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THE MELANCHOLY AESTHETES: THE PROBLEM
OF "DECADENCE" IN THE POETRY
OF THE YELLOW BOOK
AND THE SAVOY

BY
ARTHUR O. MENHART

A Thesis
Submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies through the
Department of English in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree of
Master of Arts at the University
of Windsor

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ABSTRACT

The area I propose to investigate is the poetry within certain so-called "decadent" periodicals, specifically The Yellow Book and The Savoy, which arose in England during the 1890's. To begin with, the first problem is one of definition. The historical meaning of "decadence" is given so that the rest of the study may be seen in some degree of perspective. The critical definition has been reached by tracing the various meanings assigned to decadence from its origins in the French Symbolist movement down to Arthur Symons' statement of meaning in 1893.

Concerning the actual poetry, the problem is four-fold: (i) to determine whether or not there are specific areas of subject matter peculiar to "decadent" poetry; (ii) to determine if there is a common thesis regarding their subject matter; (iii) to determine if there is a strong inclination toward the artificial and/or perverse; and (iv) to determine if there is a prevailing attitude in their poetry.

The Yellow Book is investigated first, and then The Savoy, with a greater emphasis on the latter, with special attention given to Aubrey Beardsley, Ernest Dowson, William Butler Yeats, and Arthur Symons.

I conclude that The Yellow Book cannot be labelled decadent at all, and that any decadence in The Savoy is due

to the poems of Dowson and Symons. In these poems the search for the ideal is the common subject. One cannot claim any style to be the decadent style. The perversity is not a matter of style, but of values, the decadent poets holding the unnatural higher than the natural.

But, perhaps the most outstanding characteristic of English decadents is the pervasive melancholy attitude of their poetry. The poets found that absolute beauty could not be attained and became disillusioned as a result. In effect, the decadents were melancholy aesthetes.

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INTRODUCTION

In England during the 1890's, a decade of intense literary turbulence, there arose several publications which were dedicated to the presentation of what their respective editors considered "good" poetry, fiction, criticism, and art work. The Yellow Book and The Savoy, the most famous of the new magazines, sought to bring this "good" literature and art work before the public (a task which the editors felt was not being accomplished) by having represented in their pages the best work of certain contemporary figures, of a select group of writers and illustrators. Because of this exclusive limitation one may regard these two periodicals as representative of a distinctive segment of the literary scene of the 90's, a time which, sometimes flippantly, sometimes pejoratively, and sometimes defiantly, has been labelled "decadent."

The term, "decadent," raises certain problems.¹ In the following study it will be used in two senses, historical and critical. In the historical sense "decadent" refers to that literary outburst which occurred in England, centered in London, during the last decade of the nineteenth century. The movement,

¹There has been a great deal of controversy over the definition of decadence since the 1890's. Clyde de L. Ryal's "Towards a Definition of Decadent as Applied to British Literature of the Nineteenth Century" (Journal of Art and Aesthetics, XVII, 1957, 85-92) and Robert L. Peters' answering article, "Toward an Un-Definition of Decadent as Applied to British Literature of the Nineteenth Century" (Journal of Art and Aesthetics, XVIII, 1958, 258-64), may be seen as an example of this.

if it may be called such, involved a small coterie of young and aspiring artists, chief among them Arthur Symons, Aubrey Beardsley, Ernest Dowson, and the young William Butler Yeats,² who were greatly influenced by the French Symbolists, Gautier, Verlaine, Mallarmé, and Rimbaud, by the earlier French writers, Flaubert and Baudelaire, and by the literary doctrines of Walter Pater.³ The movement reached its peak at the mid-decade mark, and then steadily and rapidly declined, until by 1900, for all intents and purposes, one may say that it completely died out. In this sense "decadent" is a historical label and in this paper will serve as a framework for the critical definition.

The critical definition is much more elusive. It has its roots in the earlier French Symbolist movement. Max Nordau quotes Théophile Gautier's definition of decadence:

The style of decadence. . . is nothing else than art arrived at the extreme point of maturity produced by those civilizations which are growing old with their oblique suns. . . a style

²Thomas Jay Garbáty ("The French Coterie of the "Savoy" 1896," PMLA, LXXV [December, 1960], 609) mentions by name Arthur Symons, Ernest Dowson, Aubrey Beardsley, Walter Sickert, and Charles Condor. Wendell Harris ("Innocent Decadence: The Poetry of the "Savoy," PMLA, LXXVII [December, 1962], 632) lists only Symons, Dowson, and Beardsley as the three "most often cited as epitomizing the decadence of the 1890's." Margaret Casford (The Magazines of the 1890's, University of Oregon, 1929, p. 4) names all of the before-mentioned people and adds Lionel Johnson, John Davidson, and Hubert Crackanthorpe. I have listed only the four men because they were the major contributors of poetry to the magazines.

³The list of influences has been derived from the following critical works: Helmut Gerber, "The Nineties: Beginning, End, or Transition?" Edwardians and Late Victorians, English Institute Essays (New York, 1939); Wendell Harris, loc. cit.; Margaret Casford, loc. cit.; T.J. Garbáty, loc. cit.; Katherine L. Mix, A Study in Yellow: The "Yellow Book" and Its Contributors, (Lawrence, Kansas, 1960).

that is ingenious, complicated, learned, full of shades of meaning and research, always pushing further the limits of language, borrowing from all the technical vocabularies, taking colours from all palettes, notes from all keyboards, forcing itself to express in thought that which is most ineffable, and in form the vaguest contours; listening, that it may translate them, to the subtle confidences of the neural path, to the avowals of ageing and depraved passion, and to the singular hallucinations of the fixed idea verging on madness.⁴

Gautier ostensibly is speaking of style, but in the final part of his definition the reference is to the person. The decadent person is super-sensitive to his own impressions: he is acutely aware of his own feelings, his own responses. The phrase "ageing and depraved passion," gives a further clue to the decadent personality. It is, as Wendell Harris claims, that "familiarity with proscribed pleasures bred a jaded weariness,"⁵ and thus led the "d ecadents" into extremities, both in style and subject matter. Although Gautier does not openly stress the inclination towards the perverse, he does hint at something sinister. Perhaps it is as William Gaunt has claimed, that there "was the sense that something vaguely evil was to be found at the very center of beauty, an evil not to be avoided but to be embraced and enjoyed (intellectually and imaginatively) by the writer."⁶ This is a Baudelarian notion, and is best expressed in the concluding verse of his "Hymne   la Beaut .".

De Satan ou de Dieu, qu'importe? Ange ou Sir ne
Qu'importe, si tu rends,--fi  aux yeux de velours,

⁴Degeneration (New York, 1895), p. 232.

⁵Wendell Harris, op. cit., p. 629. Hereafter Harris's article will be referred to as "Innocent Decadence."

