichten, sondern Wieder-
gabe von Stimmungen, keine Betrachtung, sondern Darstellung,
keine Unterhaltung, sondern Eindruck."[42] According to Hugo
von Hofmannsthal the poet "hat die Leidenschaft, alles, was
da ist, in ein Verhältnis zu bringen. . . Ein Harmonisieren
der Welt, die er in sich trägt."[43] Their art differed from
naturalism in that it was strongly influenced by the doctrine
of l'art pour l'art. The Blätter für die Kunst proclaimed:
"Eine Kunst frei von jedem Dienst: über dem Leben, nachdem
sie das Leben durchdrungen hat."[44]

Yet, as in England, the ideals of "décadence" meant

just a phase in the development of certain artists in Germany or Austria, for that matter. At the beginning of the 20th century the points of view of most members of the George-circle changed. But instead of separating these artists adapted to the new times and changed their journal accordingly. To this effect Frenzel writes:

> Der Standpunkt einer extrem in sich selbst
> begrenzten künstlerischen Wirkung konnte nur von
> sehr jungen, noch mit der eigenen Entwicklung
> kämpfenden Menschen oder von einer Epoche, die
> äusserlich so befriedet schien wie die wilhel-
> minische, aufrechterhalten werden. Rilke, Stefan
> George, Hugo von Hofmannsthal haben schon im
> ersten Jahrzehnt des 20. Jahrunderts diesen
> Standpunkt verlassen und der Dichtung neben
> ästhetischen ethische und religiöse Aufgaben
> zugewiesen . . . [45]

Blätter für die Kunst therefore represented another example of an anti-movement which drew attention to its ideals by institutionalizing their works and therewith seeking acceptability. Le Décadent, The Yellow Book, The Savoy, Blätter für die Kunst, all stand for a particular integration of a concept into cultural discourse. The word "déca-dence" as it emerged in its 19th century context and meaning represents a specific signified besides the enormous variety of labels, clichés and connotations. Its denotative

communicability shows an ideological system, a "Geistes-
haltung" that evolved through the general presuppositions
of the time.

This concludes the first part of this thesis in which
I have intended to demystify an institutionalized termino-
logy. Subsequently I shall concentrate on three authors of
the nations discussed above, and I shall analyze how
"decadence" manifests itself in the typicalities of style
and content within the general socio-historical context of
the late nineteenth century.

Notes

[1] A.E. Carter, The Idea of Decadence in French Literature 1830-1900 (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1958), p. 22.

[2] John Christian, Symbolists and Decadents (New York: St. Martin's Press, Inc., 1978), p. 1.

[3] Carter, p. viii.

[4] Richard Gilman, Decadence. The Strange Life of an Epithet (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1979), p. 5.

[5] Carter, p. 6.

[6] J.-A. Barbey d'Aurevilly, Du Dandysme et de Georges Brummell (Lausanne: Mermod, 1945), p. 47.

[7] An interesting account of dandyism is given by John C. Prevost in his book Le Dandysme en France (1817-1839) (Paris: Librairie Minard, 1957).

[8] Barbey d'Aurevilly, p. 70 and p. 37.

[9] Prevost, p. 53.

[10] Ibid., p. 78.

[11] Ibid., p. 164.

[12] Noël Richard, Le Mouvement décadent. Dandys, Esthètes et Quintessents (Paris: Librairie Nizet, 1968), p. 8.

[13] Anna Balakian, The Symbolist Movement. A Critical Appraisal (New York: New York University Press, 1977), p. 81.

[14] Gustave Kahn, <u>Symbolistes et décadents</u> (1902; rpt. Genève: Slatkine Reprints, 1977), p. 33.

[15] Jean Pierrot, <u>L'Imaginaire décadent</u> (1880-1900) (Paris: Publications de l'Université de Rouen; Presses Universitaires de France, 1977), p. 15.

[16] Balakian, p. 82.

[17] René Etiemble, <u>Le Mythe de Rimbaud</u> (Paris: Gallimard, 1952), p. 69.

[18] Pierrot, p. 16.

[19] Richard, p. 8.

[20] Anatole Baju, <u>L'Ecole décadente</u> (Paris: Vanier, 1887), pp. 9-10, in George Ross Ridge, <u>The Hero in French Decadent Literature</u> (Atlanta: University of Georgia Press, 1961), p. 23. Original source unavailable.

[21] Richard, p. 22.

[22] Roger Bauer, "'Décadence': Histoire d'un Mot et d'une Idée," in <u>Cahiers Roumains d'Etudes Littéraires</u>, vol. 1 (1978), p. 60.

[23] Ibid., p. 60.

[24] Ibid., p. 62.

[25] Ernest Raymaud, <u>La Mêlée Symboliste (1870-1890). Portraits et Souvenirs</u> (Paris: La Renaissance du Livre, 1918), p. 65.

[26] Anatole Baju, <u>Le Décadent</u>, (Paris: Anatole Baju, October 16, 1886), n.pag..

[27] Richard, p. 44.

28 Baju, <u>Le Décadent</u>, October 1888, publicity on backcover.

29 According to Richard, p. 124.

30 Raynaud, p. 89.

31 Richard, p. 245.

32 Maurice Barrès, <u>Les Taches d'encre</u>, II, p. 37, in Richard, p. 256. Original source unavailable.

33 Ingeborg Bernhart, "'Décadence' und 'style décadent'," in <u>Neøhelicon</u> II, (1974), p. 199.

34 List according to Albert J. Farmer, <u>Le Mouvement esthétique et 'décadent' en Angleterre (1873-1900)</u> (Paris: Librairie Ancienne Honoré Champion, 1931), p. 262.

35 Ibid., p. 263.

36 Ibid., p. 297.

37 Ibid., p. 298.

38 Ibid., p. 347.

39 Balakian, p. 82.

40 According to Herbert and Elisabeth Frenzel, <u>Daten Deutscher Dichtung. Chronologischer Abriss der deutschen Literaturgeschichte,</u> vol. 2 (Köln: Verlag Kiepenheuer & Witsch, 1952), p. 491.

41 Carl August Klein, <u>Blätter für die Kunst,</u> vol. 2, December 1892 (rpt. Düsseldorf-München: Verlag Helmut Küpper, 1968), p. 47.

42 Stefan George in Frenzel, p. 488. Original source unavailable.

43 Hugo von Hofmannsthal in Frenzel, p. 489. Qriginal source unavailable.

44 <u>Blätter für die Kunst</u>, vol. 1, Dritte Folge, 1896, p. 2.

45 Frenzel, p. 489.

CHAPTER III

Oscar Wilde

"L'âme de la 'décadence' est Oscar Wilde."[1] Thus opens
the second part of Farmer's work Le Mouvement esthétique et
'décadent' en Angleterre: this provokes the seemingly un-
limited discussion as to the essences of "décadence", for
it presents the reader with the ambiguity of a very diversi-
fied movement. Also the choice of an English representative
before a French one, as the chronological order of the de-
velopment of "décadence" seems to imply, might come as a
surprise to the reader. However, as far as Oscar Wilde and
André Gide are concerned, this chronological order must be
inverted, for the paths of these authors within the movement
are more consecutive than simultaneous. Besides being older
than Gide, Oscar Wilde, as Farmer expressed in the above
quotation, represented an immediate incarnation of a notion
that had begun to migrate and to influence cultural contents
in Europe, whereas André Gide was rather a late-comer who
represented an after-growth of French "décadence" rather
than a central configuration. Therefore the second part of
this thesis is chronological according to the authors as
they appeared in the evolution of the notion "décadence."

Still, even Oscar Wilde should not be mistaken as the
epitome of English literary developments during the end of

the 19th century, as the previous chapter has already indicated. W.V. Harris furthermore reminds critics that the concept of "decadence" cannot be used as the sum-total of prevailing literary spirits of the nineties in England. Such inaccurate attempts would fail to recognize the variety of intentions and achievements as well as overlook "a number of vital areas of literature flourishing in the decade which could not possibly be linked to decadence."[2] This commentary re-emphasizes the opinion put forward in the thesis that general labelling and imposing of clichés only mystifies aspects of culture the significations of which are often ignored and not recognized. I have shown previously how groups of artists achieved acceptability despite such practices. I should like to concentrate now on a single form, on one individual's interpretation of a socio-cultural aspect. Hence the exclamation "l'âme de la 'décadence' est Oscar Wilde"[3] should merely be seen as a particular transformation of the complex paradigm "décadence."

Indeed, Oscar Wilde occupied a rather anomalous position in English literature: "considered an arch-decadent by those outraged by the new developments in literature, his work was rigidly excluded from The Yellow Book even before his trial."[4] Wilde was not associated with any coteries of the "Nineties." "He did not belong to the Rhymers' Club; he never contributed to The Yellow Book or The Savoy; and he was not really very intimate with any of the leading literary

figures among his contemporaries."[5]   Although Wilde did

not think of himself as a professional littérateur, his

career still "impinged on the literary nerve-centers of his

age at every point. Whether as poet, dramatist, writer of

fiction, or critic, his work, in fact, epitomizes the spirit

of that age."[6] It is no doubt that Wilde was "at the

active heart of the age"[7] and that it was he "qui incar/nait/

en Angleterre l'esprit 'fin de siècle' dont l'Europe toute

entière subit à ce moment les suggestions ou les effets."[8]

However, it should not be overlooked that Wilde differed in

many aspects from what was called "the decadent school"

which searched for new dimensions to fiction. His concept

was that of a strong aestheticism and he followed the doc-

trine of art for art's sake with every fibre of his per-

sonality. What made Wilde unique is the fact that he in-

carnated his ideals, that art and personality were unified,

"l'homme, la vie et l'oeuvre se répond/aient/."[9] The

essential aesthetic idea which animated Wilde was a radical

anti-naturalism and a condemnation of realist tendencies.

For him art should be independent of conventional morality--

an attitude that he pursued up to his ruin. Wilde deli-

berately called attention to the conventionally immoral

nature of the subject matter of his art which necessarily

invited moral censure. Another rule of the doctrine of art

for art's sake is the harmony of form and content, yet in

many cases of "decadent" art content is emphasized at the

expense of form, something which also applies to Wilde's prose. Art being furthermore superior to nature, the author applies an elaborate artificial and self-conscious style which again is emphasized at the expense of form and content. Thus part of the reason for the failure to achieve a harmony of form, content, and style is the pursuit of another rule--that of life being itself an art. Karl Kopp explains:

> The decadents called attention to the immorality
> of their lives and of their art. In this way they
> not only undermined the aesthetic principles of
> harmony and amorality that they had learned to
> cherish, but also they failed to produce an art
> capable of containing and directing the aesthetic
> responses of their audience. [10]

Because of Wilde's identification in life and art with what society calls "immorality" and "mental corruption" as an aesthetic attitude, "decadence" in England has been largely identified with this kind of notorious aestheticism to the exclusion of other elements which contributed to the concept of "decadence," such as the importance of the "decadent" school of the "Nineties," as well as the fact that the fiction of Wilde (as opposed to the critic and the extravagant individual) had relatively little influence upon other writers of the last decade of the 19th century. This overall generalization also excluded the semantic differences

that are inherent in the "Wortfeld" of aestheticism. For

aestheticism should be associated with the concept of l'art

pour l'art, whereas the word aesthete relates more to a

social position with connotations towards moral "decadence."

By incarnating both aspects, Oscar Wilde especially contri-

buted to the confusion concerning the meaning of this art

form and he caused extensive negative implications. Hence

in England "decadence" was mainly associated with moral de-

cay, ignoring the essences of poetic "decadence" and the

theoretical aspects as they were exemplified in France.

Mario Praz' general interpretation for Romantic literature,

that of the "erotic sensibility,"[11] applies as a dominant

factor to the "fin de siècle" art in England. Still, des-

pite the heterogeneity, the phenomenon showed a strange uni-

formity that set the achievements of 19th century "deca-

dence" apart from anything that came before or after.

Johnson states that

> this inner consistency is a matter of tone or
>
> style rather than of shared themes and techniques;
>
> it relates primarily to the temper of mind which
>
> ties together the extraordinary diversity of
>
> creative activity . . . represented.[12]

This temper of mind made Oscar Wilde a distinct member of

the "decadent" movement.

In the cradle of the Victorian age, when positivistic

science was flourishing and the political equilibrium

relatively stable, Wilde received his intellectual forma-

tion from the masters of the doctrine of aestheticism in

Britain. Under Ruskin he was confronted with the doctrine

of beauty, and when Pater's The Renaissance was published in

1873 Wilde soon became one of his most fervent followers.

In 1878 Wilde moved to London, the centre of aesthetic life-

style and creative art, after having spent four years at

Oxford. There he pursued his ambition to play an important

role in society and he began to imitate the idol of the

time, the dandy and painter, Whistler. His witty personality

became a success along with his publications. After an ex-

cursion to America, Wilde visited Paris in 1883, represent-

ing the perfect aesthete.

> Il se fit présenter à Daudet, à Edmond de Goncourt,
>
> à Bourget, fréquenta les cafés littéraires où
>
> trônait Mendès, se montra aux mardis de Mallarmé,
>
> entra en contact, par l'intermédiaire de Stuart
>
> Merrill, avec les jeunes symbolistes. Pour forcer
>
> l'attention, il s'habilla à la mode du dandy pari-
>
> sien de 1848, se fit faire une réplique de la
>
> fameuse canne à pomme d'ivoire de Balzac, écrivit
>
> l'inévitable sonnet à Sarah Bernhardt.[13]

However, back in London, the charm of novelty was soon

reduced and from 1885 to 1890 Wilde spent most of his time

writing journalism, poetry, and essays. He also established

his reputation as a critic with his exceptional and

paradoxical theory which introduced the critic as artist, i.e. it introduced the conviction that "through knowledge, the critic might become more creative than the creative artist."[14] Wilde believed that the critic is superior to the creative artist. The creative artist is but an inferior critic, since art implies a choice, a conscious selection, which is dictated by the inner sense of beauty. Therefore, the artist is imprisoned with his creation, which only the critic can make into a work of art. "The critic is he who can translate into another manner or a new material his impression of beautiful things."[15]

The quotation just mentioned derives from the work which was to become the common denominator of Wilde's theories and practices, the unifying example of his form of "decadence;" it is with The Picture of Dorian Gray, that public attention focused again on Wilde.

> The novel came out on June 20th, 1890, in the July number of Lippincott's Monthly Magazine, being published as a book in April '91 with a preface, and six additional chapters to meet the needs of the fiction market.[16]

This book was not only a revolution but also the turning point in Oscar Wilde's life. In it he shows the essence of his personality. The whole drama of his existence unfolds before the reader's eyes, so that the novel is a profoundly autobiographical statement. The Picture of Dorian Gray contains a

full-length portrait of Oscar Wilde "with many of his most
searching comments on life, side by side with a complete
revelation of his emotional unreality, in portraying human
nature and the morbid strain in him which eventually wrecked
his life."[17] Indeed, the author himself admitted in a
letter to an admirer that the work contains all aspects of
his character: "I am so glad you like that strange coloured
book of mine," he wrote, "it contains much of me in it.
Basil Hallward is what I think I am: Lord Henry, what the
world thinks me: Dorian what I would like to be--in other
ages, perhaps."[18] This frankness, however, caused him a
great deal of harm. The novel was hated by the morally con-
scious public and by journalists who condemned it as being
"stupid and vulgar"-"dull and nasty"-"disgusting"-"malodo-
rous putrefaction"-"delights in dirtiness"--or as Hesketh
Pearson further quotes,

> it is a tale spawned from the leprous literature
> of the French 'Décadents'--a poisonous book, the
> atmosphere of which is heavy with the mephitic
> odours of moral and spiritual putrefaction (Daily
> Chronicle).[19]

Later on The Picture of Dorian Gray was used in evidence
against Wilde when he had to stand trial before an outraged
public. Patiently he answered each and every attack.

The idea for the book had been inspired by a few works
and an incident. A foremost guideline had still been Pater's

The Renaissance. Farmer mentions also the influence of *Melmoth the Wanderer* (1820) by Wilde's great-uncle Charles Robert Maturin (1782-1824), as well as Edgar Allan Poe's *William Wilson*.[20] However, much of *The Picture of Dorian Gray* was modelled upon J.-K. Huysmans' *A Rebours*, the French counterpart to this genre of the fantastic and the book in question in the text. Wilde began his work by writing a collection of short stories, "but the main idea came from an actual episode," Pearson states.

> In the year 1884 Wilde used often to drop in at the studio of a painter, Basil Ward, one of whose sitters was a young man of exceptional beauty. Incidentally, Wilde must have been a godsend to many painters of the time, as his conversation kept the sitters perpetually entertained.[21]

The actual commentaries that were made after the portrait had been done were turned into semi-fiction or in pre-text in Wilde's preface to *The Picture of Dorian Gray* where the episode is described. The painter's name became Basil Hallward and the sitter is introduced as Dorian Gray, but still in inverted commas. The proposition of the true and fictitious painter, who said "how delightful it would be if 'Dorian' could remain exactly as he is, while the portrait aged and withered in his stead,"[22] became the point of inspiration for the novel.

Despite the variety of opinions, criticisms,

condemnations or even praise, The Picture of Dorian Gray remains one of the most significant manifestations of the "decadent" movement. The novel is a synthesis of the intellectual and aesthetic topics of "decadence" as well as a methodical description of the evolution of a neurosis. The objectives of the doctrine of l'art pour l'art become in The Picture of Dorian Gray the principal elements of an imagined spectacle which perfectly replaces reality. Aspects of the genre such as dandyism, perversion or immorality, narcissism, escape into drugs, alienation, art consciousness and élitist way of life--all are present in Wilde's novel in a rather individualistic fashion.

The structure of the work is relatively simple, consisting of a clear division into twenty chapters, the preface and the artist's preface. The first ten chapters represent an exposition and a development of the protagonist until he is confronted with the true nature of his own portrait, the demonic soul. This appears like a peripety which directs the narrative to its inevitable catastrophe. Such a structure resembles that of a novella, a fact which probably lead Jürgen Sänger in his Aspekte dekandenter Sensibilität to call The Picture of Dorian Gray a "Novelle."[23] However, this indicates a genre debate which is still unresolved among Wilde critics and which would deviate from the original topic of this chapter. I shall assume here that The Picture of Dorian Gray contains enough aspects of a novel

to be classified in that genre.