⁶The Aesthetic Adventure (London, 1957), p. 69.

Rythme, parfum, lueur, ô mon unique reine!--
L'universe moins hideux et les instants moins lourds?⁷

"To make the world less hideous, and the moments easier to bear:" this is the ultimate goal of decadent art. Beauty must be realized no matter through what methods or in what subject matter. The end will justify the means.

So far, decadence is characterized by a constant search for beauty, the decadent ideal. It mattered little if the search led through perversity and resulted in the artificial.

The English "decadents" also had this aim borrowed from the French. But they also were followers of the aesthetic pronouncements of Walter Pater, particularly as found in his "Preface" and "Conclusion" to Studies in the History of the Renaissance.⁸ Briefly, Pater propounded the principle of "aesthetic criticism," which is the notion of the continuing refinement of one's own sensibilities in order to "know one's own impression as it really is,"⁹ so that one could "burn always with this hard gemlike flame."¹⁰ At each moment of life there is one impression to be perceived which is more appealing than any of the others, and it is the aesthetic

⁷Selected Verse, ed. Francis Scarfe (Harmondsworth, 1961), p. 223.

⁸(London, 1873). This book is a collection of articles, some previously published in the Fortnightly Review, others written expressly for the book. All future references are to the Mentor edition entitled The Renaissance: Studies in Art and Poetry (New York, 1959).

⁹Ibid., p. xii.

¹⁰Ibid., p. 158.

critic's duty to be poignantly aware of "this special impression of beauty or pleasure."¹¹ The emphasis is on the person's sensibilities, on the degree to which he is aware of "special impressions," and not on some exterior, abstract entity. Beauty does not exist as an objective ideal; it resides in the person's sensibilities.

The "decadent" disciples of Pater misinterpreted his doctrine on this point: they felt that there did exist an ideal beauty, and they sought it. But where Pater included all things, an infinite variety of experiences to be capable of creating a situation wherein the "aesthetic critic" could perceive beauty, the "decadents" restricted and limited the number of potential experiences. The archetypal decadent anti-hero was a person such as Des Esseintes, Huysman's protagonist in À Rebours.¹² Indeed, when Symons formally introduced the notion of decadence into England,¹³ the characteristics he cited as decadent were an accurate character description of Des Esseintes. The decadent was, for Symons,

an effeminate, over-civilized, deliberately abnormal creature who is the last product of our society. . . partly the father, partly the off-spring of the perverse art he adores. He delights in the beauty of strange, unnatural flowers, in the melodious combination of scents, in the imagined harmonies of the sense of taste.¹⁴

¹¹Pater, op. cit., p. xiii.

¹²Against Nature, trans. by Robert Boldick (Harmondsworth, 1959).

¹³"Innocent Decadence," p. 629.

¹⁴"The Decadent Movement in Literature" Harper's New Magazine, LXXXVII (Nov., 1893), 859. This definition is strikingly like the traits possessed by Des Esseintes. For

Symons' definition is much like Gautier's: it differs in that it stresses openly the perverse and the artificial. His debt to the French symbolists is great,¹⁵ and Symons was Pater's most ardent disciple.¹⁶ In this one person we can see the two major influences united and synthesized. And Symons is central to this "movement," for not only was he a contributor to both The Yellow Book and The Savoy, but he was the literary editor of the latter.

The notion of decadence is characterized by a constant search for ideal beauty in the perverse and the artificial so that the decadent person could "burn always with this hard gemlike flame." The notion is no longer pure Paterism, nor is it pure Baudelaire. The two ideas have undergone changes in their fusion. Pater's unlimited sources have become narrowed to the perverse and artificial: his idea of subjective appreciation of impressions has been transmuted into an objective and external ideal. The goal of the search is no longer "to make the moments easier to bear," as Baudelaire felt, but has become a positive "pleasure," which

delighting in "the beauty of strange, unnatural flowers" see Chapters VII and VIII of Against Nature; for the "melodious combination of scents," Chapter X; examples of "perverse art" and "the imagined harmonies of the sense of taste," occur frequently throughout the book.

¹⁵T.J. Garbáty (loc. cit.) claims that bringing "the French poets to the English public" was one of Symons' greatest achievements. It would seem, however, that this task was not completed in any sense until his publication of The Symbolist Movement in Literature in 1899.

¹⁶See "Innocent Decadence" (loc. cit.) and T.E. Welby. Arthur Symons: A Critical Study (London, 1925), Chapter 2. Joseph Houe (W.B. Yeats: 1865-1939 [New York, 1943], p. 128.) says that "it seemed to Yeats that, more than anyone he had ever known, Symons lived the temperate life recommended by Pater."

can be achieved through realizing beauty.

But there is one more step in the development of the English notion of decadence. The "decadents" were facing an impossible task: the beauty they sought was transient and the moments did slip away. When they realized this, they were possessed with a deep, pervasive sense of melancholy: their work became the "lament for the probable unattainability and inevitable transience of the experience of the ideal."¹⁷ In the final analysis, the English "decadent" was a melancholy aesthete who was much influenced by contemporary French writing. His writing would exhibit a constant search for ideal beauty, a penchant for the perverse and artificial, and overall, a melancholy attitude.

It cannot be said that the literature of The Yellow Book and The Savoy constitute all the "decadent" writing of the period, for much work was done which did not appear in their pages. Oscar Wilde, perhaps the decade's leading "decadent," did not make a single contribution to either magazine. Despite this, the two periodicals, especially The Savoy, are most important to the historical meaning of "decadence," for in them are represented the coterie of writers most often called "decadent."

In fact, the histories of the magazines are integrally linked with the historical background of the movement. Particularly in their respective editorial policies and aims one can find a framework within which the critical meaning of

¹⁷"Innocent Decadence," p. 634.

decadence can be applied. When The Yellow Book began publication on April 15th, 1894, it marked the start of a new venture in the history of periodical publication. The Yellow Book was issued quarterly. It ran until April of 1897,¹⁸ The literary editors were Henry Harland and Ella D'Arcy: the art editor was Aubrey Beardsley. Newness was the keynote and the immediate aim was to attract attention. The "Announcement," issued in March, 1894, is directed toward this end.

The aim. . . of THE YELLOW BOOK is to depart as far as may be from the bad old traditions of periodical literature, and to provide an illustrated Magazine which shall be beautiful as a piece of book making, modern and distinguished in its letterpress and its pictures, and withal popular in the better sense of the word. It is felt that such a Magazine, at present is conspicuous by its absence. . . .

And while THE YELLOW BOOK will seek always to preserve a delicate, decorous, and reticent mein and conduct, it will at the same time have the courage of its modernness, and not tremble at the frown of Mrs. Grundy.¹⁹

If anything this "Announcement" is bold and definitive. It proclaims the intention of establishing a new, and better, precedent in periodical literature. The permanence of The Yellow Book is stressed: its propriety boldly declared. But it is defiant in proclaiming its modernity, and in doing so, there is the hint that its contents would be, to say the least, unconventional.

And indeed, on the morning of April 15th, 1894, when the periodical was released, "London suddenly turned

¹⁸The historical facts of The Yellow Book's life are taken from K.L. Mix A Study in Yellow, except where otherwise noted.

¹⁹Mix, op. cit., pp. 77-78.

yellow."²⁰ The periodical was bound in hard covers (an innovation in periodical publication), printed on good grade paper, and sold for five shillings, a rather high price when one compares it to the two shilling price of The Savoy. Attention to the hinted-at impiety of the new magazine was already attracted, for, besides the glaring, gaudy colour which was already associated with the aesthetes and decadents,²¹ Aubrey Beardsley had by this time gained some measure as an illustrator whose strange designs hinted at the aberrated and perverse. Yet, for all this, the magazine was not as shocking as expected. It was new, and it did not contain any 'news' items: it was strictly a literary and artistic periodical. The work of several not-so-well-known writers was presented, but to balance this there were also contributions by established and respected authors. It was far from the anticipated presentation of "purple" literature.

The reception of the first number by the critics was, almost entirely, highly critical.²² The established writers and illustrators were praised, but Beardsley, Beerbohm, Symons, and most of the rest of the contributors were condemned. The censure was so vehement that the first number sold

²⁰Mix, op. cit., p. 80.

²¹The colour yellow was a favorite of this decade. The association with the "decadents" is due largely to Oscar Wilde, who, in all his finery, paraded down Picadilly, with a sunflower in his hand. Richard Le Gallienne in Prose Fancies (London, 1896) typified the prevalent attitude toward yellow: "Let us dream of this: a maid with yellow hair, clad in a yellow gown, seated in a yellow room, at the window a yellow sunset, in the grate à yellow fire, at her side a yellow lamplight, on her knee a Yellow Book."

²²Mix, op. cit., pp. 87-95.

out three separate editions.

The subsequent career of The Yellow Book was stormy. The publishing firm of Elkin Matthews and John Lane was disbanded between the issuance of the July and October numbers of 1894, and John Lane took over the publishing duties under the sign of the Bodley Head. Then came the fatal fall of Oscar Wilde. When the arrest was made he was carrying a yellow-bound book under his arm which the public mistook for The Yellow Book. The masses revolted against what they considered the defiant flaunting of their standards by this leader of the "decadents," linked Wilde intimately with The Yellow Book, and stormed the Bodley Head premises, breaking windows and threatening total destruction. Naturally, Lane was quite concerned and in his efforts to placate the mob and to assuage certain authors, he made some significant changes. The most consequential change was the dismissal of Beardsley from his post as Art Editor. Despite the fact that Wilde and Beardsley were not close friends (due to a disagreement about Beardsley's illustrations for Wilde's Salome),²³ the two men were closely linked in the public mind and anything with which Beardsley was associated came under automatic suspicion. Unfortunately, John Lane was not in London at this time and did not have all the facts about the matter. He was also under some considerable

²³Mix, op. cit., p. 139, and W. Gaunt, op. cit., p. 197.

pressure from some literary salons²⁴ who were opposed to the "decadents," and finally he consented to Beardsley's dismissal. This was accompanied by appropriate policy changes. The magazine's scope was widened and its standards of quality were lowered. These changes were so immediate that the Beardsley plates, for the fifth number, already in the presses, were removed. The magazine was issued fifteen days late.

The Yellow Book survived this ordeal, but it did so at the expense of its former ideals. The periodical became just one more among the many. My concern with The Yellow Book ceases with the fourth number as the dismissal of Beardsley and the accompanying policy changes render the magazine no longer representative of the "decadent" aspect of the decade.²⁵

In order to escape involvement with the trouble concerning Wilde, many of the main literary figures of the "decadent" coterie fled to France. And it was in Dieppe that The Savoy was conceived. In August of 1895, Leonard Smithers, perhaps the decade's most courageous publisher, went there to ask

²⁴I am referring particularly to Mrs. Humphrey Ward and her influence with William Watson and Wilfred Meynell, two of Lane's most prized authors. Watson and Meynell threatened to take their work elsewhere if Lane refused to dismiss Beardsley. Lane knew that Watson had a following and so, unable to ascertain all the facts, left the matter to Frederic Chapman, his assistant. Chapman, who never liked Beardsley, gladly gave in to Watson and fired Beardsley. John Lane later regretted taking this course of action.

²⁵See also Mix op. cit. pp. 147-66; M. Casford, op. cit., pp. 18-21; Osbert Burdett, The Beardsley Period: An Essay in Perspective (New York, 1925), pp. 252-55; and T. J. Garbáty, op. cit., p. 609.

Arthur Symons to edit a new periodical which would be devoted to literature and art work.²⁶ In light of the times, this was an unexpected turn of events. Symons accepted, and immediately contacted the also exiled Beardsley and enlisted him as art editor.

There was quite a bit of excitement among the voluntary exiles over this new venture, and for several reasons. One reason was that it provided an opportunity to show a brave face to society in the midst of the Wilde scandal. Another was the desire to show up The Yellow Book for what it truly was--a turncoat in the ranks of true art.²⁷ But there is yet another, and perhaps more important reason for the ingroup excitement. The new magazine would give the "decadents" another opportunity to justify their philosophy and their art. The best statement of The Savoy's policies and aims is contained in Symons' "Editorial Note" to the first number:

It is hoped that THE SAVOY will be a periodical of an exclusively literary and artistic kind. To present literature in the shape of its letterpress, Art in the form of its illustrations, will be its aim. For the attainment of that aim we can but rely on our best endeavours and on the logic of our belief that good writers and artists will care to see their work in company with the work of good writers and artists. Readers who look to a new periodical for only very well-known or only very obscure names must permit themselves to be disappointed. We have no objection to a celebrity who deserves to be celebrated, or to an unknown person who has not been seen often enough to be recognized in passing. All

²⁶T.J. Garbáty, op. cit., p. 609.

²⁷Ibid., p. 611.

we ask from our contributors is good work, and good work is all we offer our readers. This we offer with some confidence. We have no formulas, and we desire no false unity of form or matter. We have not invented a new point of view. We are not Realists, or Romanticists, or Decadents, For us, all art is good which is good art. We hope to appeal to the tastes of the intelligent by not being original for originality's sake, or audacious for the sake of advertisement, or timid for the sake of the elderly minded. We intend to print no verse which has not some close relationship with poetry, no fiction which has not a certain sense of what is finest in living fact, no criticism which has not some knowledge, discernment, and sincerity in its judgment. We could scarcely say more, and we are content to think we could scarcely say less.²⁸

Here we have the explicit statement of the editor: the only criterion pertinent to the work presented would be those of "good art." The note of defiance is clear. High standards are established, so high as to be beyond the reach of the masses. Symons and company decided to do without the mob.