The time of the narrative is somewhere around the middle of the 19th century (whereas the artist's preface is dated 1884 according to the actual event). Christopher Nassaar even speculates that the novel begins in the year 1873 and that Dorian Gray died in 1890, the year in which the earlier version was published in Lippincott's Magazine.[24] Whatever the dates, the first part from chapter one to ten takes place in the months of June and July just after Dorian Gray's twentieth year. Chapter eleven summarizes the following years until chapter twelve introduces the beginning of the catastrophe on the 9th of November, the protagonist's 38th birthday. Half a year later Dorian Gray is dead. Thus the reader knows that eighteen years are involved in which the rather Faustian hero is driven towards total loss of self. With the same precision Wilde indicates each place in his narrative--usually London or a country house.

The major characters of the plot are the painter Basil Hallward--an artist of the brush--, the dandy Lord Henry Wotton--an artist of the word--, and their "victim" the young "bon-vivant" Dorian Gray. All of them belong either to the aristocracy or the bourgeois high society. The minor characters are either part of the aristocracy and represent mostly wealthy, lonely Ladies giving luncheons or fancy dinners for the "crème de la crème" of London; or they represent the low classes of the Victorian society--servants,

poor actresses, prostitutes and drug addicts. The middle
class is hardly touched upon. With this precise class
selection, Oscar Wilde complies with the élitist doctrine
of "decadence," which is furthermore emphasized by the
mere choice of topic, an aesthetic quest which "takes prece-
dence over all the conditions and conventions of the real
world."[25] Consequently, the novel is amoral in outlook
according to 19th century standards.

The quest is undertaken by the protagonist or the anti-
hero Dorian Gray, who is initiated to beauty and driven to
perverted dandyism by the antagonists, his friends Basil and
Harry. The relationship between the three is that Dorian
represents, for Basil and especially for Lord Henry, an
object of study. Basil, on the one hand, uses him for his
art, portrays him in many paintings, and exploits the beauty
of the lad for his individual aesthetic purposes without
giving much in return: "Dorian Gray is to me simply a
motive in art."[26] Lord Henry, on the other hand, represents
the most influential, almost mephistophelian antagonist, one who
uses Dorian Gray for the exploitation of his fancies:
". . . Certainly Dorian Gray was a subject made to his hand,
and seemed to promise rich and fruitful results . . . He
would be a wonderful study."[27] Provided with these pre-
suppositions, it is apparent that the hero becomes an anti-
hero, not by intention but by consequence, an important dis-
tinction which Ulrike Weinhold proposes in her analysis.[28]

Dorian Gray turns into a submissive student of Lord Henry
to the degree that he practices his lessons with more ardour
than his master.

Yet, one aspect of the novel is still missing in this
description, namely that which makes the narrative grotesque
and demonic. It is the function of the portrait which Basil
has done of Dorian and which represents the true antagonist
in the plot. The portrait has received the soul of the pro-
tagonist who has therewith bought himself eternal youth--
but not eternal redemption from sin. The portrait becomes
the focus of Dorian's attention once he has realized that his
actions influence the appearance of the painting and alter
it from beauty to ugliness. It becomes "the visible emblem
of conscience."[29] Thus Dorian Gray, "under the tutelage of
Lord Wotton, takes pleasure not so much in enjoyment of the
moment as in watching the effect of the moment upon himself."[30]

The story of hedonistic slavery begins in the exclusive,
aesthetically decorated studio of Basil Hallward. Reality
is banned from his property, instead an artificial atmosphere
dominates in the domicile. "The commonest thing is delight-
ful if one only hides it,"[31] he says to Lord Henry, his en-
tertaining eccentric friend. The latter practises this
rule in a similar sense, for he is the only main character
of the plot who is married, yet for him "the one charm of
marriage is that it makes a life of deception absolutely
necessary for both parties."[32] His wife is to him what the

easel is to Basil: an object which allows the individual to
create artificial appearances. For Lord Henry "being
natural is simply a pose, and the most irritating pose I
know."[33] Anything in accordance with normal moral conven-
tions is condemned by those who adhere to a "decadent"
appearance. In addition, Lord Henry pursues an exceptional
indifferentism, which makes him the only one immune to the
consequences of such practices. The subject of interest
for both characters is Dorian Gray, who is introduced in the
text in chapter two, after his path has been set to become
an object of beauty as indicated before. Dorian immediately
falls under the influence of Lord Henry, who clearly points
out the consequences of influence to the lad:

> There is no such thing as a good influence, Mr.
>
> Gray. All influence is immoral . . . Because to
>
> influence a person is to give him one's own soul.
>
> He does not think his natural thoughts, or burn
>
> with his natural passions. His virtues are not
>
> real to him. His sins, if there are such things
>
> as sins, are borrowed. He becomes an echo of
>
> some one else's music, an actor of a part that
>
> has not been written for him.[34]

Scrupulously Lord Henry pursues this theory and truly trans-
forms Dorian into an echo of himself. Dorian becomes an
actor of a part with which he completely identifies to the
degree that it transforms his personality.

Another significant influence derives from an abstract object; it is the realization of his own beauty which Dorian perceives upon regarding the finished portrait of himself. "The sense of his own beauty came on him like a revelation. He had never felt it before."[35] This sensation is the cause of his crucial desire that only the picture might grow old and his own youthful beauty remain unchanged for ever. It is the moment when Dorian sells his soul and becomes an ardent disciple of dandyism and aesthetic living, when he begins to be fashioned into "a marvelous type."[36]

Once possessor of the painting, Dorian adheres to his narcissistic cult and lives with his counterfeit. The first change, which reveals the demonic nature of the portrait, is caused by love, i.e. by the disappointment that natural love alters acted love. Dorian had intended to marry the young talented actress Sibyl Vane, but upon realizing that her talent vanished through true love he leaves her--to suicide. She, too, was considered an artefact for pleasure, not an individual human being. From this deception on, Dorian follows the advice of Lord Henry, to whom women are but a "decorative sex"[37] and romance a habit of living. Dorian quickly comprehends his powers. "You will always be loved, and you will always be in love with love. A grande passion is the privilege of people who have nothing to do,"[38] says Harry and Dorian puts in into practice. Therewith he turns into an object of experimentation for Lord Henry, who

delights in his new "creation," who delights in inverting
Victorian values: "It was clear to him that the experi-
mental method was the only method by which one could arrive
at any scientific analysis of the passions."[39]   Ulrike
Weinhold states in this context:

> Sein /Henry's/ Verhältnis zu Dorian besteht
> darin, an ihm durch verbale Beeinflussung seine
> eigene ästhetisch-sensuelle Lebensauffassung zu
> realisieren, also seine Lebenskonzeption am
> lebendigen Experiment zu verifizieren . . .
> Dorian lebt Henry den sensuellen Ästhetizismus
> vor, so daß Henry die Erlebnisse und Empfindungen
> Dorians zum Anlaß für eigene Empfindungen machen
> kann, also eine Art sensuellen Ästhetizismus
> aus zweiter Hand praktiziert.[40]

This analysis points out the extent of Henry's egoistic
spectacle. However, neither Henry nor Basil realize the
fact that form and content are not congruent in Dorian.
Both seek an ideal and both are deceived. For Basil the
deception is fatal. He is killed by his friend, and there-
with Dorian turns also into a deception for Henry, whose own
unfortunate fate is foreshadowed when his wife deserts him.
Basil had committed the mistake of identifying soul and
exterior appearance, as well as the person with the portrait,
i.e. life with art. Although Basil had despised sensual
aestheticism he had unconsciously practised the principles

of form without content and had thus contradicted himself.
Basil had turned reality into an artefact which had des-
troyed him.

Despite the strong dependence on his environment, Dorian
tries a few times to escape his evil path and to lead a nor-
mal life. But his naïveté does not allow him to recognize
the meaning of his decisions. In the early part of his life,
for example, he writes a letter to Sybil Vane apologizing
for his behaviour, not knowing that the letter was addressed
to a girl already dead. However, "when Dorian Gray had
finished the letter, he felt that he had been forgiven."[41]
For him the mere intention settles the matter and a moment
later he again agrees with Lord Henry, who believes that

> good resolutions are senseless attempts to inter-
> fere with scientific laws. Their origin is pure
> vanity. Their result is absolutely nil. They
> give us, now and then, some of those luxurious
> sterile emotions that have a certain charm for
> the weak.[42]

Towards the end of his life, Dorian Gray renounces pleasure
with an innocent country girl in order to save her from evil
consequences and to begin a new life. But in fact he merely
nourishes a dramatic moment and breaks the girl's heart. He
only follows "that passion to act a part that sometimes makes
us do things finer than we are ourselves."[43] He does not
realize that there is no escape from the past, no escape

from the soul. The advantages of eternal youth have turned
his life into a living death. Hence he desires his soul
back at the age of thirty-eight in order to begin a new life.

> A new life! That was what he wanted. That was
> what he was waiting for. Surely he had begun it
> already. He had spared one innocent thing, at any
> rate. He would never again tempt innocence. He
> would be good.[44]

And he would never comprehend the essence of his demonic
pact, one might add, although he finally understands that
"in hypocrisy he had worn the mask of goodness."[45] He
wishes to confess, to suffer public shame, but his fate de-
termines that this can only be done through death. In
stabbing the portrait Dorian kills himself and becomes
"withered, wrinkled, and loathsome of visage."[46] Only the
true artefact survives in eternal beauty.

There is another important influence on Dorian: "a book
bound in yellow paper, the cover slightly torn and the edges
soiled . . . a poisonous book."[47] The work in question is
Joris-Karl Huysmans' A Rebours, as Wilde himself admitted.[48]
Farmer says:

> Le rôle d'A Rebours, on s'en aperçoit, est consi-
> dérable. Toute la mise en oeuvre du "nouvel hédo-
> nisme" dérive de ce roman . . . Suivant de près
> les indications d'A Rebours, Wilde retrace, chez
> son héros, une évolution identique à celle de des
> Esseintes.[49]

The book appears in the narrative in chapter ten, the end of
the first episode of the hero's life. The actual influence,
however, becomes apparent in chapter eleven, after the
passage of some years during which Dorian Gray refined his
life-style. The whole chapter is dedicated to the description
of the hero's fancies and hobbies, his mania for collecting exotic objects as well as his homosexual experiences.
Like Des Esseintes, Dorian establishes a retreated "decadent" paradise in order to serve his ideals. And like Des
Esseintes, Dorian searches distraction in the morbid and
corrupted. When he is not in his "delicately scented chambers"[50] one finds him in an opium den near the docks of
London. Thus his hedonism at the same time drives him to
forget his practices, a paradox of his unresolved narcissism.
Dorian Gray becomes totally addicted to A Rebours, "poisoned"
as Wilde writes. "There were moments when he looked on evil
simply as a mode through which he could realize his conception
of the beautiful."[51] This contradiction characterises the
essence of his existence. At the same time

> Ennui, Melancholie und Angst sind die einzigen
> konstanten Gefühle des dekadenten Ästheten.
> Gerade weil Dorian "den Leiden des Lebens" entgehen will, indem er sich nicht erkennend und
> fühlend von der Wirklichkeit betreffen läßt, muß
> er an der Lebensleere und an der Selbstentleerung
> leiden.[52]

Henry's theory of life proves impossible with Dorian, because
it does not account for crime. His ideal to have the soul
be dominated by the senses turns into an illusion.

Wilde's novel apparently deals with the problem whether
and how spiritual desires can be replaced by sensual desires.
His doctrine represents a cultural longing that arose not
only through cultural migrations but also through the socio-
historical presuppositions of his time and country. Realism
and materialism caused a questioning of the values of
spirit, morale and belief. Sensual aestheticism, however,
was to create a life beyond conventional morals, beyond true
or false and good or evil. Wilde defends this ideal in a
letter to the editor of the Daily Chronicle on June 20, 1890:

> Finally, let me say this--the aesthetic movement
> produced certain colours, subtle in their loveli-
> ness and fascinating in their almost mystical
> tone. They were, and are, our reaction against
> the crude primaries of a doubtless more respect-
> able but certainly less cultivated age. My story
> is an essay on decorative art. It reacts against
> the crude brutality of plain realism. It is
> poisonous if you like, but you cannot deny that
> it is also perfect, and perfection is what we
> artists aim at.[53]

Wilde's form of "decadence" represented an autonomous
system which attempted to equate spirit and morale with

sensual beauty. Wilde interpreted the spiritual sensually
and the sensual spiritually. Such a transformed participa-
tion in reality led to nothingness and turned out to be
merely an illusion, as the novel exemplifies. This result
is partly due to Wilde's particular interpretation of art
for art's sake. He shifted the doctrine more towards "art
for artist's sake," as Barbara Charlesworth points out.[54]
Wilde mentions himself:

> For it is not enough that a work of art should con-
> form to the aesthetic demands of its age: there
> must be also about it, if it is to affect us with
> any permanent delight, the impress of a distinct
> individuality, an individuality remote from that
> of ordinary men.[55]

It was this individuality which made him a specific example
of the doctrine of art for art's sake for the movement during
the "Nineties." And it was The Picture of Dorian Gray which
most particularly embodied his individual form of "decadence,"
more than any other work he had written before or after.
The book does not represent a perfect novel in the ultimate
sense of the genre, but Wilde shows nevertheless a refined
prose style and a strong sense for composition, although his
characters remain rather superficial. Besides the fantastic
story teller, the theoretician of aestheticism and the "deca-
dent" immoralist, he was a writer who tried to create accord-
ing to varied and different formulas. Farmer says that "il

a tenu à définir, en un temps assez insensible à la beauté de la forme, les règles de l'art d'écrire."[56] Yet, more than rules of writing Wilde wanted to refine the awareness of any artist towards beauty. His guiding ideal, which he expressed in the first sentence of the preface added to the text of The Picture of Dorian Gray, was: "The artist is the creator of beautiful things."[57]

The irony hidden in the culmination of Wilde's "decadent" talent was that at the same time the book represented success and inspiration, it was already condemned by the public and led towards the author's humiliating decline. But although Wilde had caused and pursued his own destruction it cannot be called his fault, for the "decadent" has no existential alternative and considers himself not-guilty. Wilde was guilty without guilt. His audacity and impertinence had confronted the late 19th century English society with the daring manifestation of subversive ideas. Again it would be false to call Wilde's sensual spirituality a negative or even a pathological form of "decadence." The "decadent" personality is not amoral per se, "sondern er ist es aus der Konsequenz seiner anders intendierten Lebenskonzeption heraus."[58] Still, Oscar Wilde stood for a revolt against the Victorian era, which needed to defend the last years of its long reign while a new spirit had already begun to take root. "En ces années de fièvre et d'agitation, qui mettent fin à une grande époque mais qui contiennent en germe un ordre

nouveau, l'homme et l'oeuvre prennent ainsi une valeur symbolique."[59] Indeed, this symbolic value represents the significance of Oscar Wilde and the impact he had on the cultural phenomenon of "decadence" taking place throughout Europe. He incarnated a spirit, he transformed influences into a new formula and most of all, he lived his ideas. These aspects make Oscar Wilde an exceptional testimony of the paradigm "decadence."

Notes

[1] Albert J. Farmer, <u>Le Mouvement esthétique et "décadent"</u>
<u>en Angleterre (1873-1900)</u> (Paris: Librairie Ancienne Honoré
Champion, 1931), p. 123.

[2] Wendell V. Harris, "Identifying the Decadent Fiction
of the Eighteen-Nineties," <u>English Fiction in Transition 1880-</u>
<u>1920</u>, vol. 5, No. 5 (Lafayette: Purdue University, 1962),
p. 11.

[3] Farmer, p. 123.

[4] Harris, p. 3.

[5] E.D. Johnson, "The Eighteen Nineties: Perspectives,"
in <u>Wilde and the Nineties. An Essay and an Exhibition</u>, ed.
Charles Ryskamp (Princeton: Princeton University Press,
1966), p. 26.

[6] Ibid., p. 26.

[7] Richard Gilman, <u>Decadence. The Strange Life of an</u>
<u>Epithet</u> (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1979), p. 126.

[8] Farmer, p. 123.

[9] Ibid.

[10] Karl Kopp, "The Origin and Characteristics of
'Decadence' in British Literature of the 1890's,"
<u>Dissertation Abstracts</u>, vol. 24, No 4 (Ann Arbor: University
Microfilms, Inc., 1963), p. 1604.

[11] Mario Praz, The Romantic Agony (London: Oxford University Press, 1933), p. v.

[12] Johnson, pp. 26-27.

[13] Farmer, p. 219.

[14] Richard Ellmann, "The Critic as Artist as Wilde," in Wilde and the Nineties. An Essay and an Exhibition, p. 5.

[15] Oscar Wilde, The Picture of Dorian Gray (Garden City: Dolphin Books, Doubleday & Co., Inc., n.d.), p. 5.

[16] Hesketh Pearson, The Life of Oscar Wilde (London: Methuen & Co. Ltd., 1954), p. 146.

[17] Ibid., p. 145.

[18] Rupert Hart-Davis, ed., The Letters of Oscar Wilde (London: Rupert Hart-Davis Ltd., 1962), p. 352.

[19] Pearson, p. 147. Most sources unidentified.

[20] Farmer, p. 180.

[21] Pearson, p. 145.

[22] Wilde, The Picture of Dorian Gray, p. 7.

[23] Jürgen Sänger, Aspekte dekadenter Sensibilität. J.-K. Huysmans' Werk von "Le Drageoir aux épices" bis zu "A rebours" (Frankfurt am Main, Bern, Las Vegas: Peter Lang, 1978), p. 197.

[24] Christopher S. Nassaar, Into the Demon Universe. A Literary Exploration of Oscar Wilde (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1974), p. 39.

[25] Richard A. Long and Iva G. Jones, "Towards a Definition of the 'Decadent Novel'," College English, vol. 22, No 1 (New

York: Harcourt, Brace & World, Inc., 1960), p. 249.

[26] Wilde, <u>The Picture of Dorian Gray</u>, p. 20.

[27] Ibid., pp. 68 and 85.

[28] Ulrike Weinhold, <u>Künstlichkeit und Kunst in der</u> <u>deutschsprachigen Dekadenzliteratur</u> (Frankfurt am Main, Bern, Las Vegas: Peter Lang GmbH, 1977), p. 102.

[29] Wilde, <u>The Picture of Dorian Gray</u>, p. 101.

[30] Barbara Charlesworth, <u>Dark Passages. The Decadent</u> <u>Consciousness in Victorian Literature</u> (Madison and Milwaukee: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1965), p. 57.