And, as could be expected, The Savoy failed. The reasons were mostly financial. The editors had learned that one cannot openly defy the public and present them with art which they could not hope to appreciate or understand, and at the same time have them pay for it. All the errors made and the unfavorable circumstances led ultimately to financial loss. The third issue contained several reproductions of William Blake's illustrations for Dante's Inferno which were judged to be indecent by Messrs. Smith and Sons, a major outlet for the railway bookstalls. They subsequently refused to display the magazine for sale any longer. The magazine sold for only two shillings, less than half the price of The Yellow Book,

²⁸The Savoy, No. 1, January, 1896, p. 5.

and yet it was as expensive to produce. The editors' decision to publish monthly instead of quarterly was made by the third number, thus increasing not only the total cost, but also levying greater pressure on the editors. And then there was Beardsley's ever-declining health. Initially the magazine received a great deal of attention because the notorious Beardsley was intimately associated with it.²⁹ But with each successive issue, less and less of his work appeared. He was dying of tuberculosis. For all three reasons, it was known in September that the December issue would be the last. In this final number Symons listed, somewhat bitterly, the reasons for the cessation. Besides the reasons stated above, he regretted giving so much for so little, and for "assuming that there were many people who really cared for art, and really for art's sake."³⁰ Implicit in this statement is the belief that even though The Savoy had a brief life, it did achieve its goal,--the presentation of "good art." It seems that, for Symons, "good art" was synonymous with the best work of his contributors. Symons' and Smithers' venture was doomed to failure because of lack of public support. There was no lack of

²⁹This point is also made by Burdett (loc. cit.) and Mix (loc. cit.). Although Beardsley was a major cause for calling the magazine "decadent," it is unfair to place the entire blame on him, for other key figures were also in the yellow limelight; Symons for his perverse poetry ("Stella Maris") and Smithers as a publisher of erotic and banned works.

³⁰"A Literary Causerie" III, No. 8 (Dec., 1896), 92.

literary and artistic contributors for either periodical; in fact, once the announcement for The Savoy was made, Symons was swamped with offerings.³¹

In effect both The Yellow Book and The Savoy did bring before the public certain new writers, such as Joseph Conrad and G.B. Shaw. The Yellow Book was the less exclusive of the two and after Wilde's arrest and Beardsley's dismissal, it lost any pretension of being dedicated solely to "good art." The Savoy remained faithful to its initial policies and to the last number continued to present only what its editor considered to be of high quality. It is interesting to note that the contents of the last number of The Savoy are the work of Symons and Beardsley alone,--perhaps as a farewell.

It seemed to the public that the "decadents" of the mid-90's openly flaunted the common standards of morality, and hence, a great antagonism arose between them. The masses could not understand the aims of these "decadent" writers, and immediately associated any of their productions with immorality. The term, "decadent," indiscriminately applied to all their work, had very little definition at the time, but was a stigma that, once applied, doomed any chance of general acceptance.

A brief analysis of the historical and critical meaning of decadence has been given in the first part of this study. I propose to analyze the poetry of the two magazines against

³¹M. Casford, op. cit., p. 20.

the historical background to see if the critical definition of decadence applies. That is, I hope to establish whether or not there are specific areas of subject matter which are truly decadent; to see if this poetry reveals the constant search for the ever-elusive ideal beauty; to determine if the decadent style abounds in perversities of language,³² if this poetry is a "retreat from great art by way of complexity",³³ and to determine if there is an overall melancholy attitude.

The magazines will be investigated in their chronological order, The Yellow Book first and then The Savoy. More emphasis will be placed on the latter, as The Savoy is historically the better representative of this movement. In discussing both magazines I will stress the poems of Symons, Dowson, Yeats, and Beardsley because these four men were the figures par excellence of the decade and of these magazines.

Ultimately it is hoped that some substantial conclusions may be reached about the unity of the poems within each magazine, and about the relationship between the two periodicals. And, most important of all, the poetry of The Yellow Book and The Savoy will be investigated with the view of illustrating any decadent characteristics, namely, the search for ideal beauty as a central theme, the inclination toward the perverse or artificial in treatment of theme, and a general mood of melancholy as an attitude.

³²Ian Fletcher "The 1890's: A Last Decade," Victorian Studies, IV (June, 1961), 353.

³³D.W. Gotshalle. Art and the Social Order (Chicago, 1947), p. 224.

POETRY OF THE YELLOW BOOK

Over all, the poetry of The Yellow Book is of very uneven quality. Perhaps part of the reason for this is the widespread, and often times opposed views presented by such differing poets as Symons and Watson. Harland sought a balanced fare for his first number,³⁴ presenting A.C. Benson, William Watson, and Edmund Gosse, poets of respectability, as well as Richard Le Gallienne, John Davidson, and Arthur Symons, the young, rebellious moderns. But the sought-after balance was not realized: Harland had paid too much attention to the "frown of Mrs. Grundy."

My discussion of the poems will not be in order of their publication, but rather, I shall group together poems related to each other in theme and subject matter so that some fluidity may be achieved in their discussion.

The Yellow Book's first poem is Richard Le Gallienne's "Tree Worship." One reached it after fifty pages of Henry James,--a very respected author. For all the title indicates, the poem is not a pagan, pantheistic prayer to the aged tree but a personal search, on the speaker's part, for a new and lasting faith.

The first five quatrains picture the strength, vastness, age, and permanence of a three-hundred-year-old tree, and

³⁴Mix, op. cit., p. 86.

compare the tree's being to the weakness, insignificance, and transience of the poet's life. The following quatrains are imaginative. By day, the speaker sees the tree as the sleeping place for magical dryads, as well as a majestic part of nature, a shelter for bird and beast. The tree has a dual nature now, one natural and majestic, the other magical and eerie, for with the rising moon, the dryads awaken to unite with moths and bats to hold witches' sabbaths.

The magical picture of the tree is extended in subsequent stanzas.

And then I picture thee some bloodstained Holyrood,
 Dread haunted palace of the bat and owl, whence steal,
 Shrouded all day, lost murdered spirits of the wood,
 And fright young happy nests with homeless hoot and squeal.³⁵
 (I, 58)

The tree has been, in the speaker's imagination, a crucifix, an instrument of death, and because of this has served as the refuge for the spirits of those executed there. Thus far, the tree represents strength, endurance, and something of the supernatural: it is, for the poet, the embodiment of the virtues which he desires.

The final conversion of the poem is in the form of a direct appeal from the speaker to the tree:

I seek a god, old tree: accept my worship, thou!
 All other gods have failed me always in my need.
 I hang my native song beneath thy temple bough,
 Unto thy strength I cry--Old monster, be my creed!