[31] Wilde, <u>The Picture of Dorian Gray</u>, p. 14.

[32] Ibid.

[33] Ibid.

[34] Ibid., p. 27.

[35] Ibid., p. 34.

[36] Ibid., p. 46.

[37] Ibid., p. 58.

[38] Ibid., p. 59

[39] Ibid., p. 68.

[40] Weinhold, p. 106.

[41] Wilde, <u>The Picture of Dorian Gray</u>, p. 106.

[42] Ibid., p. 109.

[43] Ibid., p. 235.

[44] Ibid.

[45] Ibid., p. 236.

[46] Ibid., p. 237.

[47] Ibid., pp. 132 and 134.

[48] Pearson, p. 154.

[49] Farmer, pp. 191 and 190.

[50] Wilde, The Picture of Dorian Gray, p. 138.

[51] Ibid., p. 155.

[52] Weinhold, p. 109.

[53] Richard Ellmann, ed., The Artist as Critic: Critical Writings of Oscar Wilde (London: W.H. Allen, 1970), pp. 246-7).

[54] Charlesworth, p. 65.

[55] Oscar Wilde, "The English Renaissance of Art," Miscellanies (London: Methuen and Co., 1908), p. 251.

[56] Farmer, p. 202.

[57] Wilde, The Picture of Dorian Gray, p. 5.

[58] Weinhold, p. 140.

[59] Farmer, p. 252.

CHAPTER IV

André Gide

With André Gide this chapter returns to the French
literary context of the "fin de siècle," after a specific
English trend has been analyzed. As I pointed out before,
the choice of Oscar Wilde and André Gide does not allow a
chronological sequence following the assumption that the
origins of the topic in question, "décadence," were in
France, since André Gide embodies in a sense an aftergrowth
of the French interpretation of the phenomenon. Oscar
Wilde represented a direct transformation of a paradigm
that had migrated to English literary circles. André Gide,
however, being much younger, became more a disciple of
existing authors in his early years, and he participated in
their forms of "decadence" rather than created an original
doctrine. Therefore the particular interpretation of the
"decadent" notion as Gide incarnated it and as he describes
it in his book Paludes shows traits of slight shifts away
from the strict adherence to the "décadence" of an Anatole
Baju, for example. Not only did Gide relate more to the
circle around Mallarmé and his "symbolist" form of the
"decadent" movement but, after some enthusiastic first publi-
cations, he also obtained an ironic distance which the

narrative chosen for this chapter, Paludes, will illustrate.
In addition, it should be noted that, as in the case of Brod,
"decadence" was but a phase for the young André Gide, who
left "symbolist" aestheticism even before the death of
Mallarmé in 1898. According to Klaus Mann[1], the publication
of Les Nourritures Terrestres in 1897 marked the end of
Gide's participation in the "decadent" movement, which at
that time had lost much of its innovating momentum, although
Gide never abandoned his non-conformist attitude. During
the period of his participation, however, Gide also adhered
to the doctrine of l'art pour l'art, which represented a
recognizable reality for him, an essence of life he shared
with the artists of his time.

Hence at around the age of twenty, Gide began to fre-
quent the élitist circles of the Paris of 1890. He had ob-
tained a thorough humanistic education and had developed a
strong tendency for the creative process in literature.
His heroes at the time belonged to the German and English
Romantic periods. Among them were Keats and Hölderlin,
Coleridge and Novalis, Shelley and Heine, Byron and
Schopenhauer[2], as well as Montaigne, Whitman and Verlaine.
In general, he was very widely read. He had also begun
analysing his identity from an early age, a practice which
resulted in his 1891 publication of Les Cahiers d'André
Walter. This book "is neither a novel nor a treatise nor a
prose poem, but a loose compilation of lyric and philosophic

aperçus, the posthumous - confession, allegedly, of a young

man who was destroyed by an overdose of music, madness,

and meditation."[3] The morbid joys of life of André Walter

clearly are a testimony to the artistic practices that had

grown out of the "decadent" school. Gide's ties with the

"symbolist" movement appeared first in 1892 in his Le Traité

de Narcisse. Paludes then, published in 1895, marks already

the end of this phase in the young author's life. But, as

mentioned above, before outgrowing the movement André Gide

took part in the artistic life of 1890 Paris, the intellec-

tual centre of the "fin de siècle." "The timid young puri-

tan," as Albert Guérard calls him, "attended the salon of

Stéphane Mallarmé, there to discuss how literature could

best avoid the contamination of life . . ."[4] The "symbolist"

followers of Mallarmé despised "naturalism" or any social

criticism that might destroy a work of art, for only the

"Absolute" was acceptable: form, rhythm, colour, sounds.

As Anatole Baju had preached it, they took their mission to

maintain the purity of art seriously. Most of these young

artists had grown out of a secure bourgeoisie and in most

cases could afford leisure, dandyism, or extravagances.

Mystic introversion was a required quality in addition to a

determined defence of art. André Gide's character was well

suited to this environment. Thomas Cordle says:

> Gide's neurotic personality, with its primary
>
> movement toward the sensual and the shameful and

its compensating counter-movement toward purity
and sublimity, disposed him to Decadence even
before he had encountered the chief works of that
tendency. [5]

The young Gide was received together with other "symbolists"
and "decadents" at Mallarmé's Tuesday afternoon gatherings
as well as at Hérédia's more sumptuous Saturday receptions.
Gide refers to these meetings in his early autobiography *Si
le grain ne meurt*:

> Chaque samedi, Hérédia recevait; dès quatre heures
> son fumoir s'emplissait de monde: diplomates,
> journalistes, poètes; . . . C'était aussi le
> jour de réception de ces dames; parfois un des
> assidus passait du fumoir dans le salon, ou vice
> versa; par la porte un instant entr'ouverte, on
> entendait un gazouillement de voix flûtées et de
> rires; . . . Henri de Régnier, Ferdinand Hérold,
> Pierre Quillard, Bernard Lazare, André Fontainas,
> Pierre Louys, Robert de Bonnières, André de Guerne,
> ne manquaient pas un samedi. Je retrouvais les
> six premiers chez Mallarmé, le mardi-soir. De
> tous ceux-ci, nous étions Louys et moi les plus
> jeunes . . . Chez Mallarmé s'assemblaient plus
> exclusivement des poètes; ou des peintres parfois
> (je songe à Gauguin et à Whistler). [6]

Gide explains that the movement was a reaction against

realism as well as against the Parnassians and that the in-
fluence of Schopenhauer, as for Max Brod, was important for
their artistic concept.   In a letter written forty-five
years later, Gide summarizes the aspects of the "decadent"
sensibility during his youth:

> Sous l'influence de Mallarmé, sans trop nous en
> rendre compte, nous étions plusieurs et en pleine
> réaction contre le naturalisme, à n'admettre rien
> que d'absolu /sic7. Nous rêvions, en ce temps, des
> oeuvres d'art en dehors du temps et des "contin-
> gences." Il n'y avait chez nous, à propos des
> questions sociales, point tant ignorance et aveu-
> glement que mépris; un mépris né d'une méprise.
> Tout ce qui n'était que relatif (au temps, aux
> lieux, aux circonstances) nous paraissait indigne
> de l'attention d'un artiste; en tous cas, nous pré-
> tendions maintenir à distance, soigneusement écar-
> tées de l'oeuvre d'art, de notre oeuvre, toutes
> préoccupations épisodiques.[7]

On the one hand, in this statement of the mature Gide the
shortcomings of a cultural phenomenon are admitted. At the
same time he clarifies the developments of a paradigm which
Anatole Baju for the main part had introduced in order to de-
fine the new consciousness of the end of the 19th century. On
the other hand, to take Gide's "critical" explanations for
granted without questioning their veritability would be a

crucial mistake. Since Gide had been a contemporary and
participant of the "decadent" movement, his point of view
necessarily was prone to retrospective fallacy. Hence two
aspects should be taken into consideration when dealing with
Gide's later point of view: From my 1980's critical perspec-
tive I have to acknowledge the existence of actual historical
facts which include the mixture of creative groups of
friends, journals, or individual concepts, among others.
However, at the same time it is necessary to crystallize
the influences, i.e. the type of cultural sensibility these
people and their products belonged to. Therefore, the above
quoted commentary must still be regarded within its parti-
cular circumstances.

Like · Baju's "école décadente" Gide followed the
bohemian fashion of publishing journals, an idea that had
lost some of its originality by that time. Between 1890 and
1895, when little magazines sprang up like mushrooms and
disappeared with equal swiftness, Gide got involved in a
variety of publishing ventures.

> First he founded the little Potache Revue (School-
> boy's Magazine), . . . Then it was La Conque (The
> Shell)--about as short lived and as amateurish as
> its predecessor. As for Le Centaure--following La
> Conque--it could pride itself on original illus-
> trations by Odilon Redon and Puvis de Chavannes.
> At the Revue Blanche, Gide succeeded Léon Blum

as literary critic. At <u>L'Ermitage</u>, he was fellow-
contributor of Rémy de Gourmont . . .[8]

At the <u>Revue Blanche</u>, Gide worked together with Gustave Kahn.
At the same time he wrote six books, one of which, <u>Les Cahiers</u>
<u>d'André Walter</u>, received enthusiastic criticism from
Maeterlinck but condemnation from Huysmans, who considered
the work vulgar. Gide encouraged the genius of Valéry,
maintained personal contacts with Verhaeren, Rodin,
D'Annunzio, Hofmannsthal, Rilke and George. In 1891 he met
for the first time Oscar Wilde who, then a successful author,
came to study the Parisian way of life. In short, André Gide
was not only familiar with his creative countrymen but he
knew of the important contributions to the "fin de siècle"
artistic movement all over Europe. He had been introduced
to British dandyism, the Vienna "New Romantics," the Berlin
circle, and even the "Prager Kreis." He travelled widely
and had an open mind for all new aesthetic theories, philo-
sophies, or ideologies, and this made him a vulnerable but
unique genius and product of his time.

One myth that should quickly be touched upon here is
the question of Gide's morality or rather immorality, his
tendency to pederastry and at the same time his adherence to
strict religious principles, an ambiguity that was a common
part of the "decadent" sensibility at the "fin de siècle."
Pierrot states that "les Décadents découvrent la sexualité,
mais c'est en grande partie pour la refuser, ou du moins

pour refuser ses formes normales."[9]   Thus homosexuality

represents a form of physical pleasure that coincides with

the "decadent" doctrine of anti-naturalism.   Since nature is

supposed to be replaced by the artificial or abnormal, so

the woman is expected to be sophisticated rather than

natural.   These hedonistic aspects are related to the reli-

gious undertakings of the "decadent" aesthetes.   "Ce qu'en

effet les Décadents demandent à la religion, ce n'est pas

seulement le pittoresque d'un décor extérieur, c'est aussi

un moyen de renouveler une sensualité blasée."[10]   Out of

such an ecclesiastic-sexual ambiguity evolved a sentiment of

guilt which, together with the anti-natural attitude, was con-

sequential for the "decadent" sensibility.   A sort of catho-

lic aestheticism developed during the 1880s, a fashion which

almost made believers out of atheists.

> Des artistes, dont la majorité sont foncièrement
>
> incroyants, ont recours, dans une intention par-
>
> fois profanatoire, à des thèmes catholiques et aux
>
> aspects extérieurs de la religion et du culté,
>
> considérés d'un point de vue uniquement esthétique,
>
> même si déjà existe en arrière-plan une nostalgie
>
> diffuse du surnaturel.[11]

The early André Gide must be regarded from this contextual

angle, without, however, ending up by labelling him, as

Mario Praz, for example, tends to do.   After having clarified

that Gide's work was rooted in the "decadent" movement, Praz

continues his analysis by presenting as typicalities in
Gide a variety of labels such as "psychological ambiguity,"
"sadistic pleasure," "martyr of pederastry," or "diabolic
mysticism."[12]   Rather than focussing on the constructive con-
sequences of his personality, destructive connotations are
emphasized.

Gide descended from a wealthy, bourgeois family of
Catholic as well as Protestant confession. Although educated
in the Protestant religion, Catholicism intrigued him and in-
fluenced his thinking. Confronted with such ambiguity, his
life became a challenge and a mystery from an early age on.
At the same time, like his "decadent" contemporaries, Gide
denied and mocked the bourgeois institutions, for he asso-
ciated more with aristocratic dignity and eccentricities.
Gide nourished the extreme and changed aspirations from day
to day, from religious feelings to ecstasies of carnal lust.
As Mann puts it, "he posed as the immoralist but was con-
stantly preoccupied with moral issues."[13] The same discre-
pancy is reflected by his platonic marriage with his cousin
Madeleine Pondeaux, whom he admired and cherished while at
the same time he followed his weakness for charming Arab
boys. This tendency made Gide an outcast of the general
moral code of his society.

> He was therefore obliged to demonstrate a Law
> which would justify his anomaly and admit his most
> contradictory impulses. He was equally incapable

of casual hedonism and of untroubled puritanism
and constantly oscillated between order and
anarchy--until at last he made the very state of
oscillation the foundation of a new ethic.[14]

But Gide remained a riddle for the public. The Nouvelle
Revue Française claimed that his work was "the most revolting
moral and intellectual scandal of the century."[15] For many
Gide was an evil influence and he was condemned and despised
like Oscar Wilde in England. Even literary criticism became
preoccupied to a large extent with Gide's homosexuality.
Consequently, the author's life and work turned into a dis-
torted legend which in many cases no longer differentiated
between the essential and the non-essential. Among other
critics, Planche in his psychological interpretation of Gide,
tries to correct this legend:

> Nous voudrions simplement remarquer que l'homo-
> sexualité n'a pas eu, même dans la propre vie de
> Gide, l'importance qu'il lui a prêtée et qu'elle
> n'a pas cet aspect triomphant et joyeux qu'il a
> cherché parfois à lui donner. Elle est, et reste
> une maladie, un manque, une souffrance et un drame.
> Jamais Gide n'a connu cette plénitude de satisfac-
> tion qui engage à la fois toute la capacité de
> jouissance des sens et toute la capacité d'affec-
> tion d'une personne humaine et qui s'appelle et
> mérite seule de s'appeler l'amour.[16]

This critic rightly warns of too rapid diagnosticism and thus of classification. Gide does not fall into a prescribed pattern. He went through ideological transformations and aesthetic fluctuations and grew into a respectable philosopher. However, this chapter is only concerned with his youth. The young Gide's *Paludes*, which was published during this period of active aesthetic preoccupation, already indicates a distancing irony pointing toward a transformation, a more mature stage. Nevertheless, Gide then participated in a cultural movement in France under the auspices of his "decadent" masters and therewith embodies, besides Oscar Wilde and Max Brod chosen for this thesis, a particular signified of the signifier "décadence."

The narrative *Paludes* appeared in 1895 at the Librairie de l'Art Indépendant, after it had occupied the author's mind for a long time. The work was finished in the seclusion of the Swiss mountains where Gide's doctor had sent him for recovery from symptoms of tuberculosis. It was written in a state of mind of utter frustration and self-estrangement of which his autobiography gives ample testimony:

> Je rapportais, à mon retour en France un secret de
> ressuscité, et connus tout d'abord cette sorte
> d'angoisse abominable que dut goûter Lazare
> échappé du tombeau. Plus rien de ce qui m'occu-
> pait d'abord ne me paraissait encore important.
> Comment avais-je pu respirer jusqu'alors dans cette

> atmosphère étouffée des salons et des cénacles,
> où l'agitation de chacun remuait un parfum de
> mort? . . . Un tel état d'estrangement (dont je
> souffrais surtout auprès des miens) m'eût fort
> bien conduit au suicide, n'était l'échappement
> que je trouvai à le décrire ironiquement dans
> Paludes.[17]

Gide was no longer sure of his role and his identity among
the others. Although he had declared previously that every-
body had his place on earth he had not experienced many
transformations yet.

> Je me persuadais que chaque être, ou tout au moins:
> que chaque élu, avait à jouer un rôle sur la terre,
> le sien précisément, et qui ne ressemblait à nul'
> autre; de sorte que tout effort pour se soumettre
> à une règle commune devenait à mes yeux trahison;
> . . . Au vrai, j'étais grisé par la diversité de
> la vie, qui commençait à m'apparaître, et par ma
> propre diversité . . .[18]

The creative process that made Gide produce Paludes at the
same time made him realize that against his will he had been
directed by social patterns. The awareness of his diversity
saved him from being captured in this mill and made him
change direction. Therefore, Paludes is "a parody of Gide's
symbolist period;"[19] "Paludes est une satire où perce le dé-
goût pour les lettres et pour les milieux littéraires; tels

que Gide venait de les voir;"[20] _Paludes_ is a "satire, donc, du monde d'ici, la 'vraie vie' étant ailleurs. Mais aussi satire de soi-même, de ce qu'il a été, de ce qu'il est encore et dont il veut se purifier;"[21] _Paludes_ shows "hilarious self-irony . . . where the most acrid criticism is mitigated by a hearty laughter;"[22] it is a "satire on a cloistered literary life;"[23] or as Gide says himself in his dedication: "J'écrivis cette satire de quoi."[24] _Paludes_, then represents an ironic counterpart of "l'école décadent," a demystification of a movement that began to stagnate, without, however, the author being totally freed from its influences and essences. In _Paludes_, Gide recapitulates "decadent" themes, imagery and outlook by means of which he exposes a sterile life in a sterile milieu, an atmosphere of suffocation and stagnation. _Paludes_ is therefore a work of transition. "Decadent" in its content, yet avant-garde in its style, the narrative is slightly beyond the actual movement of "décadence" in France. However, it contains the Gidean dualism of distancing and at the same time of being part of an attitude. Gide

> wanted to be . . . a 'demoralizer--a destroyer, that is, of pragmatist pretense, of abstract or inherited authority, and of flattering self-delusion. He wanted to throw open all questions which men are tempted to consider closed; to challenge all received opinions, all restrictive institutions,

all a priori notions concerning the nature of
man.[25]

Although transitory, <u>Paludes</u> remains part of the general
sensibility, of particular thoughts, which characterize the
works of Gide. It is a part of those themes above that are
resumed, varied, and amplified but that remain the product
of a particular cultural movement. Although Gide despised
this movement later, it shaped the author and his work. He
remained preoccupied with the theme of moral revolt through-
out his career.

The narrative centers around a young man who is writing
a book called <u>Paludes</u>, "which is the story of Tityre who lives
contentedly alone in a marsh and desires nothing more than a
closer assimilation to his milieu."[26] The narrator explains
that the name Tityrus derives from Virgil. He says:
"<u>Paludes</u> c'est l'histoire d'un homme qui, possédant le champ
de Tityre, ne s'efforce pas d'en sortir, mais au contraire
s'en contente; voilà . . ."[27] This state of being is what
the narrator has undertaken to change. "By portraying con-
tentment in a life of intolerable boredom, /he wishes/ to
inspire discontent in his audience."[28]

> . . . c'est parce que Tityre est content que moi
> je veux cesser de l'être. Il faut qu'on s'indigne
> au contraire. Je vais rendre Tityre méprisable à
> force de résignation.[29]

This indicates also the theme de "l'acte libre" which Gide's

narrator points out at the banquet and pursues throughout the text: "Ce n'est pas des actes que je veux faire naître, c'est de la liberté que je veux dégager . . . ."[30]

The text has the form of a journal, covering six days from Tuesday to Sunday. Additionally, each day has a title or a "dedication" to a particular person like Hubert and Angèle. The narrative is even more intertwined, for as Germaine Brée points out, "Gide, dans Paludes, nous présente un héros qui tient un agenda, écrit des notes en vue d'un roman, écrit un roman au sujet d'un héros qui tient un journal."[31] The narrative is written in the first person singular. The narrator is never identified and remains mysteriously nameless until he explains to Hubert: "Je suis Tityre et solitaire," and later when he answers to Martin's question about a name on a piece of paper: "'Qui c'est, Tityre?' Je répondis: '--c'est moi'"[32] By thus responding the narrator merges with his own story of a bachelor who lives in a tower surrounded by marshes, the story of one who cannot travel and who lives in a monotonous pseudo-reality. Paludes, in effect, is a book within a book. Gide as well as his ridiculous hero are writing Paludes. Thus it appears as if Gide "pokes fun at his own double--a Parisian 'décadent' who has lost the ability to do anything, to make any decision--all entangled in the labyrinth of his psychological complications."[33] Gide mocks the neurotic aesthete, and the narrator, too, makes fun of the follies and

tribulations of his compatriots. However, the irony sur-
rounding the narrator is that he never seems to finish his
work, or rather he never finishes finishing his work. He is
a writer who doesn't write but instead supplies interpreta-
tions of his work according to the tastes of each inquirer,
because he thinks that the only way of communicating the
same thing to everyone is to modify it according to the
peculiarities of each: "Mais comprenez, je vous prie, que
la seule façon de raconter la même chose à chacun,--la même
chose, entendez-moi bien, c'est d'en changer la forme selon
chaque nouvel esprit."[34] Everything centers around the idea
of stagnation which makes the work almost an "anti-novel"
or "anti-novella." The lives of the characters in Paludes
are trapped in a milieu which is governed by boring little
routines, by artificial artistry and paralyzing traditions.
The agenda kept by the narrator best symbolizes this sense-
less way of life, an ironically planned existence:

> Tenir un agenda; écrire pour chaque jour ce que
> je devrai faire dans la semaine, c'est diriger
> sagement ses heures. On décide ses actions soi-
> même; on est sûr, les ayant résolues d'avance et
> sans gêne, de ne point dépendre chaque matin de
> l'atmosphère . . . j'écris huit jours à l'avance,
> pour avoir le temps d'oublier et pour me créer
> des surprises, indispensables dans ma manière de
> vivre; chaque soir ainsi je m'endors devant un

lendemain inconnu et pourtant déjà décidé par moi-
même. Dans mon agenda il y a deux parties: sur
une feuille j'écris ce que je ferai, et sur la
feuille d'en face, chaque soir, j'écris ce que
j'ai fait. Ensuite je compare; je soustrait, et
ce que je n'ai pas fait, le déficit, devient ce
que j'aurais dû faire.[35]

In practice, this planning turns out to be less complicated:
"Sur l'agenda, sitôt levé je pus lire: tâcher de se lever à
six heures. Il était huit heures; je pris ma plume; je
biffai; j'écrivis au lieu: se lever à onze heures.--Et je
me recouchai, sans lire le reste."[36] The ridiculed monotony
and the sentiment of estrangement appear as a "leitmotiv"
throughout the text. They become apparent especially in the
relationships of the narrator, who gives summaries of the
senseless lives of his bourgeois friends Hubert and Richard,
and who attentively clarifies that his friendship with
Angèle is merely platonic and sterile, although she would
like at times to change those conditions.

'Ce soir, je resterai, dit-elle; --voulez-vous?'
Je m'écriai: 'O! voyons, chère amie!--Si mainte-
nant l'on ne peut plus vous parler de ces choses,
sans que tout de suite . . .--Avouez d'ailleurs
que vous n'en avez pas grande envie;--puis vous
êtes, je vous assure, délicate . . . Non chère
amie,--non--nous pourrions en être gênés;--j'ai

même fait à ce sujet quelques vers:

Nous ne sommes pas,

Chère, de ceux-là

Par qui naissent les fils des hommes.[37]

Bertalot indicates that "ces vers dénoncent une étrange pré-
monition de la situation anormale qui existera un jour entre
. . . /Gide/ et Angèle-Emmanuèle."[38] Without turning towards
biographical interpretation it is clear that the narrator of
Paludes avoids getting involved but estimates Angèle highly
and attempts desperately to change their lives in order to
be liberated:

'L'émotion que me donna ma vie c'est celle-là que

je veux dire: ennui, vanité, monotonie . . . nos

vies, je vous assure, Angèle, sont encore bien

plus ternes et médiocres.'--'. . . Quelle monoto-

nie! recommençai-je--après un silence. Pas un

événement!--Il faudrait tâcher de remuer un peu

notre existence.'[39]

Unfortunately, the initiative he undertakes to solve the
problem consists but in a long planned trip to the suburbs
of Paris with Angèle on Saturday. The escape-excursion is
rained out and cannot be extended because they have to be
back for Sunday church, religious correctness being part of
their moral framework.

One of the highlights of Paludes is the social satire
that Gide delivers about Angèle's literary soirée:

In her tiny, crowded, airless salon the same
thoughts and phrases pass from mouth to mouth until
they become the common property of all the men of
letters gathered there. These are people who never
travel, who seek no new experiences. They are con-
tent to repeat without end the same stale maxims
and observations. The writer of Paludes attacks
their conplacency and the "malady of retrospection"
that makes them do again and again what they have
already done once; but he is nonetheless one of
them.[40]

In this scene Gide sarcastically remembers the "symbolist"
gatherings which had begun to irritate him some years earlier.
He criticises a "complacent society nourishing itself on its
meager accomplishments and negative virtues; the men of
letters knowing nothing, and aspiring to know nothing, out-
side their own salons . . . ."[41] But even his hero cannot es-
cape that hollowness and lethargy. He does not succeed in
"breaking out of his own marshlands, and becomes Tityre. Like
his hero he /the narrator/ fails because he cannot venture
forth into the unknown; the stagnant atmosphere of his life,
however dull, is nevertheless safely familiar."

Therefore, the only thing the narrator of Paludes re-
solves to do, once his story Paludes is supposedly finished,
is to write another story about a similar topic under the
title Polders. Thomas Cordle explains that "'Polders' are

tracts of marshy land reclaimed from the sea and protected
from it by dikes."[42]   As the title suggests, Polders is but
a variant of the previous book and will also depict a life-
less, shut-in world. This represents the end of Gide's
narrative, whose themes such as ennui, impotence or self-
destruction have made aspects of "decadence" in Paludes
apparent. At the same time Gide has drawn attention to the
consequences of this "decadent" sensibility, because by des-
cribing the monotony of Tityrus and the absurdity of the
narrator Gide has demonstrated to his compatriots the vanity
of their lives and their total lack of freedom. He opposes
comfortable resignation, bourgeois routine and "everything
that reduces the individual to a function or social role."[43]
The irony of Paludes, however, is that its hero, the narrator,
is more bound by habits, memoranda, and conventions than any
other character in the text. The one person the narrator
criticises most, Hubert, is at the same time the only one
capable of breaking out of the closed circle when he decides
to travel to Biskra in North Africa. Hence, Gide dramatises
through irony man's tendency "to become a function, and his
imprisonment by his illusory conception of a coherent and
single self."[44]   Gide mocks the unliberated liberator--and
yet he approves of his doctrine. In Paludes the author
describes the genesis of a work of art, the description of
the soul by means of words. He presents a literary theory
which considers the work of art to be an interpretation of

appearances, i.e. he presents an aesthetic doctrine together with a critique. These two poles of Paludes imply a dialectical process of literary creation, since Gide's aestheticism is initiated by the tensions and contradictions of opposite notions. In Paludes "la création littéraire . . . est définie comme une perpétuelle métamorphose. Tout dans Paludes montre le système complexe d'ambivalences et de réciprocités qui préside à la transformation en oeuvre d'art d'un état d'âme latent."[45]

Nevertheless, it should be noted that although for Gide the domain of art and that of life "sont reliés par un réseau complexe et parfois obscur de correspondances qui s'authentifient mutuellement,"[46] they always remain clearly distinct and separated. The aesthetic utilisation of a work of art counts for Gide, the end-product of the artistic creation which is the culmination point of experiences. Gide fused image and idea, aesthetics and ethics and he thus created "a personal form of fiction that is both challenging and poetic. This form," as Vinio Rossi believes, "first achieved in Paludes, is the modern parable."[47] Undoubtedly, Paludes represents a shift in the aesthetic sensibility of his time which I indicated at the beginning of this chapter. But, to repeat, Paludes is a direct product of the genre of "decadent" literature still adhering to its rules. Paludes contains characteristics of "decadence" such as the attenuation of emotion and its detailed analysis. It contains the

themes of ennui, frustration, and moral confusion, which
are all themes of disintegration and alienation. Instead
of movement, the narrative shows stagnation; it treats the
leisured classes with an élitist penchant and specializes
in situations that are beyond the probabilities of daily
life, refusing current values of their culture and rejecting
present-day (i.e. end 19th century) civilisation. A further
typicality of a "decadent" text, very individualistic in
Paludes, is its conscious form, not just in the sense of
structure, but more in that of language. Paludes is a prime
example of how vocabulary, syntax, or imagery develop in
elaborate patterns, sometimes overshadowing the situation.
As Anatole Baju had preached in Le Décadent, Gide also
followed the principle according to which "le Décadent . . .
né fait rien qui ne soit prémédité, posé, préparé en vue d'un
but unique: l'enquête personnelle."[48] Consequently, I
believe that although Gide was in revolt against the norms
of the "decadent" sensibility he still belonged to the para-
digm of "décadence" pursuing his "enquête personnelle" with
the tools given by a cultural movement coming to its end in
France during the last decade of the 19th century. Gide
arrived at the conviction in Paludes--and reaffirmed it
under the "table des phrases les plus remarquables de Paludes--:
'Il faut porter jusqu'à la fin toutes les idées qu'on sou-
lève.'"[49] With Paludes one particular signified of the signi-
fier "décadence" has exhausted its meaning and has stopped
functioning.

Notes

[1] Klaus Mann, André Gide and the Crisis of Modern Thought (London: Dennis Dobson Ltd., 1948), p. 58.

[2] Authors according to Mann, p. 40.

[3] Ibid., p. 42.

[4] Albert J. Guérard, André Gide (New York: E.P. Dutton & Co., Inc., 1963), p. 4.

[5] Thomas Cordle, André Gide (New York: Twayne Publishers, Inc., 1969), p. 34.

[6] André Gide, Si le grain ne meurt (Paris: Gallimard, 1928), pp. 261-62.

[7] Georges Guy-Grand, André Gide et notre temps (Paris: Gallimard, 1935), p. 86.

[8] Mann, p. 49.

[9] Jean Pierrot, L'Imaginaire décadent (1880-1900) (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1977), p. 157.

[10] Ibid., p. 113.

[11] Ibid., p. 106.

[12] Mario Praz, The Romantic Agony (London: Oxford University Press, 1933), p. 369.

[13] Mann, p. 21.

[14] Guérard, p. 5.

[15] Mann, p. 19. Original source unavailable.

[16] Henri Planche, _Le problème de Gide_ (Paris: Editions Té Qui, 1952), p. 123.

[17] Gide, _Si le grain ne meurt_, pp. 321-22.

[18] Ibid., p. 274.

[19] Vinio Rossi, _André Gide. The Evolution of an Asthetic_ (New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1967), p. 87.

[20] Enrico Umberto Bertalot, _André Gide et l'attente de Dieu_ (Paris: Lettres Modernes Minard, 1967), p. 45.

[21] Claude Martin, _La maturité d'André Gide de "Paludes" à "L'Immoraliste" (1895-1902)_ (Paris: Editions Klincksieck, 1977), p. 61.

[22] Mann, p. 100.

[23] Guérard, p. 194.

[24] André Gide, _Paludes_ (Paris: Gallimard, 1920), p. 7.

[25] Guérard, p. 30.

[26] Cordle, p. 51.

[27] Gide, _Paludes_, p. 16.

[28] George D. Painter, _André Gide. A Critical Biography_ (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1968), p. 23.

[29] Gide. _Paludes_, p. 35.

[30] Ibid., p. 80.

[31] Germaine Brée, _André Gide l'insaisissable protée. Etude critique de l'oeuvre d'André Gide_ (Paris: Société d'édition "Les belles Lettres," 1970), p. 69.

[32] Gide, _Paludes_, pp. 65 and 72.

[33] Mann, p. 44.

[34] Gide, _Paludes_, p. 75.

[35] Ibid., pp. 29-30.

[36] Ibid., p. 103.

[37] Ibid., pp. 133-34.

[38] Bertalot, p. 45.

[39] Gide, _Paludes_, pp. 23 and 42.

[40] Cordle, p. 51.

[41] Ibid.

[42] Ibid., p. 54.

[43] Guérard, p. 70.

[44] Ibid., p. 203.

[45] Brée, p. 92.

[46] Ibid., p. 15.

[47] Rossi, p. 15.

[48] Anatole Baju, _Le Décadent_ (Paris: Anatole Baju, novembre 15-30, 1888), n. pag.

[49] Gide, _Paludes_, p. 137.

Max Brod

This chapter will deal more closely with the question
whether the "fin de siècle" phenomenon of "decadent" litera-
ture occurred merely in France and England, or whether there
was a European genre of "decadent" literature which would
therewith include the German speaking nations. I have al-
ready pointed out previously that a specific process of insti-
tutionalization of an ideology had taken place in Germany in
the 1890s around Stefan George. The reference-book presenta-
tion in the first chapter has shown that "decadence" was
mainly accredited to French and at the most to English artists
but rarely to works from Italy, Austria, or Germany, for ex-
ample. Although the notion of "decadence" was a vast cul-
tural movement, I do not intend to generalize the phenomenon.
The European occurrences of "decadent" literature are charac-
terised not only by similarities but at the same time by
differences, both of which apply to the German context of
this chapter. Furthermore, I wish to remind the reader that
although the "decadent" literary movement represented an im-
portant and fast-spreading phenomenon, it co-existed along
with various other movements, which especially in German
speaking nations were of prior importance. Many "decadent"
German artists later merged with these pre-dominant movements

as was the case with the George-Kreis and their journal
Blätter für die Kunst, for example (see chapter two, page 55),
or as indicated the expressionistic tendencies of Max Brod's
style. For the moment, however, I should like to concentrate
on another stratum, another signified of a cultural phenome-
non called "decadence" which has its roots in the traditions
of Western Civilization and which should not be put off as
a "Modeerscheinung."

The examples of Oscar Wilde and André Gide have shown
two interpretations of "decadence" in literature that had a
strong impact on the genre, on other artists and on society.
The third author in this chapter will move within German
language boundaries. The writer in question, a much neglected
artist whose early links with "decadence" are almost complete-
ly ignored among critics, is Max Brod.

Max Brod was born in 1884 in the three culture city of
Prague which at that time still belonged to the Austrian
Empire. Indeed, he was born when the major phase of the new
artistic movement took place in France and when German lan-
guage literature still strongly adhered to Realism and
Naturalism. Brod turned to and discussed the notion of
"decadence" after it had stirred the English "Nineties,"
after the beginning of "Jugendstil" (named after the journal
Die Jugend which first appeared 1896), and after the "Jung-
Wiener" had come together in the 1890s in Austria. The ideas
of "fin de siècle décadence" seemed to have migrated slowly

across the European continent until they reached the eastern
cultural centre of Prague. Although this seems to be a
rather simplistic explanation, it appears from literary
history that "Dekadenz-Literatur" after its French and
English models had been translated and published was produced
mainly by élitist groups in either Berlin, Munich or Vienna.
Prague belonged to the periphery of the Austrio-German terri-
tories. Its marginal position was partly due to political
discrepancies between the Czechs and the Austrians, and
caused as well by socio-cultural diversifications and con-
flicts between Czech, German and Jewish traditions. Never-
theless, at the end of the century an influential literary
circle developed in the German and German-Jewish part of
the city often called the "Prager Schule." In his autobio-
graphy, Max Brod distinguishes three stages of half-genera-
tions in this "school":, ". . . die Gruppe der Älteren um
Hugo Salus--die mittlere Generation um Leppin und die
Anfänge Rilkes--schliesslich meine Freunde und mich, . . .
zu denen Kafka, Werfel, Urzidil gehörten."[1] However, it
should be noted that a "decadent" school with a specific
program as it was presented previously did not develop in
Prague. The "Prager Schule" was rather a circle of friends
who gathered around their literary interests, exchanging
and criticizing each-other's works without trying to propa-
gate an idea to the public. Max Brod himself modifies the
term "Schule" in his 1966 publication Der Prager Kreis:

> Man spricht seit einiger Zeit viel von einer
> "Prager Schule." Ich finde diesen Begriff nicht
> recht zutreffend. Denn zu einer Schule gehört
> doch wohl ein Lehrer und auch so etwas wie ein
> Schulprogramm. Wir hatten weder den einen noch
> das andere. Ich habe daher absichtlich eine
> Beziehung gewählt, die lockerer, schwankender,
> verschwimmender ist. Ich spreche lieber von
> einem "Prager Kreis."[2]

Furthermore the "decadent" notion in Prague differed from
its predecessors in that it did not influence its authors
for many years. The most remarkable poet who evolved through
this movement was Rainer Maria Rilke. As for Max Brod, his
early prose works represented a youthful stage which he
would completely abandon later by turning towards the Jewish
tradition. Hence, for Brod "decadence" was but an interlude
with few ideological or stylistic consequences as opposed
to most of the authors mentioned so far. Nevertheless,
"decadence" received a particular meaning in his works, a
meaning which he tried to clarify by establishing his in-
dividual association with the term and by creating a new
variant called "indifferentism."