Give me to clasp this earth with feeding roots like thine,
 To mount yon heaven with such star-aspiring head,
 Fill full with sap and buds this shrunken life of mine,
 And from my boughs O might such stalwart sons be shed!
 (I, 59)

³⁵All reference to work cited from The Yellow Book will be indicated in the text by volume and page number.

The plea is for regeneration from an unproductive life. The tree becomes a god who is capable of granting his request. The tree assumes ultimate importance and apparently deposes all other gods, including the Christian. But the final stanza contradicts this pantheistic portrayal.

O winds that blow from out the fruitful mouth of God,
 O rains that softly fall from his all-loving eyes,
 You that bring buds to trees and daisies to the sod,
 O God's best Angel of the Spring, in me arise.
 (I, 59)

This last stanza returns the poem to conventional religious beliefs. By carrying the worship of the tree the one step further, by stating that all things initially come from God, the poem, at the end, loses its brash, pagan flavor. This notion of God as the essence of all works of nature appears only in the last quatrain: it jars violently with the speaker's former statement, "All other gods have failed me always in my need." The first seventeen quatrains have a sense of unity that is disturbed by this tacked-on ending.

Essentially the speaker is searching for some source of security, some external entity in which he can place his faith and trust. The old tree, a thing of nature, seems to be the answer. Yet, the tree is not purely benign: it is a "Vast and mysterious brother," a "bloodstained Holyrood," an "Old monster," and a gallows tree.

There are somber hints of evil in calling the tree a gallows. Bats, owls, witches, and corpses are linked with the tree. Fantastic images are not infrequent. Moths and bats hold witches' sabbath rituals; lost, murdered spirits seek out more innocent dwellers of the tree to frighten them;

nightingales are adulterous and murderous; and the bare-bones human corpse becomes a "Ghostly Aeolian harp fingered of winds and rains." These are not common conceits: they are elaborate and unnatural.

In mood, the poem begins quite melancholily, for the speaker's life has been unsatisfactory and unproductive. But this melancholy is dissipated by final hope. The speaker still prays, and the tree seems to offer what he seeks,--a new, enduring faith.

From the view point of this interpretation, one cannot say that "Tree Worship" is a decadent poem. There is a search, but it is for re-affirmation in life rather than for ideal beauty. The inclination is towards the highly imaginative and fantastic. Anything unnatural in this poem is quite innocuous.

Alfred Hayes' poem, "My Study", in the second number, also deals with the nature-God relationship. It is, however, more straightforward. The first stanza establishes the tone and attitude that is maintained throughout the poem.

Let others strive for wealth or praise
 Who care to win;
 I count myself full blest, if He
 Who made my study fair to see,
 Grant me but the length of quiet days
 To muse therèin.

(II, 275)

There is no deification of any one part of nature: the whole created nature, as created by God, is honoured because in it one can find God's imprint. This is more purely transcendental. It echoes the same sentiment that Wordsworth proclaimed in "Expostulation and Reply." Here are two stanzas of "My Study"

which may be taken as representative:

Here dwell my chosen books, whose leaves
 With healing breath
 The aches of discontent assuage,
 And speak from each illumined page
 The patience that my soul relieves
 From inward death;

Some perish with a season's wind,
 And some endure;
 One robes itself in snow, and one
 In raiment of the rising sun
 Bordered with gold; in all I find
 God's signature.

(II, 276)

The sentiments are typically romantic. Like Le Gallienne, Hayes seeks solace in nature. Unlike Le Gallienne, Hayes is not melancholy but optimistic. Where Le Gallienne is fantastic, Hayes is conventional.

The two poems, "Twilight" and "The Waking of Spring", by Olive Constance contain the same theme, only more extreme, effeminate, and sentimental. "The Waking of Spring" is threadworn in its content.

Spirit of Spring, thy coverlet of snow
 Hath fallen from thee, with its fringe of frost,
 And where the river late did overflow

Sway fragile white anemones, wind tost
 And in the woods stand snowdrops, half asleep,
 With drooping heads--sweet dreamers so long lost.
 (IV, 116)

Etc., etc.

Leila Macdonald's "Red Rose", though simpler in form, is a much better poem. The speaker laments the fleeting moment of a rose's life, but resolves that the rose

should stay dying half your life;
 Your drooping face
 Gives you when dying your divinest face.
 But death's pale colours are your sole disgrace.
 (IV, 143)

To say the least, extolling the beauty of a rose dying is not traditional: it is extra-ordinary, and mildly perverse. The lament is for the transience of beauty: the tone, melancholy and wistfully upbraiding.

These are the poems which may be said to deal with nature most directly. The sentiment expressed is not brazenly perverse but, in general, is fairly commonplace. Nature is God's handiwork and beauty's residence. Regret is voiced because beauty does not last, but is so fleeting. Yet, the beauty in question is not ideal beauty, but the real beauty of nature. It is not a goal to be sought but a phenomenon to be witnessed.

Related to the 'nature-beauty' poems just discussed are the 'love-beauty' poems in that love is also seen as a fleeting, fickle thing. A.C. Benson's "Δαιμον ζόμενος" is a fine expression of this. The first two quatrains laud the virtues of the speaker's loved one. Then,

Suddenly, once, at a trivial word,--
 Side by side together we stept,--
 Rose a tempest that swayed and stirred;
 Over your soul it swept.

Dismal visitants, suddenly,
 Pulled the doors in your house of clay;
 Out of the windows there stared at me
 Something horrible, grey.

(I, 83)

"Δαιμον ζόμενος", (possessed by a devil) is a fitting title: the poem is concerned with the moment when love vanishes, when love, the ideal, is no more. There is a certain regret about love's passing, but the attitude is more one of incomprehension, of bewilderment.

This is not an uncommon notion. Theodore Wratislaw extends and elaborates upon the notion of evil in love in his poem "To Salomé at St. James." The woman described here is a dancer at St. James Music Hall, and she has a certain power over men. The fact that she portrays Salomé appeals to the speaker who likens her spell over him with that which the original Salomé had over Herod.

I too am servant to your glance,
 I too am bent beneath your sway,
 My wonder! My desire! who dance
 Men's heads and hearts away.

Sweet arbitress of love and death,
 Unchanging on time's changing sands,
 You hold more lightly than a breath
 The world between your hands!

(III, 111)

Love, at least of this kind, is basically evil: its attraction is fatal. The transient here is the never-ending change of victims. The constant is the "Sweet arbitress of love and death" who holds this destroying power,--the "sweet arbitress" who is woman. The speaker likens himself to Herod and all victims of love, and, more than the original, he knows the possible consequences and is still willing to submit to her charms.

This poem is based upon the Salomé and St. John story. Woman, the seductress, has instincts which incline her to use man, instincts which "the strength of love release." The names may change but this fatal magnetism remains. Originally it was Salomé dancing before Herod to win St. John's head: now it is a painted actress dancing at St. James to win the heart of the speaker. The tone is ruefully

accepting. The subject matter is artificial and perverse. The speaker delights in this predicament.