Before turning to Brod's narratives and his new concept,
however, I should like to add a few words on the migration
of the term "décadence" and of the influence of French litera-
ture on the German speaking movement. According to Ulrike

Weinhold, the notion "décadence" was introduced to German

speaking countries by Hermann Bahr's article "Die Décadence,"

published in 1888 in a newspaper, and by Friedrich

Nietzsche's essay "Der Fall Wagner," also published in 1888:

> "Décadence" bezeichnet von nun an im deutsch-
>
> sprachigen Raum alle diejenige Literatur, die
>
> durch Übernahme oder eigene Entwicklung inhalt-
>
> liche und formale Gemeinsamkeiten oder
>
> Ähnlichkeiten mit Vertretern des französischen
>
> Symbolismus oder auch mit Oscar Wilde und den
>
> englischen Präraffaeliten aufwies. Der Ausdruck
>
> bezog sich vor allem auf die "Jung-Wiener" und
>
> den George-Kreis.[3]

Of particular importance in this development were Stefan

George and Richard Dehmel who were the major translators of

Baudelaire, Verlaine, and Mallarmé. Hence, it seems

evident that it was to a large extent the function of these

"intermediaries" that enabled the introduction of the new

movement in Germany and Austria. In that connection Yves

Chevrel points out the problems which the works of J.-K.

Huysmans encountered:

> Ce qui a manqué à Huysmans pour s'imposer en
>
> Allemagne avant 1890 ce fut aussi . . . l'absence
>
> d'un intermédiaire qui se serait consacré à la
>
> propagation de ses oeuvres. Zola, par exemple,
>
> avait bénéficié entre 1879 et 1881 d'une petite

campagne de presse dans la <u>Frankfurter Zeitung</u>,
grâce à M.-G. Conrad, qui résidait alors à Paris.
Mais la critique littéraire, avant 1890, est sou-
vent tenue par les représentants des anciennes
générations, qui ont du mal à admettre l'évolu-
tion moderne. La situation va se modifier à par-
tir des années 90. En effet, parmi les journa-
listes qui se rendent à Paris vers ces années se
trouvent deux critiques qui vont prendre conscience
de la signification de l'oeuvre huysmansienne et
surtout de son caractère exemplaire: un Autrichien,
Hermann Bahr (né en 1863) et Ola Hansson (né en
1860), Suédois résidant à Berlin.[4]

Soon after their stay in Paris during the late 80's, transla-
tions of Huysmans' works appeared and had a great impact on
the German speaking artists. They discovered in him a new
type of writer, a new generation for which naturalism was
but a point of departure. Authors like Leopold von Andrian,
Stefan George, Hugo von Hofmannsthal and Max Brod among
others were inspired by Huysmans. As a consequence the
development of the notion of "décadence" in Germany and
Austria was quite different to those in France and England.
Although philosophers like Schopenhauer, Nietzsche and
Wagner were important factors in the crystallization process
of the German movement, it depended much on exterior influ-
ences as regards literary content and form; less important

was dandyism or the moral aspect in general which was so decisive in England. Despite this development, the commentaries of Fanny Johnson seem rather unsupportable. She says in her book <u>The German Mind</u>, 1922, an introduction to German culture via their literature from 1870-1914, that

> Germans have ever been good imitators; they took no shame in the fact that they got their men's fashions from London, their women's from Paris, and their literary style--anywhere. . . . Essentially they are a people who love to think, to contemplate and criticise rather than to act.[5]

Such polemic does not change the fact that German "Dekadenz-Literatur" might have been less original in the French sense, yet nevertheless it created its own form of "décadence."

Undoubtedly, an essential condition for the development of the "fin de siècle" movement in Germany and Austria was the youth of its participants. At a time of political instability and transition from monarchy to democracy, the young German artists were sensitive to any innovation. Theobald Ziegler writes:

> Jung war dann weiter auch das Revolutionäre und Unhistorische dieser neuen Richtung, ihre Abkehr von allem traditionell Geltenden, namentlich auch in der Sitte. Allem Konventionellen erklärte man den Krieg, die Substanz der Sittlichkeit löste man auf und forderte für sich das Recht, fessellos

sich auszuleben in seiner Eigenart. Die sozial-

demokratische Kritik am Bestehenden verband sich

mit Nietzsches Moralskeptizismus und mit seinem

extremen Individualismus.[6]

Although applicable, those notions seemed to have less
"Sturm und Drang" inherent in their Prague parallel. For Max
Brod at least, it was rather Schopenhauer who influenced his
youthful thinking. He said himself:

Seit dem Jahre 1900 . . ., seit meinem 16.

Lebensjahr also, hatte mich Schopenhauer völlig

in seinen Bann genommen. . . . alles wurde von der

Frage überschattet: 'Ist der menschliche Wille

frei? Oder wird er, wie Schopenhauer sagt,

'nezessitiert,' mit Notwendigkeit zu seinen

Entschliessungen gebracht?'[7]

Later, as a consequence of other experiences, Brod turned
away from this pessimism, "/dieser/ Lehre, daß der menschliche
Willensentschluß wie alles übrige Wirken und Tun in der Welt
zur Unfreiheit verurteilt sei, es sei denn, daß der Wille
die Welt 'verneine' . . ."[8] Yet, before renouncing this
pessimistic world-view it helped to initiate in Brod a new
conception which he called "Indifferentismus." In this per-
sonal "Weltanschauung" he saw

das Böse wie das Gute gleich preisenswert ("Omnia

admirari") und gleich berechtigt, weil auf gleiche

Weise zwanghaft kausiert . . . . Wir haben keine

Möglichkeit zu wählen. Wir sind der Kausal-

kette, dem grausamen Apparat verfallen, den Kafka

die "Totenschlägerkette" nennt.[9]

Despite the fact that this term was the result of a general

cultural atmosphere, this interpretation can only be attri-

buted to Brod. Paul Raabe says: "Dieser Ismus ist also

keine allgemeine literarische oder geistige Strömung, sondern

der Beitrag eines Autors zu der passiven Grundhaltung einer

ästhetizistisch überzüchteten Zeit."[10]

The word "indifferentism" itself, however, was not in-

vented by Brod. Its meaning was merely transformed and

adapted to his individual conception. Without reiterating

the critical research pattern of the first chapter, I shall

quickly glance at the definition of "indifferentism" in

official dictionaries in order to clarify why the concept

represented another signified within the structure of "dé-

cadence."

The earliest reference to this term I came across is in

the American The Century Dictionary of 1889.[11] It states

under "indifferentism": "1) Systematic indifference; avoid-

ance of choice or preference; specifically, the principle that

differences of religious belief are essentially unimportant;

adiaphorism . . . 2) In metaph., the doctrine of absolute

identity; the doctrine that to be in idea or thought and to

exist are one and the same thing . . ." The Oxford English

Dictionary of 1933 mentions: ". . . ⟦.⟧ . . . f. F.

indifférentisme (Littré) _7 1) A spirit of indifference professed and practised . . . esp. the principle that differences of religious belief are of no importance; adiaphorism; absence of zeal or interest in religious matters . . . 2) Metaph. 1866 Monsell in Contemp. Rev. 1.33: Hence arises a third form of philosophy, which, for want of a better name, we will call Indifferentism, as being a system in which the characteristic differences of mind and matter are supposed to disappear, being merged in s.th. higher than both. 3) Biol. 'term originally applied to the cond. of the sexual glands at the time of the development, when parts of them are common to both sexes (Syd. Soq. Lex. 1886)." In Französisches Etymologisches Wörterbuch, 1952, Walther von Wartburg states under "indifférentisme: m., 'indifference, erigée en système, en matière politique ou religieuse' (seit 1750, Nouv. Bibl. Germ. 6, 23; Ritter)." Ernst Klein, on the other hand, mentions in A Comprehensive Etymological Dictionary of the English Language, 1966, for the adjective "indifferent, adj. - L. indifferens, gem. - entis, 'indifferent, similar; neither good nor evil 'fr. in-, 'not,' and differēns, pres. part. of differre, 'to differ.' Derivatives: indifferent, n; indifferent - ism, n. indifferentist, n; indifferently, adv." The Grand Larousse de la langue française, 1975, gives further etymological references: "indifférentisme (de indifférentiste, celui qui accepte tous les dogmes religieux /1721, Trévoux7. dér. de indifférent;

1750, Ritter, les Quatre Dictionnaires /en religion; en

politique, 1869, Amigues/). Volonté systématique de ne

pas se prononcer en religion ou en politique: Faire pro-

fession d'indifférentisme." The Duden, 1977, merely writes:

"Indifferentismus - indifferente Haltung, Einstellung; das

Uninteressiert sein, Gleichgültig sein." Meyer's Enzyklo-

pädisches Lexikon, 1972, however, is more thorough: "In-

differenz: Ununterschiedenheit, Ununterscheidbarkeit;

insbesondere Gleichgültigkeit gegen bestimmte (religiöse,

eth.) Weltvorstllungen und Normen (Indifferentismus), in der

Identitätsphilosophie Schellings Terminus zur Bestimmung des

Absoluten, des höchsten Prinzips im Kontext als '1. von Natur

und Geist, von Objekt und Subjekt,' das--ähnlich der

Coincidentia oppositorum alle Gegensätze umfassend--in-

haltlich ununterschieden und ununterscheidbar und daher

weder real noch ideal bestimmbar ist." Webster's Third New

International Dictionary of the English Language, 1961 and

1966, essentially repeats what has been mentioned already

for the word "indifferentism." So does Brockhaus Enzyklo-

pädie, 1970, and the American Heritage Dictionary, 1970, both

of which have entries for "indifferent" only, but expand on

variants. Other reference books are completely "indifferent"

to the term and do not list it in the first place.

This short glance at the reference book interpretations

of the term "indifferentism" leads to the conclusion that the

adjective "indifferent" is of Latin origin and that the noun

"indifférentisme" was derived from the adjective in France
during the 18th century, migrating later to England and
Germany. Its essential meaning centers around the prin-
ciple that differences of religious belief are of no im-
portance, as well as the philosophical concept according to
which differences between mind and matter should not exist
but that mind and matter should unify to something beyond
that. "Indifferentism" also applies to political undecided-
ness and in a more general sense it indicates an indifferent
attitude or opinion. For Max Brod, however, the meaning of
"indifferentism" extended to a more existential philosophy.
For him all forms of existence, either good or evil, de-
pended on the same laws of causality, which rendered life
senseless, for man had no choice. He saw a "circulus
vitiosus" out of which there was no escape. "Indifferentism"
seemed the appropriate form of survival. This pessimistic
world-view reflected both the influence of Schopenhauer as
well as the general atmosphere at the change of the century,
the "Untergangsstimmung," the revolt against the bourgeois
system, against superficiality, against traditions, against
senseless human relations and the relativity of judgements.
For Brod, "Indifferentismus" best captured the sense of the
time, the sense of "décadence." Therefore, his contribution
to the general cultural phenomenon consisted neither of
dandyism nor of a journal, but of a concept with which
"decadent" characteristics were to be clarified. Hence,

"indifferentism" represented an additional signified that
enriched the concept of "décadence."

Although Schopenhauer played an important part in the
influence of Brod's ideas, French authors like Laforgue and
Huysmans--already mentioned before--, and indirectly Wilde
and Beardsley also contributed to the young author's forma-
tion, as soon as their works were translated and migrated,
so to speak, across the continent. Brod mentioned, "Ich
lebte allein, unabhängig in meinen Anschauungen, selbständig,
orientierte mich an Goethe, an George und an den Franzosen
(Flaubert, Jules Laforgue, Rimbaud), . . ."[12] Later he read
Huysmans together with Kafka. His own literary reputation,
however, began with his first book Tod den Toten, Novellen
des Indifferenten, a collection of novellas written between
1902 and 1906, as well as his novel Schloß Nornepygge, der
Roman des Indifferenten, written between 1903 and 1908. The
first received "erstaunlich starke Beachtung, die Zustimmung
von Max Mell, Felix Braun, Stefan Zweig, /Franz/ Blei,"
and the latter created "unerwartetermaßen in Berlin einen
Kreis leidenschaftlich debattierender Leser, mit Kurt Hiller
an der Spitze . . ."[13] The political orientation of the
Berlin circle, their Bohème-spirit and their openness towards
new art made Schloß Nornepygge a sensation. In Vienna,
however, it was misunderstood. The group of the "New-
Romantics" disagreed with the book, because their ideological
framework was disoriented, it seems, from presentiments of

political changes occurring in Brod's work, which caused defiance rather than sympathetic understanding. Thus the reception of Brod's form of "décadence" differed in the German-speaking cultural centers. As for Prague, the percentage of German artists and of a potential readership represented a minority within a minority. Around 1900, 35,000 Germans of which 10,000 were Christian and 25,000 Jewish lived among 415,000 Czechs.[14] Therefore the reception of literary productions was limited to a small and élitist group which relied on the German cultural centers because their own culture was increasingly replaced by that of the Czech (whose independence movement was finally rewarded in 1918). In this doomed cultural mixture, the "Prager Kreis" was an island of creativity which in a sense helped the city move toward its new national identity. Margàrita Pazi mentioned: "Der literarische Hochstand in Prag erwuchs aus der Vermengung von Dakadenz und Aufblühen, aus dem Verfall des Alten und dem Aufbau des Neuen zu einem völlig neuen Bewußtsein, zu einer nationalen und geistigen Reife."[15] It is in this socio-historical and cultural context that Max Brod wrote his novellas and novels. I shall subsequently look at a selection of his early publications Tod den Toten, (11 novellas, 1906), Experimente, (4 novellas, 1907), and Schloß Nornepygge, (1908).

Tod den Toten was written under the motto "nil admirari!" and the novella Indifferentismus of the same collection under

the motto "omnia admirari!," an opposition of concepts which underlines the essence of Brod's "décadence": everything is the same, regardless of whether one admires everything or nothing. In <u>Tod den Toten</u> the protagonist Gottfried Tock, a billionaire in Berlin, attempts to reveal the laws inherent in the process of art-production and art-reception. He tries to find his identity within that process and collects the most valuable art objects which he stores in a room that was designed as a theatre. In this absurd theatre dusty art objects represent actors and spectators at the same time, annihilating each other and being forgotten. Tock considers old art an anachronism which he wishes to destroy, for the admiration of the dead kills the spirit of life and the sense of existence: "Nieder mit diesem Pack, das sich aus den Gräbern in unsere Luft drängt! In die Grüfte zurück, ihr halbverwesten Pestherde! (taumelnd) Tod den Toten! Tod den Toten!"[16] In effect, however, Tock is part of his own collection, doomed to die, because he himself has fled life and become a disillusioned "statue." Realizing this Tock blows up his home, his collection and dies in the flames of the past. He represents, as Raabe says: ". . . die Desillu-sionierung eines von Kunst überfütterten, die Reaktion eines Menschen, der die Anhäufung geistiger Traditionen nicht mehr ertragen kann und darin erstickt."[17]

The novella is written in a drama-like form without the use of the "story within a story" technique, i.e. a

"Rahmenhandlung"; the latter is replaced instead by a stage-setting-like introduction. The narrative itself consists of a dialogue between Gottfried Tock and Karl Winter, an idealistic student from Prague, who visits the old friend of his father. Brod writes in the present tense and carefully increases the suspense with a dynamic style towards the catastrophic end. The atmosphere resembles that of Rodenbach's Bruges-la-morte. The rooms of the house are dim, spooky, despite bright daylight, and they are filled with most controversial objects, unharmoniously piled together:

> Man findet neben primitiven Einrichtungsstücken
> zum täglichen Gebrauche halbvermoderte Diwans mit
> fürstlichen Wappen, süßlich duftende Gobelins,
> rahmenlose Bilder, schmutzige Venetianerspiegel,
> allerlei Sevresporzellen auf einem gotischen
> Altarbruchstück. All dies ist varitätenartig,
> pietätslos, ja mit einer Art raffinierter Barbarei
> aufgeschichtet. Eine antike Riesenstatue, die zu
> hoch war, hat man quer gespalten. Der obere Teil
> steht in der Ecke; scheint als Kleiderrechen
> verwendet zu werden. An den Ohren, an der Nase
> baumeln Westen, Hosen, Krawatten. Der Rumpf vom
> Schulterblatt an liegt zwischen einem Bett und
> einem Waschtisch.[18]

The owner of this tohuwabohu, of course, is old, pale, non-energetic and still in bed when his young visitor arrives.

Brod describes here isolation <u>in chaos</u> as opposed to
Rodenbach's, Wilde's, or Huysmans'[19] dandyistic descriptions
of isolation <u>in order</u>. This chaos, this mixture of gothic
art with washing basins shows the indifferent spirit which
dominates the human being.

   In contrast to such a pessimistic, life-negating
novella is the story of the ill Leo Grottek in <u>Indifferentis-
mus</u>, the last novella of the collection. Here Brod's concept
should be interpreted in a more optimistic, life-supporting
sense, although it centers around disease. Raabe explains
that the interest at Brod's time focused much on illness:
"Diese stilistisch durchgefeilte Novelle ist ein Exemplum
für den späten Jugendstil, der das Kranke liebte und das
Verfallende und darin das Wesen des Lebens sah."[20] Positive
and negative existential attitudes are both the essence of
"indifferentism," since the causality of the vicious circle
determines the choice, as I pointed out before. Yet, what-
ever the choice, Gottfried Tock as well as Leo Grottek are
condemned to die after they have found their individual truths.