The fourth number of The Yellow Book presented four poems about love. One of them, Charles Sydney's "Song", is a playful, light verse expressing a mock displeasure at the speaker's beloved because she is too insistent in her manifestations of love and will hardly allow the speaker to reciprocate.

Richard Le Gallienne's "Home" is in contrast to this poem. The speaker overhears two lovers say that they are going home and is immediately cast into a dejected mood. He thinks of his own situation: his home is lonely but for a small child whom it pains to see. One is not sure whether his erstwhile lover and/or wife has deserted him or if she has died. The speaker bewails the fleeting moment of true love: "Ah, love, we too once gambolled home as they,"; "Yes! we had once a heaven we called a home." The speaker is in complete isolation without love. This attitude implies that love is quite important in life, but that love is transient and leaves only sad memories.

Dolf Wyllarde's "Rondeaux d'Amour" is the reverse side of the picture from Le Gallienne's "Home." Actually, Wyllarde's poem is composed of three "rondeaux", each complete and perfect in form. This trilogy of verses presents a fairly complete picture of the cycle of love. The first rondeau is an entreaty from the speaker to his lover to

be wise! for all too soon we tire
When once the longed-for guerdon we acquire
The wonder that we think not to possess,

Once in our keeping, holds us less and less.
 Nay - let us love, nor all too much inquire,
 Before the night.

The ambiguity emanates from the two possible meanings of "night". It may be the actual night, or it may refer to death. If it is the actual night, then the speaker has been promised a 'rendezvous' with his love and does not want to wait until night. If death is meant, the plea is carpe diem "for all too soon we tire."

The second rondeau portrays the speaker's reaction to the actual meeting with his lover, a meeting which is the epitome of all he yearned for.

During the night I felt you breathing deep
 Against my heart--and yet I did not weep
 With perfect passion!--fearing only this,
 One golden moment of the night to miss--
 The sacred night that was not made for sleep!
 (III, 88)

The lady succumbs to his pleas, and:

We sowed in love--in passion do we reap,
 During the night.
 (III, 88)

The third rondeau is about the disillusion which quickly follows upon the consummation of their love.

After the night Love wearied of his powers,
 He fell asleep among the passion-flowers.
 (III, 88)

.....
 Poor Love! who trembles at himself, and covers,
 After the night.
 (III, 89)

The sequence, "Before the night," "During the night," and "After the night" gives the reader a complete picture of love's cycle: first comes the yearning and the chase, then the ultimate realization, and finally, having discovered that

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the achievement falls below the expectation, disillusionment. Inherent is the notion that love--or the embodiment of the ideal of love--should never be realized, that love should remain locked in its ivory tower. Once love is realized it ceases to be the ideal and becomes the stuff of common, everyday life.

If the meaning of 'night' is death, then the concept of love is changed. The three rondeaus form an argument to love passionately, to taste bliss, for soon "Love" [will] weary of his powers.

The ambiguity of the two interpretations is difficult to resolve for one--the actual-night interpretation--is not a microcosmic reflection of the other. The former seems to say that love is better in the anticipation than in the realization, while the latter maintains that one must love completely, for life is short and opportunity is scarce. However, if one realizes that after death, "Wan in the daylight looked our crystal towers," that Love is no longer important, and that "During the night", love is a taste of bliss and pleasurable, the incongruity lessens, for, even in the actual-night interpretation, just because the spent lover is disillusioned, there remains the fact that the love experience was enjoyable.

This poem presents a fairly realistic, if cynical, view of love. It must be always enshrined in the yearning of anticipation, for if the love is consummated, the ideal which was sought is found to have slipped away. The poem's statement, for all its truth, was bold for the mid-90's,

and was probably regarded as immoral by the general public, especially since Wyllarde was a woman. It is, in fact, a disillusioned view of love, and is bitter in its tone. The audacity of her viewpoint would have been considered decadent, but, as we can see, the whole poem is bitterly realistic rather than perverse--or artificial.

Equally cynical, but far more imaginative is Graham R. Tomson's "Verspertia." The characters are two losers in the game of love who find themselves no longer able to love. The girl in the poem, Verspertia, had followed her lover to a lonely island where he abandoned her. One is not sure how far in the past this happened. We are certain that Verspertia is a ghost however. The speaker, whose true love has died, arrives at the island, and meets Verspertia, who seeks his love. He replies

"Dear, but no love is mine to give," I said
 My heart is colder than granite stone
 That guards my true love in her grassy bed;
 My faith and troth are hers, and hers alone,
 Are hers and she is dead."

(IV, 50-51)

The speaker is quite unable to love Verspertia at this time: he has isolated all such feelings and placed them before his now-dead lover. He cannot yet realize, as does Verspertia that

"Love will be life ah, Love is Life!"
 (IV, 50)

His sentiments seem to be laudable to the criterion of our monogamous society, but not with reference to the more catholic--and perhaps truer--yardstick of the ghost-lover.

The rejected girl now laments,

Ah, hadst thou loved me but a little while,
 I might have lived again.
 Then slowly as a wave along the shore
 She glided from me to yon sullen mound.

Verspertilia has returned to her spirit-world. Love was the only thing to revive her, but it was refused her.

The speaker, who recounts this memory, is now smitten with regret. The realization of the truth of her insight, "Love is Life," has come too late.

And now, alas, my true-love's memory
 Even as a dream of night-time half-forgot,
 Fades faint and far from me,
 And all my thoughts are of the stranger still,
 Yea, though I loved her not:
 (IV, 51)

The memory of his dead "true-love" is no longer sacred. He realizes, now when it is too late, that Verspertilia will never return. Implicit is the notion that not only the phantom girl has lost, but that the speaker too has missed his opportunity to live life through love. This realization dooms the speaker to eternal melancholy. Love, or the chance for love is fleeting. The whole notion of the imagery is fanciful: it requires that a rejected ghost-lover teach the sorrowing speaker the truth about love and life, but even then, the opportunity has slipped by. Once again we have the melancholy rueful and realistic picture of love--the ideal.

On page 127 of the first number Aubrey Beardsley has an illustration entitled, purposely ambiguous, it seems, "Night Piece." It is the picture of a solitary woman on the street. The predominant colour is black: the woman is outlined for the most part in white. She is the typical

Beardsley-woman--almost emaciated in her slenderness, very finely dressed, sensuous, thick lips, perverse expression on her face, low bust line. The indication that she is a prostitute is quite strong.

Immediately following this is Symons' "Stella Maris," 'Star of the Sea', a title sometimes given to the Blessed Virgin Mary. But this poem is not religious: it is about an encounter with a prostitute who lights up the dark sea of his life like a beacon, the star of the sea. True or ideal love is not mentioned. Instead Symons maintains that even the purchased love one shares with a prostitute is an occasion for joy, and not for shame or guilt feelings.

And I, remembering, would declare
 That joy, not shame, is ours to share,
 Joy that we had the will and power
 In spite of fate, to snatch one hour,
 Out of vague nights, and days at strife,
 So infinitely full of life.
 And 'tis for this I see you rise,
 A wraith, with starlight in your eyes,
 Here, where the drowsy-minded mood
 Is one with Nature's solitude;
 For this, for this, you come to me
 Out of the nights, out of the sea.

(I, 131)

The speaker is amazed at being able to remember this particular woman, "neither first nor last of all," until he becomes aware that through this encounter he was able to win "An instant from oblivion." Unlike the selfish lover of "Verspertia," the speaker in this poem does believe in a more catholic application of love; for it is only through acts of love (the love act?) that "the moments pass more quickly and the moments are easier to bear." It is for this reason that the speaker recalls this particular woman; she

is individual just as Beardsley's nocturnal lady.

That this poem is decadent is indisputable. The ideal of realizing life to the full, of "burning always with this hard gemlike flame," is the sought after goal; that the attainment of such a state is at best infrequent and the maintenance of such a love is impossible is proven in the speaker's statement that he can only win instants from oblivion. Perverse and artificial qualities can be found in the nature of the subject matter: bought love is seemingly equated with true (married?) love. The melancholy attitude is evident in that the speaker has only the memory, and not the actuality of the incident. This is, perhaps, the one poem which is truly decadent in every regard.

John Davidson's "A Ballad of a Nun" extends the efficacy of love even further than Symons has stated. In fact, this poem would have been in more kindred company in the pages of The Savoy. It is the narrative of a sister who for ten long years has been the model of virtue in her order while, all the time, she has been fighting a constant battle with the volatile passions within her soul. Then, one night as she is keeping watch at the convent gate, music from a pre-Lenten carnival floats up to her from the village below. She finds herself no longer able to resist her inner instincts and flies from the convent to the village. There is some deep-rooted dissatisfaction burning within: her quest is:

"Life's dearest meaning I shall probe;
Lo! I shall taste of love at last!
Away!" She doffed her outer robe,
And sent it sailing down the blast.

Upon entering the carnival she spies a "grave youth nobly dressed" and offers herself to him.

Straight to his house the nun he led:
 "Strange lady, what would you with me?"
 "Your love, your love, sweet lord," she said;
 "I bring you my virginity."
 (III, 276)

The noble youth acquiesces to her desires, but the nun, far from being disillusioned or guilt-ridden, realizes that "This/ is life's great meaning, dear, my lord." She does not feel that she has been debased but rather through giving the youth "all her passion's hoard," she has become "sister to the mountain now, / And sister to the sun and moon." The sharing of love has elevated, rather than lowered her.

When, after the passing years, she has grown old and "The hour came of her last caress," she rises one midnight and returns to the convent to throw herself at the wardress' feet to confess.

The wardress raised her tenderly;
 She touched her wet and fast-shut eyes;
 "Look, sister; sister, look at me;
 Look; can you see through my disguise?"

She looked and saw her own sad face,
 And trembled, wondering, "Who art thou?"
 "God sent me down to fill your place:
 I am the Virgin Mary now."

"You are sister to the mountains now,
 And sister to the day and night;
 Sister to God;" and on the brow
 She kissed her thrice, and left her sight.
 (III, 279)

Symons declared that love--sexual love--was the only thing which made life joyful: Davidson betters him by stating that love is the way to heaven, to sanctity, to God.

Amazingly enough, Symons received far more criticism

than did Davidson.³⁶ Yet, surely a nun who breaks her vows and is rewarded would be more shocking than a person who revels in dealings with whores. Davidson's poem is a declaration that love atones for all sins. Love is the ideal to be sought, for even in God's eyes, love fulfills the spirit. There is no trace of melancholy, unless it resides in the knowledge that such an occurrence would not happen in reality. In fact, the poem is highly wrought. Under the guise of the ballad form--perhaps the simplest of all literary forms--Davidson is highly symbolic in his play on words--sister, lord, carnival. Through her yielding to her passions, the woman becomes a true sister to creation, to man and God, and not just a religious who flees the world to

comfortable convent laws
That bury foolish nuns alive!

The 'lord' of the carnival usurps the Lord, her God, until the awareness that God does not exist apart from His creation comes. The carnival is not just a village festivity, it is all of life--a life which can be very enjoyable. The coming Lent is Death, which puts an end to life's pleasures. It is only through living life and indulging in life's pleasures that man can draw near to his intended purpose. Even the nun, who is aware that love is life's dearest treasure, is so burdened by her social learning that toward the end of her life she feels the need to repent. Her forgiveness, by someone no less than the Virgin Mary, condones, and even

³⁶Mix, op. cit., p. 115.

promotes her actions, and implicitly, love as a way of life. Verspertilia was right: "Love is Life."

There are, however, six other poems in the first three numbers of The Yellow Book which can be included in this discussion of love. Three of these, Dollie Radford's "Song" (II, 116), Ronald Campbell Macfie's "Dreams" (II, 195), and Norman Gale's "Betrothed" (II, 227) are similar insofar as each presents the object of the speaker's love as a person who is quite above ordinary mortals. Gale's betrothed brings paradise to earth: Macfie can only approach his goddess in his dreams: Radford states that all else in the world is naught "if love should fail." At best these poems are slight works. They do present a concept of love which is diametrically opposed to the formerly mentioned poems.

Theo Marzial's "To a Bunch of Lilacs" is a better poem. The speaker, although in love, addresses a bunch of lilacs and asks why his heart is not yet broken. He realizes that he has no hope to attain satisfaction in his love, but he is happy nonetheless. His only wish is "to love, and die." True, this is not a profound poem: it too idealizes the loved one. The speaker, who cannot openly declare his love, is forced to seek solace from nature. Poems by Watson and Macdonnell are more optimistic: the speaker in each, aware that daylight is no time for love (?), pleads that the loved one wait until nightfall for declarations of love. "Reiselust" pushes this further; the speaker yearns for the eternal "night,"--death-- so that the atmosphere of love will not be dispersed. This is similar to Marzial's prayer "to love, and die."