   The boy Leo, in <u>Indifferentismus</u>, is forced into re-
flective passivity: ". . . durch Krankheit zur Inaktivität
gezwungen, meistert /er/ durch Einbeziehung des Guten wie
des Bösen seine--durch ein determiniertes Schicksal be-
dingte--Unfreiheit mit ästhetischer Passivität."[21] Leo
finds himself, for he learns to identify his life as an
equal part of the world: "Man muß sich selbst, seine eigenen

Taten, Neigungen, Freuden, Schmerzen als Teil der Welt, als
gleichberechtigt mit dem Weltall ansehen."[22] Therefore the
human being is not limited to just passive observation and
resigned acceptance of fate. By integrating himself into
the flow of existence he can limit the destructive forces
of pessimism; and although man has no power of influence he
can absorb everything. This is what little Leo does and it
makes him sovereign over his destiny. Good and evil equally
participate in his life. No doubt, Schopenhauer, who also
appears in a dream of Leo, is the spiritual father of many
of Brod's thoughts in this novella. But, as Margarita Pazi,
says: "Trotz der Müdigkeit des Welterleidens an Stelle des
Welterlebens sickert bereits der Lichtstrahl des Optimismus,
bewerkstelligt durch die Liebe, in das Schrifttum Brods."[23]
"Indifferentism" receives a spark of hope.

In between Tod den Toten and Schloß Nornepygge Brod
published the small collection of novellas called Experimente,
written in 1905 and 1906 (thus the three books treated here
were all written during the same period of time, 1902-1908,
their order not being chronological). In Experimente Brod
criticizes with a slightly satirical tone the society of
Prague and the implications of the class structure on certain
individuals. He describes the so-called freedom people have
to experiment with their lives, experiments that end up in
the stereotyped pattern of established social codes.
Bürgerliche Liebe, 1905, analyzes flirt schemes and bourgeois

love affairs which a peasant from the country is confronted with. Indeed, Seff Plemscheier is shocked:

> Er konnte dieses Übermass von Fäulnis und sittlicher Niedertracht nicht fassen. So also sah es in der Stadt aus, in diesen reinlichen, geometrisch eingeteilten Häusern, in diesen nicht schadhaften Zimmern, auf diesen asphaltierten saubern gepflegten Strassen. Alles schien ihm mit einem Mal wüst, gährend, mit Unrat gefüllt . . .[24]

Brod talks about the hypocrisy of human sentiments, their false excitements, "ihre/n/ Surrogat-Aufregungen, mit ihrem Liebes-Sacharin . . ."[25] He shows how these social codes transform the individual into a passive being who is no longer capable of developing true feelings.

In <u>Der Hochstapler</u>, 1905, the reader is confronted with a caricature of the credulity and the pseudo-appreciation of art by a pseudo-aristocratic bourgeoisie which is fooled by a swindler. For these bored citizens the lust for sensations is satisfied by Hugo von Granichhausen and his wife Daisy. Brod describes the senselessness of existence within a decaying social structure which establishes dream-fantasies in order to survive. The "indifferent" Hugo von Granichhausen has understood the rule: "Die Welt will betrogen sein. Also werde sie betrogen."[26] But in the end the swindler is unmasked and society returns to its old patterns.

The same resigning pessimism dominates the novella <u>Die</u>

<u>Stadt der Mittellosen</u>, 1906, the story of Francis Carus

Gehmann and his short love affair with the salesgirl

Ruschena.   Brod here criticizes the vicious causality that

determines the functioning of a city by the presence of

its rich inhabitants.   Once they are gone, the city is life-

less and destitute.   His protagonist represents passive sub-

ordination and indifferent acceptance.   He does not compre-

hend that an individual existence has to be fought for, and

he even refuses to love, which drives the more active

Ruschena to commit suicide.

> Das sind doch die Herren und wir Untergebene, so
>
> ist es nun einmal zugeteilt.   Und wir wären sehr
>
> unklug, wenn wir uns gegen die mächtige Last des
>
> Bestehenden auflehnten.   Wie könnten wir denn da
>
> in der Gegenwart froh werden!   Alle die Zeit, die
>
> wir mit Kämpfen und Revoltieren zubringen, ginge
>
> uns doch inzwischen verloren . . .[27]

Carus is the symbol of the attitude towards life exemplified

in "indifferentism."

   Even <u>Die Insel Carina</u> shows the influence of Schopen-

hauer's pessimism although it tends towards the fantastic in-

fluenced by Meyrink.   Margarita Pazi summarises its contents:

> Wohl können die Menschen, von einem phantastischen
>
> Zufall gelenkt, zu einem Experiment gelangen, aber
>
> sie können sich "nicht in neue Bahnen Stellen"
>
> (Ex 70).   In der Liebe Matteos zu Claire kann die

Idee Schopenhauers, daß die Liebe oft im Wider-

spruch zu der eigenen Individualität steht, ver-

folgt werden, der der Autor nichts entgegenzusetzen

hat.[28]

Life cannot be changed by experiments, "denn nicht wir machen

die Experimente, sondern man macht sie mit uns."[29]

The culmination of Brod's period of "indifferentism"

towards which the previous publications contributed, is no

doubt his novel Schloß Nornepygge, which integrates all

aspects of this world-view. "Der Roman des Indifferenten,"

as the subtitle announces, is not so much a novel about a

castle than the tragedy of its owner, the protagonist of the

narrative, Walder Nornepygge.

Walder verkörpert die Tragödie des geistigen

Menschen dieser Zeit, dessen Intellekt und

Scharfsinn vergebens nach einem Zweck des Daseins

sucht und dem der aus der Unfreiheit des Menschen

resultierende Pessimismus alles Wollen und Sehnen

sinnlos erscheinen läßt.[30]

The novel describes the desperate quest of an individual for

his proper identity. Walder, an intellectual whose inven-

tions have made him a multi-millionaire, searches his true

ego and the essence of existence by means of several trans-

formations which he mistakes for his identity. Walder em-

bodies pessimistic "indifferentism" until he has to realize

that "indifferentism" cannot lead him to his identity. The

ambivalence destroys him. He had considered everything possible, had accepted any trend, had never decided pro or con. His "indifferentism" had been marked by indecisiveness until he had to realize that "mein Charakter ist Charakterlosigkeit;"[31] but then it was too late. "Indifferentism" does not furnish solutions. Walder Nornepygge gets trapped in the vicious circle of self-made causality instead of learning to master natural causality and to control its effects. Indeed, Walder is imprisoned by his desire for liberty, which drives him more towards pessimism the more he is confronted with its limits. "Viva la Libertà!" is the title of the last episode which represents but the liberty to commit suicide. Again the protagonist dies, becoming an anti-hero who must fail, because the idea of "indifferentism" does not allow him to succeed. The world-view states that the deterministic "Zeitgeist" hinders the human being from making an individual choice. But instead of interpreting the idea sociologically (or rather socialistically) and demanding change, Brod's character remains passive, egocentric and adheres to the doctrine of causality which leaves no hope for change. Therefore, Walder Nornepygge pursues an anti-metamorphosis the stages of which will subsequently be concentrated on.

The novel Schloß Nornepygge is divided into ten chapters which, however, do not directly correspond to the periods of the protagonist's life. The time is situated somewhere at

around the beginning of the 20th century somewhere in a southern German or German speaking region. The duration of the plot is one year beginning in autumn and ending during late summer days of the following year. Three aspects of the narrative determine its four part division, which represents the stages in the life of Walder Nornepygge. The aspects are: (1) state of consciousness; (2) master; (3) building, each of which have four subcategories which influence the stages in Walder's life. The protagonist goes through four transformations. This process is partly presented in the form of a self-analysis of the protagonist at the end of the text summarizing for the reader the migration of Walder.[32] The author also furnishes biographical details as to the development of the protagonist before the time of the narrative in order to give the reader a detailed and exact picture, leaving as little as possible to his own imagination. "Ich war Student, Kaufmann, Künstler, . . ."[33]

The first period in the text consists of the following: Under the leadership of the macabre creature, Guachen, Walder is at the height of his enthusiasm for the "club of the differentiated" (Differenzierten-Klub oder Loge) which has regular meetings in the "Pavillon der Differenzierten," a side wing of Schloß Nornepygge. The motto of the club says that "nichts, was--/pause/ selbstverständlich ist, soll getan werden."[34] Its members enjoy the morbid, the play with death, artificiality up to speech patterns (the pause

in the above sentence is consciously intended), macabre entertainment, exotic food, Roman beds, and any provocation that tickles the normally expected. They all come from an upper class intellectual élite, they are marginal, fulfill an "exponierte Stellung am Rande der Menschheit,"[35] and are from different national origins: Fräulein Tock, a "mann-weibisch" spinster and only woman, Jean d'Ormi, John Rocketby, Walder and Guachen. The proscription of feelings is detrimental for Walder, for his insensitivity drives him into isolation. According to the "differentiated", every action has to be justified. "Sein introspektiver Intellekt erfaßt und rechtfertigt jede Handlungsweise und alle Beweggründe und läßt ihm dadurch alle Tätigkeit absurd erscheinen."[36] Their belief in decadence and mysticism does not satisfy the predominant factor of _ennui_, however, which leads to Walder's first transformation. He begins to search for real meaning in actions and slowly discards the pretensions of the "Differenzierten-Klub." The change is brought about by the arrival of relatives from Stettin, among whom are the young woman Lotte and the "Don Juan" Oironet, both of whom function as catalysts. Walder begins to realize that liberty is not identical with isolation, that intellectualism is not life-experience, that feelings are not necessarily spiritual. So far he had ignored human values, and this made him a naïve, insecure and fearful creature who had to be taught like a child. In despair he exclaims: "Wie bin ich zu diesem Leben

gekommen? Wer bin ich? Wer ist Walder Nornepygge, dieser

Mensch, der aus Sehnsucht nach Freiheit stirbt? O ich bin

nicht frei! Alles, was geschieht, geschieht notwendig.

Alle mein Gedanken und Taten sind erzwungen."[37] He

realizes his imprisonment by causality: "Der ganze Jammer

seiner zerfließenden Existenz überfiel ihn ! . ."[38] He is

momentarily cured by the Dionysian Oironet who confronts him

with orgastic pleasures at a fantastic ball in the castle:

"Sie lagerten auf den Teppichen, über Sessel gestreckt, auf

Diwans, einander knetend und erdrückend, heiße Körper mit

dem Ausdruck verrotteter Sinnlichkeit im Gesicht."[39] Second-

ly, he is influenced by the stereotyped bourgeois culture

embodied through Lotte, the true German "Hausfrau" or, as

Guachen puts it, ". . . das personifizierte Deutschtum, der

Genius der Butzenscheibenlyrik, ein rührendes Poesiealbum--

aus den achtziger Jahren--mit Musik beim Aufklappen."[40]

Lotte makes Walder dream of another extreme: "Dieses un-

verdiente Glück, ein stilles Leben zu beginnen, neben dir

in einem zart-aufgeräumten Wohnraum sitzend Wirtschafts-

rechnungen durchzusehen, über Einkäufe Beratungen zu halten,

eine Reise oder ein Kleid zu erwägen . . ."[41] Suddenly,

Walder Nornepygge identifies himself with a true German of

a German nation in a German landscape and he creates a bour-

geois dolls-house with his beloved strong German girl Lotte

among "/einem/ imitierten Perserteppich einer Ottomane . . .

/und der/ . . . so behaglichen Pracht einer imprägnierten

Palme."[42] "Decadent" artificiality is mixed with "Butzen-
scheiben" and "Fachwerk." However, Nornepygge's happiness
is doomed. With the death of Walder's father, whose love
he had just re-found, begins a second transformation towards
another stage. "Der häusliche Herd" no longer suffices for
him. He begins to discover sensuality and longs for a
social life which Lotte is incapable of sharing with him.
"Was hatte er überhaupt jemals genossen? Plötzlich schien
ihm sein Leben, an der Weite des Frühlings und der keimenden
Welt gemessen, unerträglich eng. So viele Frauen gab es,
so viele viele Frauen . . ."[43] As of now Walder identifies
his desire for liberty no longer with "Differenziertentum"
nor with bourgeois life, but with sensuality, not being able
to compromise and to integrate all aspects into a unified
personality. Nevertheless, he is aware of the price he must
pay: "Jetzt habe ich Ordnung um mich, einen liebenswürdigen
Haushalt, ländliche Augen. Und was kommt, ist Unordnung,
Haß, Gier."[44] From his "Gartenlaubenroman" and "Blauveil-
chenstimmung,"[45] as he calls it, Walder turns to the ex-
cesses of a new life under the guidance of Oironet, alias
Don Juan Tenorio, alias Nauj, a political instigator and re-
incarnated Don Juan, who confuses socialistic revolution
with jet-set games. Nornepygge's new home shall be a harem
constructed in his garden to better serve his sexual desires.
With the help of corruption and perverted parties Walder
obtains the necessary love-practice and a bad reputation.

This cures his innocence and naïveté and turns him into a true disciple of Nauj, whose contradictory preparations for an aristocratic revolution consist in organizing orgies. The climax of the developments occurs in form of a perverse party in a coal-mine, where the rocks are covered with black velvet on which intercourse is openly celebrated. During this period Walder sees an advantage in "indifferentism."

> Mit Freuden nahm er wahr, daß sich sein Indifferen-
> tismus, der ihn alles gleichberechtigt finden ließ,
> hier von der angenehmsten Seite zeigte, indem er
> ihn eben die Schönheiten aller Frauen gleich-
> berechtigt finden ließ und zu den mannigfachsten
> Genüssen ohne Einschränkung befähigte.[46]

However, these excessive pleasures necessarily lead him to another disillusionment, because his incapability to differentiate reverses the ideal of "indifferentism" to boredom. Walder experiences everything <u>in extremis</u>, idealizes his adventures until the climax turns satisfaction into <u>ennui</u>, again alienating him from himself.

During his last stage of his search for identity, Walder decides to renounce all wordly pleasures and to become a hermit in the belief that there he finally might come across true liberty, the existence of which he has had to question increasingly--especially when he discovered the irony that he had merely been a puppet in a well planned political plot. Hence he turns to the charismatic priest

Lodolf "den Asketen," a childhood friend of his, who commands him: "Tue Buße in der Einsamkeit und dir wird verziehen werden. Der Herr wird dir eine schwere Prüfung auferlegen, denn du hast viel gesündigt. Aber verzage nicht, dir ist Gnade beschieden . . ."[47] Walder interprets this gesture as a sign and begins to live in a grotto in the forest, conditioning himself to ecstatic self-humiliation. He is convinced that his sufferings might heal the evils of the world--until representatives of the evil world try to bring him back to his castle with the intention to continue his puppetry towards a political putsch.

It is not the expectation of monarchic glory that forces Walder to eventually capitulate. It is the fact that after all his escapades his wife Lotte has finally followed his example and become unfaithful, a fact he cannot tolerate. He wished to preserve her as an object of true love and again he is disillusioned. The final transformation thus consists of the realization that all his stages of experience were but variants of one unified life. But instead of seeing a positive construction, Walder only sees negative destruction from which the only escape is suicide. He analyzes:

> Ich bin ich, der Indifferente, einziges Exemplar
> dieser Gattung, zum Glück der Welt . . . Ich weiß,
> was ich bin: ein Monstrum, ein Monstrum . . .
> Ein Kind unserer Tage, Zeitgenosse der Eisenbahnen
> und großen Kolonialreiche, krank von den

> einströmenden Schätzen des Weltverkehrs, krank
>
> von allzuviel Empfängnis, von allzuvielen
>
> Möglichkeiten, unabgeschlossen, ein Opfer des
>
> geistigen Freihandels, durchfurcht von allen
>
> Dampferlinien und Telegraphendrähten der Welt.
>
> Ich weiß, was ich bin. Der moderne Mensch.[48]

The discrepancy between the façade of his environment and its
hidden motives finally enters Walder's consciousness; "er
erkennt, daß, obwohl alles menschliche Handeln durch den
angeborenen Charakter prädestiniert und nicht veränderbar
ist, der Mensch doch nicht von der sittlichen Verantwortung
freigesprochen werden kann."[49] This realization leaves him
only one choice: total self-negation. Walder Nornepygge
hangs himself in the dome of his castle after having been
declared consul of the new republic which is about to be
created. The grotesque end is further emphasised by the
last irony when Don Juan Oironet proclaims the corpse as
the symbol of the revolution. "Und Tausende hoben ihre
Waffen dem schwarzen Strich oben in der glänzenden Kuppel
entgegen, brachten Hochrufe auf den Konsul aus, jubelten
vor Kampflust . . . der Leiche zu."[50]

This fatal settling of an account with the self does
not just question the actions of the protagonist, the anti-
hero, but it questions the existence of modern man on the
whole. Through an interesting technical device the narrator,
Max Brod, includes himself in the story, hence participating

in the search for an escape from the traps of existence.

> Und so legt er dem Helden einen Abschiedsgruß
>
> an die Zeitgenossen in den Mund, der zu einer
>
> ironischen Zeitkritik wurde, eine Liebeserklärung
>
> und ein Dokument der Verachtung in eins, ein
>
> Paradigma indifferentistischer Weltauffassung.[51]

The text states:

> Wie hasse ich euch Menschen. Wie liebe ich euch
>
> . . . Nein, im Grunde, wie fern und unverständlich,
>
> wie kindlich-zart erscheint ihr mir. Sein ganzes
>
> Leben lang dasselbe tun, dasselbe denken, alles
>
> von einem und demselben unveränderlichen
>
> Gesichtspunkt, in einem Stil auffassen: wie klein,
>
> wie trotzig! Seid mir gegrüßt, ihr Dandys, Knopf-
>
> agenten, Bergwerksbesitzer, Sozialistenführer,
>
> . . . Gerwürzkrämer, . . . Wagnerianer, Bohémiens,
>
> Bakteriologen . . . Ihr habt jeder euren Beruf,
>
> Amen! Kein Paket ohne Schutzmarke! Und ihr
>
> Künstler nicht anders, nicht anders, auch ihr seid
>
> jeder stolz auf einen Trick, eine Schrulle, eine
>
> Livree: Nennier findet nur das Leben in der Mine
>
> schön, Degas nur unter Balletteusen und Rennpferden
>
> . . . Und in . . . Wien thronen Peter Altenberg,
>
> der Kaffeehaus-Jesus, . . . Karl Kraus, der ganzen
>
> Welt immer überlegen . . . Rubens malt immer dicke
>
> Frauen, Rosetti dünne, Hiroshige den Berg Fuji,

> Nowak Obst, Rembrandt sich selbst. Der Komment
>
> darf nicht beulkt werden. Und warum schildert
>
> . . . Scheffel nur Alkohol und blaue Augen,
>
> Laforgue nur den Mond, Oscar Wilde nur schöne
>
> Lasterhafte, Brod nur nachdenkliche Jünglinge
>
> . . . Erbärmlich! . . . So sieht es auf der
>
> ganzen Welt aus, alle Menschen sind sorgfältige
>
> Spezialisten, nichts weiter . . . Ja, ich sehe
>
> es jetzt so klar: jedes Handeln ist ein Denkfehler.
>
> Es strebt der Mensch, so lang' er irrt.[50]

Max Brod identifies with the arguments of his anti-hero. By
integrating himself into the narrative he emphasizes the
message of this book. Brod reflects not just a pessimistic
world-view, but the general atmosphere of his time with its
stylized cult of beauty, the artificial paradise and over-
sensitized eroticism all with the background of a gloomy,
old Prague.

Although much of the style in Schloß Nornepygge already
foreshadows expressionism Brod clearly remains a member of
the "decadent" genre. He himself denies the allegations to
expressionism: "Dabei hatte ich eine zeitlang selbst als
so etwas wie der Expressionistenpabst gegolten. Das war
freilich ein Mißverständnis exquisiten Ranges gewesen."[53]
Brod's narrative is unique. His language varies between
romantic-sentimental and realistic-naturalistic tendencies.
With strong metaphors he draws parallels to a musical score

(especially Berlioz' "Symphonie phantastique" to which
chapter 4 is dedicated), which he presents through allitera-
tion and assonance: "Seine Augen erhellten erbarmungslos
mit lodernden blauen Feuern alles, was er sagte, wie eine
große Unglücksstätte, ein Schlachtfeld . . ."[54] Monologues
and visions throughout the text hint towards the stream of
consciousness technique, which again is contrasted with
elaborate dialogues or detailed descriptions of spooky,
diseased, artificial circumstances. All in all the book is
a classic example of "decadent" aspects like "Zeitgeist,"
"Weltanschauung," or technique. Brod's theory of "indif-
ferentism" represents another paradigm signifying "déca-
dence." Walder Nornepygge stands for the individual of
modern times who finds himself isolated from society and in-
capable of coping with that situation. Instead of using
and profiting from the total process of socio-historical
forces, from the dialectic of the modern world, Brod's
"indifferent" anti-hero finds only isolation and is destroyed.
Thus "Indifferentismus" limits the faculty of social integra-
tion more than French or English forms of "decadence" did,
which makes this world-view a particularly interesting
example of "decadent" discourse.

Notes

[1] Max Brod, <u>Streitbares Leben</u> (München: Kindler Verlag, 1960), p. 218.

[2] Max Brod, <u>Der Prager Kreis</u> (Stuttgart: W. Kohlhammer Verlag, 1966), p. 9.

[3] Ulrike Weinhold, <u>Künstlichkeit und Kunst in der deutschsprachigen Dekadenzliteratur</u> (Frankfurt am Main, Bern, Las Vegas: Peter Lang GmbH, 1977), p. 120.

[4] Ives Chevrel, "Les lettres allemandes et autrichiennes devant J.-K. Huysmans 1880-1900," <u>Revue des Sciences Humaines</u>, No. 170-71, 2-3 (Lille: Université de Lille III, 1978), p. 27.

[5] Fanny Johnson, <u>The German Mind as Reflected in Their Literature from 1870 to 1914</u> (London and Sydney: Chapman and Dodd Ltd., 1922), pp. 11 and 116.

[6] Theobald Ziegler, <u>Die geistigen und sozialen Strömungen des Neunzehnten Jahrhunderts</u> (Berlin: Georg Bondi, 1899), p. 657.

[7] Brod, <u>Der Prager Kreis</u>, pp. 133 and 134.

[8] Brod, <u>Streitbares Leben</u>, p. 235.

[9] Brod, <u>Der Prager Kreis</u>, p. 134.

[10] Paul Raabe, "Der junge Max Brod und der Indifferentismus," <u>Weltfreunde</u>, ed. Eduard Goldstücker (Berlin: Luchterhand Verlag, 1967), p. 256.

[11] For dictionary references see bibliography of dictionaries.

[12] Brod, <u>Streitbares Leben</u>, p. 209.

[13] Ibid., p. 14.

[14] According to Margarita Pazi, <u>Max Brod. Werk und Persönlichkeit</u> (Bonn: H. Bouvier & Co. Verlag, 1970), p. 2.

[15] Ibid., p. 3.

[16] Max Brod, "Tod den Toten," <u>Die Einsamen</u> (München: Kurt Wolff Verlag, 1919), p. 20.

[17] Raabe, p. 256.

[18] Brod, "Tod den Toten," pp. 2-3.

[19] Reference to Georges Rodenbach, <u>Bruges-la-morte</u> (Paris: Ernest Flammarion, n.d.); Oscar Wilde, <u>The Picture of Dorian Gray</u> (Garden City: Dolphin Books, Doubleday & Co. Inc., n.d.); Joris-Karl Huysmans, <u>Against the Grain</u> (New York: Illustrated Editions Co., 1931).

[20] Raabe, p. 257.

[21] Pazi, p. 28.

[22] Brod, "Indifferentismus," <u>Die Einsamen</u>, p. 192.

[23] Pazi, p. 28.

[24] Max Brod, "Bürgerliche Liebe," <u>Experimente</u> (Berlin: Axel Junker Verlag, 1907), p. 17.

[25] Ibid., p. 9.

[26] Brod, "Der Hochstapler," <u>Experimente</u>, p. 77.

[27] Brod, "Die Stadt der Mittellosen," <u>Experimente</u>, p. 113.

[28] Pazi, p. 29.

29 Brod, "Die Insel Carina," Die Einsamen, p. 254.

30 Pazi, p. 31.

31 Max Brod, Schloß Nornepygge (Leipzig und Wien: Kurt Wolff Verlag, 1918), pp. 463-64.

32 The three aspects and four categories which determine the life of Walder Nornepygge are:

Aspects:	state of consciousness	master	building
Sub-categories:	"Differenzierten-Klub"	Guachen	"Pavillon der Differenzierten"
	faithful husband return to the father	Lotte	timbered farmhouse
	a life à la Don Juan	Nauj	harem
	life of a hermit	Lodolf	grotto

Brod, Schloß Nornepygge, pp. 469-270: "Was habe ich nur hier in diesem Parke alles erlebt, in den zwei Jahren, seit das Schloß steht. Ein Jahr lang gab ich mich als Differenzierten, im vorigen Herbst hatte dieser Stil den Höhepunkt. Der Winter verwandelte mich in einen trauten deutschen Ehegatten, wie ehrlich war ich in dieser kalten Jahreszeit dem häuslichen Herde zugetan. Wirklich, wenn ich es so überlege, es ist mit den Jahreszeiten gegangen. Im Frühling, mit den sprossenden Säften der Natur im Einklang, betrug ich mich wie ein gefährlicher Lebemann. Die schwüle Sommerhitze hemmte mich, schläferte mich, in ein Eremitendasein hinüber. Und jede dieser vier Perioden habe ich so innig tief durchgelebt, mit dem so sicheren Gefühl, daß jede die einzig mögliche sei! . . . So gegenwärtig wie die vier Jahreszeiten, . . . /waren/

meine vier Meister: Guachen, Lotte, Nauj, Lodolf, die

mich jedesmal ganz beherrscht haben, so wohleingerichtet wie

die vier Gebäude, die ich mir wie Monumente meiner Phasen

aufgestellt habe: der Pavillon der Differenzierten, das

Bauernhaus, der Harem, die zackige Grotte.   Und all das in

diesem Park.   Nun überblicke ich es wie eine Landkarte, und

dazu mein voriges Leben als Couleurstudent, als Künstler mit

den Brüdern Ehstredt, mit Reckleiner als Gelderwerber in

amerikanischer Manier. . . . Wie lächerlich dieses Streben

nach Freiheit!"

33 Brod, Schloß Nornepygge, p. 339.

34 Ibid., p. 81.

35 Ibid., p. 31.

36 Pazi, p. 32.

37 Brod, Schloß Nornepygge, pp. 103-04.

38 Ibid., p. 106.

39 Ibid., p. 172.

40 Ibid., p. 124.

41 Ibid., p. 169.

42 Ibid., p. 235.

43 Ibid., p. 267.

44 Ibid., p. 281.

45 Ibid., p. 282.

46 Ibid., p. 367.

47 Ibid., p. 408.

48 Ibid., pp. 466-68.

[49] Pazi, p. 32.

[50] Brod, <u>Schloß Nornepygge</u>, p. 504.

[51] Raabe, p. 260.

[52] Brod, <u>Schloß Nornepygge</u>, pp. 497-98.

[53] Brod, <u>Der Prager Kreis</u>, p. 178.

[54] Brod, <u>Schloß Nornepygge</u>, p. 31.

CHAPTER VI

In the previous chapters I have been directed by the question of what the notion "decadence" represented in a variety of discourses. I have demonstrated the emergence, migrations and transformations of this cultural notion and consequently the process of the institutionalization of its terminology. At the same time I have confronted the reader with a conceptual inflation which turned its original meaning into labels, cutting the word "decadence" from its roots. In other words, I have presented a map which analyzed the metalanguage of the discourse around "decadence." The present task then will have to be an analysis of the terri-tory; this means a critical look at today's perspectives in criticism, perspectives that deal with the notion of "deca-dence." What I intend to point out here is the fact that each interpretation shifts the angle of the original concep-tualisation. There is no doubt that the artists referred to in this thesis had a specific way of looking at their time and movements. However, what we, the critics, have to be aware of, are the consequences of our own practice. In this chapter I intend to draw attention to the necessity of demystifying critical terminology such as the word "deca-dence." In addition, I shall attempt a synthesis of the aesthetic term and its representatives mentioned before.

An important "defect" that appears in many critical analyses of "decadent" discourses or of the notion itself is, on the one hand, the avoidance of etymological background and, on the other hand, the ignorance of socio-historical presuppositions as well as inherent ideologies. By thus ignoring certain criteria, those critical works mystify the process of acceptability of the concept "decadence," and this had led the term to become an institutionalized signifier. Missing are precise definitions as to each individual understanding of "decadence."

G.S. Fraser (1965), for example, introduces English "fin de siècle" artists in the following way:

> The poets of the 1890's lacked . . . energy; like Baudelaire, one of their heroes, they accepted the world around them with the bored, indifferent atti-tude of the dandy; like Gautier, another of their heroes, they adopted the creed of "art for art's sake." It was not a very nourishing creed and many of them, pursued by melancholy, by ill-health, by remorse for the excesses of their lives, ended by becoming Roman Catholics.[1]

Fraser pursues the unquestioned connotations of "decadence;" following a 20th century pattern and avoiding the true ideo-logical sources of the notion. Fraser does not grasp that it was not the acceptance of their society which created the "decadent" school, but rather a refusal of its system.

Hence, indifference or remorse are consequences of that
rejection instead of a sign of passive integration.

A different problem appears in Pierre van Bever's ar-
ticle "Signification du 'Décadentisme'" (1968), which lacks
differentiation of terminology. He says:

> Le terme est pourtant, comme on sait, français
> d'origine. "Décadentisme" ou "Décadisme" furent
> d'abord des noms de guerre choisis par une faction
> symboliste avant que le mouvement ait trouvé son
> nom définitif . . . .La nuance péjorative qui
> restera attachée à la notion de décadentisme de-
> vait entraîner progressivement la disparition du
> 'terme lorsque les nouvelles avant-gardes se furent
> imposées . . . Ainsi disparaissait en France
> l'identification popularisée par T. Gautier du dé-
> cadentisme et de l'avant-garde, qui avait au moins
> le mérite de rappeler que l'insurrection du verbe
> était lié à la crise d'une société.[2]

Not only does Bever fail to clarify the etymology of his
topic and therefore apply a term which was little used for
the general movement, but he also mixes two notions that did
not totally coincide in concept and in time: "Décadisme"
was not used before Anatole Baju invented the word on the
spur of the moment as Ernest Raynaud has described. "Les
décadents" should furthermore be differentiated from "les
symbolistes," since the first in a sense preceded "symbolism"

and then developed into an independent school from which "symbolists," whose movement terminated later, distanced themselves.

An overabundance of critical definitions appears in George Ross Ridge's book The Hero in French Decadent Literature (1961). The table of contents offers the following variety of possibilities:

- II) The Decadent in his Worldview: the Megalopolis; Modern Man as Decadent; the Modern Woman; the Androgyne; the Deathwish.
- III) The Decadent: A Metaphysical Hero.
- IV) The Decadent: A Cosmopolitan in Babylon.
- V) The Decadent: A cerebral Hero.
- VI) The Decadent: An Aesthete.
- VII) The Decadent: A Pervert.
- VIII) Metamorphoses of the Vampire: Modern Woman and the Femme Fatale.
- IX) The Decadent in Cataclysm: Problems of the Götterdämmerung.[3]

Although Ridge turns against the use of certain clichés and wishes to establish a more delineated picture of the "decadent" hero, he does not develop his individual concept of "decadence." Instead he applies all interpretations possible and mixes the "decadence" of authors and heroes. Little socio-historical context is given but rather a book-for-book presentation without a clear theoretical development. Nevertheless, the work is an informative contribution to

research in "decadence."

A similar flaw occurs in Richard Gilman's 1975 publication of <u>Decadence: The Strange Life of an Epithet</u>. By wanting to cover the whole phenomenon of "decadence" with old and new labels or critical interpretations, the author becomes imprecise. He neither furnishes a thorough etymology of the word nor examples of "decadent" texts (in addition, the lack of footnotes and bibliography may be due to his unsuccessful search for books entitled "Decadence," for he says he visited four big libraries and found only one book under that title by C.E.M. Joad ?).[4] His arguments are important and interesting but lack structure. However, his overall analysis is in a sense an ironic demystification of the interrelationship between socio-cultural or behavioural patterns and language. For this reason the book is significant for readers focusing on "decadence." Gilman rightly draws attention to the critical dilemma, for example: "Words in time, words with histories: one intellectual problem is that of bringing such verbal presences and histories into coherence with our own."[5] Later on he points out transformations, which make his concept of "decadence" as an epithet resemble the paradigm which I put forward in this thesis: ". . . the changing uses of words are changes in ideas."[6]

Most critics writing on "decadence" in the past decade show an increasing awareness of their own historical context

as they re-define the concept, and they take greater care
than previous critics to avoid stereotyped labels. C. de
Deugd in his article "Towards a Comparatist's Definition of
'Decadence'" underscores the fact that "there just does not
exist an adequate, accepted definition of Decadence, at least
I am not acquainted with one that satisfies the demands of
scholarly research in its coverage of the facts."[7] In order
to reach a solution of that problem, he contributes to a
definition, as he says, and introduces "five main charac-
teristics of aestheticist-decadent literature,"[8] which are:
(1) Beauty is the essence of art; (2) marked emphasis on all
matters of form; (3) "sensitivism" (what is traditionally
called impressionism); (4) thematic or "thematological"
point, "in other words, the particular, very specific choice
of themes among those by and large designated as Aesthetes
and Decadents."[9]   (5) The principle of the sovereignty, the
complete supremacy of literature over human life and nature.
Deugd presupposes familiarity with the word "decadence"
and with what it is generally associated. He draws attention
to the international nature of the phenomenon and points out
the danger that lies in the use of the term outside a specific
"Zeitgeist" with the example of a contemporary author. He
asks the important question as to what "decadence" is. He
asks in addition how one can find out what it is without
just following a pattern or imposing the pattern on anything
that resembles "decadence."

Similarly, Marianne Kesting (1975) mentions the lack
of an organising principle in the research of "fin de siècle"
cultural aspects:

> Es ist bislang das Dilemma der Jahrhundertwende-
> Forschung, daß sie zu keinem übergreifenden
> Ordnungsprinzip der immensen Materialien findet
> und entweder Themen und Motive sehr verschiedener
> stilistischer Behandlung nebeneinander ordnet
> . . . [10]

H.E. Gerber also draws the reader's attention to "Some
Problems in Definition" (1962) when he questions the deroga-
tory labelling that takes place in the use of "decadence"
and "aestheticism" "for almost any kind of writing the
critic or special-interest group did not like."[11] He says:
"Our task is, I think, to decide whether there is any specific
valid use to which these two terms can be put in the vocabu-
lary of the literary historian or the critic."[12] But al-
though Gerber ironizes the association of aestheticism, for
example, with "descriptions of precious stones, exotic per-
fumes, luxurious draperies" versus "clay, granite, coal,
sulphur, the odor of garlic, burlap, and horsehair blankets,"[13]
he does not offer an alternative or rather a possible solu-
tion to the definition problem.

Clyde de L. Ryals in his article "Toward a Definition
of 'Decadent' as Applied to British Literature of the
Nineteenth Century" (1958), however, contributed to

terminological confusion by calling "decadence" a "sub-
phase of romanticism":

> The definition of decadence that I should like to
> advance is that decadence, as far as the literature
> of the nineteenth century is concerned, is but a
> subphase of romanticism and exists, in varying
> degrees of course, wherever the romantic impulse
> exists; that is, if romanticism is the state which
> results when the classical synthesis has begun to
> disintegrate, then decadence is the result of the
> complete disintegration.[14]

Rather than being an independent movement with individual
presuppositions, "decadence" is for this critic merely a
"condition inherent in romanticism that proceeds from roman-
ticism when the romantic impulse is not held in check."[15]
One might add that for him romanticism is classicism "not
held in check" and ask where the beginning and where the end
of this flow should be situated.

The philosophical analysis of Norberto Bobbio is much
more precise in that respect. He says in his book The
Philosophy of Decadentism (1948) among others that decadence or

> decadentism is not merely a literary movement, but
> a spiritual atmosphere, whose mark appears in
> poetry and art, thought and manners, and then by
> bringing out that special characteristic of the
> philosophy of existence through which it stands

clearly .,. . revealed as a philosophy of poetic

inspiration, with its emergence from a state of

mind rather than from a critical uncertainty . . .[16]

Bobbio's presentation of what he chose to call "decadentism"

(translated from Italian "decadentismo") is a very valuable

contribution to the critic's knowledge of a particular

"Zeitgeist."

More recent again are the interesting studies from Roger

Bauer and Ingeborg Bernhard. The first treats the question

of "decadence" in two articles "'Fin de siècle' et 'déca-

dence' comme catégories littéraires" (1975) and "'Décadence':

Histoire d'un mot et d'une idée" (1978), both of them giving

a clear historical outline of the concept "décadence" and

its various applications. The 1975 article, however, con-

centrates more on the necessity of crystallising each form

of "decadence" as an individual "système de signes":

> . . . ces "jeux" de l'imagination, leur cohérence
>
> et nécessité interne, leurs métamorphoses au cours
>
> du temps, la place et la fonction (changeante) de
>
> chaque image ou signe particulier dans le système
>
> de signes (lui aussi changeant) méritent d'être
>
> d'abord décrites et analysées pour eux-mêmes. Une
>
> telle étude devrait en tout cas précéder (car elle
>
> seule peut la rendre possible) toute tentative
>
> de préciser la place, la fonction de ce système de
>
> signes littéraires à l'intérieur de systèmes plus

> vastes, globaux: dans l'histoire de l'époque au
> sens le plus large.[17]

He also points to the fact that "decadence" is a global pheno-
menon by saying "c'est la généralité du phénomène, le parallé-
lisme d'évolutions analogues à travers toute l'Europe qui
est remarquable et significative."[18] The second article then
is of etymological nature giving a very thorough presentation
of the development of the notion "décadence." Bauer points
out the "flexibility" of the word, "la totale 'disponibilité'
du mot,"[19] which facilitates the introduction of a multipli-
city of meanings, but that unfortunately also causes the for-
mation of clichés which cut the word from its roots. Thus
"décadence" turns into a "simple étiquette"[20] that annihi-
lates the original meanings: ". . . seules les connotations
ultimes du mot sont restées vivantes . . ."[21] Such a de-
velopment, of course, makes the work of the critic a delicate
task: "Les choix opérés dans le magma d'images et de signi-
fications disponibles par des utilisateurs divers et diverse-
ment motivés, posent derechef /sic/ des problèmes délicats à
l'historien des lettres . . . et des idées."[22]

In her article "Décadence und style décadent" (1974),
Ingeborg Bernhard pursues this dilemma of the critic. She
presents a very extensive summary of the most important Euro-
pean critical works on "décadence" since the beginning of the
20th century, classifying them in their particular critical
"schools" and thus showing the parallel movement of critical

interpretations of the notion "décadence" as opposed to the
variety of interpretations concentrating on authors only,
both, however, augmenting the terminological hodge-podge.
She supports the idea that "décadence" should be acknow-
ledged as an independent aesthetical category rather than
as a late romantic extension. She also recognizes the
difficulties of delimitation that today's research in "dé-
cadence" is confronted with in the multitude of terminologies.
She says:

> Bei all diesen Bemühungen, die unter anderem auch
> zu erkennen geben, daß die spezifischen künstleri-
> schen Erscheinungen um 1900 gesamteuropäisch zu
> sehen sind, wird für den Kritiker ein Dilemma
> offensichtlich: das Fehlen begrifflicher Klarsicht.
> Gerade die 80er und 90er Jahre zeigen fast unent-
> wirrbare Verflechtungen in den literarischen
> Strömungen wie l'art pour l'art, Ästhetizismus,
> décadence, Symbolismus, Impressionismus, Neuromantik
> und Jugendstil--Schlagwörter wie sie für die
> Bestrebungen der damaligen Avantgarde geprägt
> wurden. Die Literaturwissenschaft hat bis heute
> bei diesen in sich verschwimmenden Benennungen noch
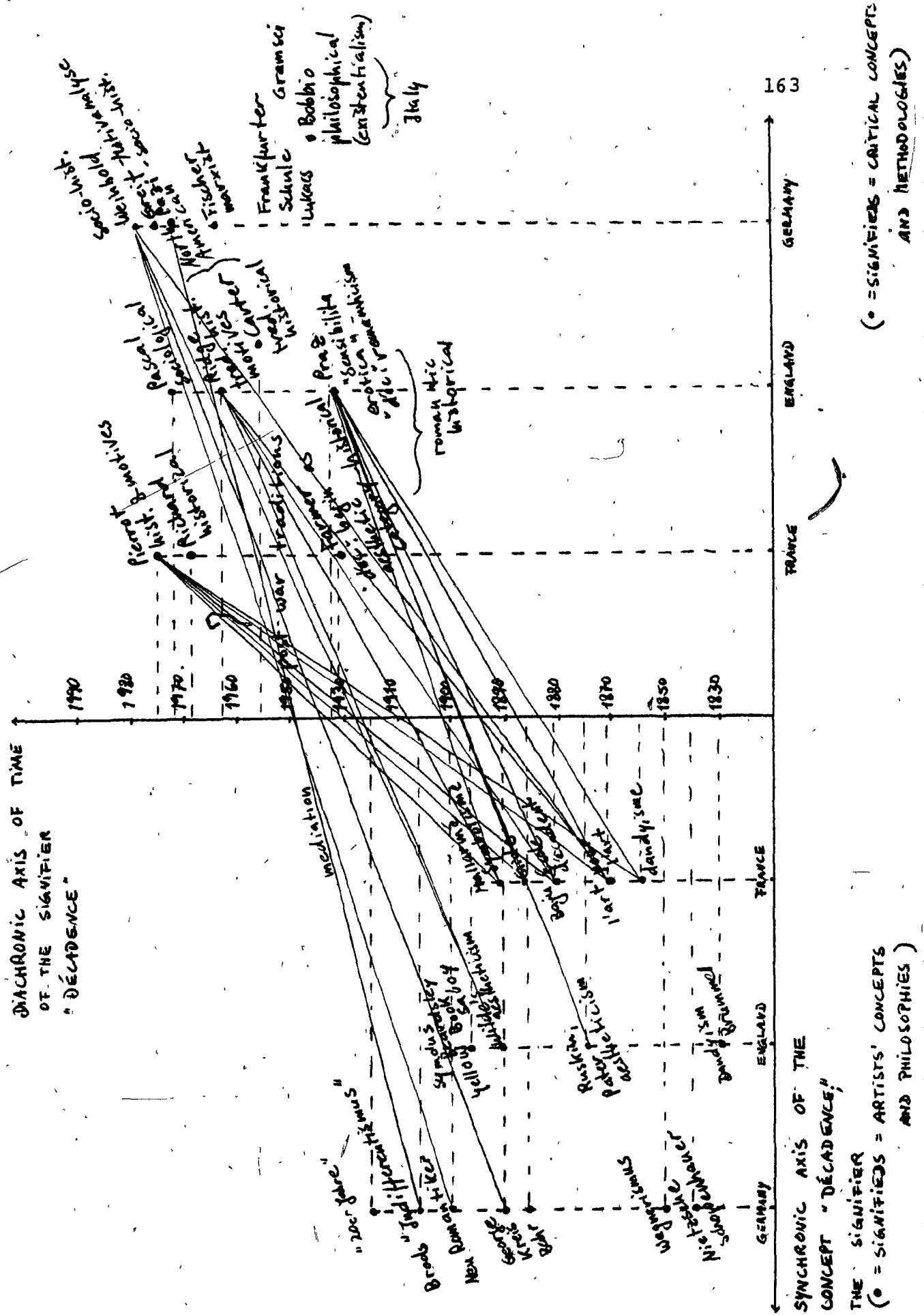> keine Abgrenzung schaffen können.[23]

Upon this note of recognition of the lack of terminolo-
gical clarity in literary studies I shall terminate the small
choice of critical discourses on "decadence" presented here.

The idea was to draw attention to the process of inflation of critical terminology on the one hand and, on the other, the integration of established labels and clichés into critical discourses, i.e. a process of institutionalization of metalinguistic criteria that fit particular ideological concepts and needs. Although the transformations of the word "décadence" in the 19th century artistic discourses seem to imply a similar process, the presuppositions to such a linguistic dynamism are quite different. As I have pointed out in the first chapter of this thesis, linguistic transformations and migrations presuppose a distinct "Zeitgeist" which recognizes concepts and draws them towards acceptability. Necessarily, such a process also integrates ideologemes and intelligible labels, yet those axioms represent paradigms of communicatability at a particular socio-historical moment. Therefore critical discourses should not--without a re-formulation--attempt to make communicable in a different socio-historical context what served as a paradigm of communicatability before. In other words, what "décadence" means today as individual form or as critical concept cannot be the same thing as what it meant in 1880.

With my concluding re-evaluation of studies in "decadence," I intend to try to establish a common framework for the processes mentioned above from a retrospective, critical perspective. Throughout these chapters I have used the Saussurian structure of signifiant and signifié, which meant

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that the signifier "décadence" has a multiplicity of
signifieds. With the help of a scheme, I should like to
expand on that structure here; (please turn to the next
page for the scheme). The left side of the diagram repre-
sents within the space-time context of the signifier "deca-
dence" the signifieds of "decadence" treated in the previous
chapters. Each signified is an individual transformation of
the signifier migrating to different spaces in different
times. The right side of the diagram introduces the critic
and his concept which becomes another signified within
specific critical traditions and methodological contexts and
without implying a homogeneous development. I do not
believe, however, that the artist's concept becomes a signi-
fier for the critic. I rather think that the critic's
signified has as intermediary between the signifier and his
concept the signified he is trying to define. In other
words, in Farmer's interpretation of English "aestheticism"
and "decadence," for example, the English form of "decadence"
serves as an intermediary for his individual conception of
the term and the overall phenomenon.

Hence, the nature of the signifieds of artist and
critic are not identical. The signified of the artist or
school of artists implies the creation of an original model.
The artist works at the level of the signifier, defining
his own concept through elimination or delimitation of certain
criteria inherent in the signifier. That this process might

DIACHRONIC AXIS OF TIME
OF THE SIGNIFIER
"DÉCADENCE"

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Time axis labels: 1990, 1980, 1970, 1960, 1950 post-war traditions, 1940, 1930, 1920, 1910, 1900, 1890, 1880, 1870, 1850, 1830

mediation

Pierrot & motives
hist.
Richardian historical
Pascal psychological
North American
Niche tactics motives
Carter medieval historical

Poe & "sensibilité"
erotica à rebours
"fin de romanticism"
romantic historical

socio-inst.
Weinhold positivist.
Greit. socio-inst.
Fischer marxist
Frankfurter Schule
Lukács
• Bobbio philosophical (existentialism)
Italy
Gramsci

traditions
scientist's
aesthetic
eclectic

"avant-garde"
"Indifferentismus"
Broch
New Romantiker
George Kreis
Rilke

Symbolist Decadance
Yellow Book
aestheticism

Ruskin
Pater
aestheticism

dandyisme
Brummel

symbolism
naturalism
positivism
"fin de siècle"
l'art pour l'art
dandysme

Wagner
Nietzsche
Schopenhauer

GERMANY   ENGLAND   FRANCE

SYNCHRONIC AXIS OF THE
CONCEPT "DÉCADENCE"

THE SIGNIFIER

FRANCE   ENGLAND   GERMANY

(• = SIGNIFIEDS = ARTISTS' CONCEPTS
AND PHILOSOPHIES)

(• = SIGNIFIEDS = CRITICAL CONCEPTS
AND METHODOLOGIES)

turn into an inflated practice is not unusual as the invention of the word "décadisme" by Anatole Baju illustrated. Yet, the essential remains the content of this model and its socio-historical presuppositions which make it an independent paradigm of communicatability.

Contrary to the artist's signified, the signified of the critic or of the critical tradition involves the analysis of a concept rather than its creation. The critic develops a theory using as a tool the original model of the artist. What the critic tries to communicate is the meaning of the signifier through a particular signified thus introducing a new signified. The meaning, however, depends now on the socio-historical context from which the critic originates, and to which he refers. It is evident that in this case the tendency towards terminological inflation is much higher than in the artist's case, since it implies additional transformations. Therefore, we, in the function of the critic, should be aware of our own metalanguage when we approach the metatext of an author.

Notes

[1] G.S. Fraser, The Modern Writer and his World. Continuity and Innovation in Twentieth-Century English Literature (New York: Frederick A. Praeger Publishers, 1965), p. 247.

[2] Pierre van Bever, "Signification du 'décadentisme!'", Revue des langues vivantes, No 4 (Bruxelles: Editions Marcel Didier, 1968), pp. 366 and 368.

[3] George Ross Ridge, The Hero in French Decadent Literature (Atlanta: University of Georgia Press, 1961), table of contents.

[4] Richard Gilman, Decadence. The Strange Life of an Epithet (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1979), p. 23.

[5] Ibid., p. 25.

[6] Ibid., p. 95.

[7] C. de Deugd, "Towards a Comparatist's Definition of 'Decadence,'" Comparative Poetics, eds. D.W. Koffema, E. Kunne-Ibsch and A.J.A. van Zoest (Amsterdam: Editions Rodopi N.V., n.d.), p. 33.

[8] Ibid., p. 37.

[9] Ibid., p. 45.

[10] Marianne Kesting, bookreview of Hans Hinterhäuser's Fin de siècle. Gestalten und Mythen, 1975, Romanische Forschungen, ed. Fritz Schalk, vol. 89 (Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann, 1977), p. 514.

[11] H.E. Gerber, "Some Problems in Definition," English Fiction in Transition 1880-1920, vol. 5, No 5 (Lafayette: Purdue Univeristy, 1962), p. 31.

[12] Ibid.

[13] Ibid.

[14] Clyde de Ryals, "Toward a Definition of Decadent as applied to British Literature of the Nineteenth Century," Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism, 17 (n.p.: np, 1958), p. 86.

[15] Ibid., p. 92.

[16] Norberto Bobbio, The Philosophy of Decadentism. A Study in Existentialism (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1948), p. 15.

[17] Roger Bauer, "'Fin de siècle' et 'décadence' comme catégories littéraires," Neohelicon III, 3-4, eds. Miklo Szabolcsi and György M. Vajda (Budapest: Akadémiai Kiado, 1975), p. 71.

[18] Ibid., p. 81.

[19] Roger Bauer, "'Décadence': Histoire d'un Mot et d'une Idée," Cahiers Roumains d'Etudes Littéraires, vol. 1, ed. Romul Munteanu (Bucarest: Editions Univers, 1978), p. 55.

[20] Ibid., p. 64.

[21] Ibid., p. 66.

[22] Ibid., p. 64.

[23] Ingeborg Bernhart, "'Décadence' und 'style décadent'," Neohelicon II, 3-4, eds. Miklos Szabolcsi and György M. Vajda (Budapest: Akadémiai Kiado, 1974), p. 194.

CONCLUSION

This thesis has demonstrated the process and implications of the discourse surrounding "decadence." I have presented an analysis of the emergence, the migrations and transformations of a cultural notion. In so doing I have tried to explain the mechanism of the institutionalization of terminology from the perspectives of the artist as well as the critic. I presented a map which focused on the metalanguage inherent in the works of such artists as Oscar Wilde, André Gide and Max Brod. Subsequently, I presented the critical territory within which the map is placed, i.e. retrospective aesthetics as practised by critics. Both angles, however, were always looked at in relation to their specific socio-historical contexts, contexts which in each case determined the meaning of the notion "decadence."

Although this thesis lacks a thorough socio-historical background due to the scope of the study, I pointed out the importance of the differences in point of view as determined by each individual's presuppositions. I showed how the term "decadence" was and is used. Thus I drew attention to the differences and the similarities of the paradigm "decadence" within the map as well as the territory. I used the terminology as it was used by the artists and the critics without, however, necessarily agreeing with their actual

conceptualizations. As a consequence, I based my own point of view on certain structures as introduced by Saussure: the signifier and the signified. The signifier stands for the overall cultural phenomenon of "decadence," whereas the signified accounts for the multiplicity of variants that appeared in each particular existential framework. Therewith I explained the incompatible variations of the original word "decadence," such as in French: 1) décadence, 2) décadisme, 3) décadentisme, 4) décadent, 5) décadiste, 6) décadentiste; or in English: 1) decadence, 3) decadency, 3) decaydency, 4) decadentism, 5) decadent, 6) decadently, 7) decadescent, 8) decadentistic; and in German: 1) Dekadenz and 2) dekadent. Therewith I also explained the interpretations of, among others, Anatole Baju, Arthur Symons, Stefan George, as well as most important the forms of "decadence" in Oscar Wilde's The Picture of Dorian Gray, André Gide's Paludes, and Max Brod's Schloß Nornepygge. Due to the limitations of this thesis, Italian or North American authors such as D'Annunzio or Whitman had to be left out.

What became apparent throughout the study of all these variants is a process of terminological inflation in the use of the notion "decadence." Therefore, I also wished to point out the dangers involved in such a process. Despite the fact that certain basic associations of "decadence" remained constant throughout its usages, and despite the ongoing opposition to bourgeois values and society implicit in the term,

new variants were continuously being invented. Brod's

term "Indifferentismus," for example, represents an increase

of inflation of aesthetic distinctions within a given

society. Furthermore, the critical choices in many instances

only re-emphasize the stereotypization of "decadence," or

they contribute a new and often redundant definition, or

they ignore certain aspects completely--for example, there

does not appear to be any critical study of Max Brod in

reference to "decadence".

Terminology such as the notion of "decadence" in this

thesis is determined by institutional constraints. A reci-

procal effect appears, i.e. two aspects of the migrational

and transformational processes: the analysis of the develop-

ment of the notion of "decadence" did not only deal with the

fact that a given ideological position or presupposition in-

fluences the emergence of a particular concept, but it must

also be recognized that an already established system of

thought is capable of influencing human behaviour and action

in given social situations. The implications of both aspects

were only touched upon in this thesis. A thorough theoretical

analysis of ideological interrelations remains to be done.

Nevertheless, the attempt to relate "decadence" with vaster

cultural issues should leave the reader with an impression

of this field of research.

Finally, I should like to emphasize again that this thesis

has not covered all aspects of "decadence" even at the time of

its emergence, as for example, such phenomena as mysticism and spiritism. I have limited the references to seeing the wave of conversions to catholicism as a reaction against positivism, a reaction that was considered to be "decadent." I have left unmentioned the impact of sciences such as palaeontology, criminology or the beginnings of modern psychology, i.e. the totally negative interpretations of "decadence" by Nordau or Lombroso, for example. I have omitted references to interrelations of the "decadent" move-ment with early moments of such movements as expressionism or futurism. I have left out more recent studies like Susan Sontag's article on "camp" or references to today's variant of "decadence" in the "punk" movement, both of which represent a rebirth of this cultural phenomenon. Yet, I hope I have elucidated to a slight degree the possibilities which the discourse around "decadence" implies.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

A. Selective Primary Bibliography: Only those works that
    have directly been dealt with in the thesis are mentioned
    here. This includes as primary material journals, auto-
    biographical works and critical writings.

B. Selective Secondary Bibliography: The most important
    works in reference to the thesis are listed here--
    including some 19th century authors--although more
    material with regard to "decadence" has been looked at.

C. Bibliography of Dictionaries.

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