In all, the last six poems present quite different picture from the decadent notions in the preceding twelve poems. The last poems, except for "Reisehist" are simple in form and language, and express well worn sentiments. The attitude of yearning is very artificial: so is the glorification of the loved one. The reason Love of this kind cannot be realized is not because love is an abstract ideal, but because of personal unworthiness of the lover. The artifice is almost Petrarchan. Such poems as "Stella Maris," "Versperilia," and "A Ballad of a Nun" do not localize love but strive to embody, in the verse and imagery, more universal truths about love. Others, such as "Δαιμονι Γουερος" and "To Salomé at St. James" rue the elusiveness and cruelty of both love and the loved one. The attitudes are vastly different. I maintain that the first twelve poems establish the norm for The Yellow Book, not just because of the statistical weight of numbers, but because, in my estimation, they are more profound, more polished, and more intense. These poems, as indicated, do exhibit decadent traits--not necessarily all of the three characteristics of my definition in each poem--but sufficiently so that the poems can be considered decadent. In each there is the seeking after the ideal which is found to be transient, In each the conceits are fanciful, artificial and, on occasion, perverse. Usually the attitude is melancholy. Another striking feature about these poems is their realism, not only in details of description, but in the general concepts expressed. All poems agree with the Christian dictum that one must love: they escape this

label by refining and knitting their concepts of love to sexual love alone.

But all the poems of The Yellow Book are not about nature or love. There are eleven others which can only be loosely grouped as philosophical. They may deal with either nature or love, but the point of emphasis is elsewhere. E. Nesbit's "Day and Night" is an example of this. Day and Night are presented as the alternate lovers of Earth, who is unfaithful to the Day, though she gives every outward appearance of being faithful, but only waits till Night, her true lover, comes to caress her. The poem is autobiographical: Edith Bland (nee Nesbit) was married to Humphrey Bland, a man whose extra-marital activities resulted in several children whom he brought home for Edith to watch over.³⁷ Even though she seemed to accept this situation, she turned to G.B. Shaw for comfort. Shaw apparently realized the dangers of such a liason, and succeeded in leading their relationship through passion to solid, and long lasting friendship. Humphrey Bland did care for his wife, and in this poem, is no doubt "The golden Emperor": he was her husband and as such was her master. She, as Earth, was powerless to reject his love, and had to feign reciprocal affection, when in fact she was yearning for Shaw, alias Night. In this anticipated union she felt that

the soft tears true lovers weep
Should make amends for everything.
(IV, 234)

³⁷Mix, op. cit., pp. 131-33.

The general tone of the poem is rueful and melancholy, but hardly bitter. True love, the love of Night, is seen as a personal panacea for all other ills. The poem is an artifact revolving around the central image of the triangle of lovers--Day, Earth and Night.

Gosse's two poems, "Alere Flamman" and "Dream of November," and Dobson's "Sat est scripsisse" (Enough is written) form a small group about art and the artist. "Alere Flamman" is dedicated to A.C. Benson, whom Gosse introduced to The Yellow Book. It is set in Ancient Rome, and pictures the poet as the guardian of the secret flame which must always be kept burning within the temple. The common people, the "chattering band," seek to break into the temple to extinguish the flame.

Ah! so, untouched by windy roar
 Of public issues loud and long,
 The Poet guards the sacred door,
 And guards the glowing coal of song;
 Not his to grasp at praise or blame,
 Red gold, or crowns beneath the sun,
 His only pride to tend the flame
 That Homer and Virgil won,
 Retain the rite, preserve the act,
 And pass the worship on intact.

This is, according to Gosse, the supreme function of the poet: he is the guardian of the sacred flame of art. The attitude toward the "crowd" is decadent, but not exclusively, for others have felt this way about art. The poet is someone apart from the ordinary and cannot be appreciated by them.

"A Dream of November" is also concerned with the world of art. The poem is concerned with the poet's trance in an aesthetic experience brought on by both natural and artificial things.

In this strange birth of various blooms, I cannot tell
 Which spring from earth, which slipped from bows, which
 sank from sky.

(I, 155)

The poet-speaker is enthralled by his vision of paradoxical images, "bare boughs in bloom," "bloom peach and plum in lacquered dyes." The whole scene, the total effect, is artificial in impact. The poet is conscious that he is a maker, an artist who works with all things as his material:

My trance unweaves, and winds, and shreds, and forms anew
 Dark bronze, bright leaves, pure silken threads,
 in triple flower.

(I, 155)

There is, here, the consciousness of art's superiority to life: for the poet this is the only life--a life of making, of retreat from the world through art.

Dobson's "Sat est scripsisse" is quite similar to "Alere Flamman." Indeed, the poem is dedicated to Gosse. The speaker speculates that in time to come some reader may pick up one of his books of verse and think, upon reading them, that the poems are not too worthwhile. The speaker overrules this judgment declaring:

"And yet they had their office. Though they today are
 passed,
 They marched in that procession where is no first or
 last;
 Though cold is now their hoping, though they no more
 aspire,
 They, too, once had their ardour:--they handed on the
 fire."

(II, 143)

Just as the dying poet-guardian in the Roman temple handed on the fire, so does Dobson's "Author." The poet must live his life dedicated to art; it does not matter if the artist's work is minor.

Katherine de Mattos' "In a Gallery: Portrait of a Lady (Unknown)" dwells upon the mystery of life and of art. The speaker is arrested by a portrait hanging in an art gallery of a lady and tries to divine the secret of her magnetic powers, wondering if other viewers were able to fathom the mystery.

Am I the first of those who gaze,
 Who may their meaning guess
 Yet dare not whisper lest the words
 Pale even painted cheeks?
 (II, 178)

The speaker seems to have guessed the secret of this lady with her "jewelled fingers," but she does not reveal it to the reader. We are left with a sense of mystery. We do know that this woman had many suitors, if not lovers, and that one of them, "Perchance to ease his soul," painted this enigmatic portrait of her. The hint is that this woman is married ("jewelled fingers"), but unhappily (the "jewelled fingers writhe and gleam From out your sombre vest;"), and perhaps is being adulterous. The reader will never know for sure as the painter, or the speaker, or the woman knew.

There are five poems which deal with time and its effects. William Watson's "Two Sonnets," "The Frontier" and "Night on Curbar Edge, Derbyshire," are perhaps the most obviously so. "The Frontier" is about the moment of insight, of understanding, at twilight when a

visionary glow,
 Pendulous 'twixt the gold hour and the grey,
 Lovlier than these, more eloquent than they
 Of memory, foresight, and life's ebb and flow.
 (I, 113)

The speaker then parallels this moment also when he looks into a beautiful woman's face and sees

The first, faint, hesitant, elusive hint
Of that invasion of the vandal years
(I, 113)

which will repalce the woman's beauty with ugliness.

"Night on Curbar Edge, Derbyshire" is a sadder, more desolate portrayal than "The Frontier." The speaker surveys the scene before him and feels his isolation and solitude. Even time itself becomes of lesser importance. The gulf between the scene the speaker sees and man's relative struggle becomes apparent. One cannot help but be reminded of Matthew Arnold's "Dover Beach" because of the thought expressed in the octet of this sonnet.

No echo of man's life pursues my ears;
Nothing disputes this Desolation's reign;
Change comes not, this dread temple to profane,
Where time by aeous reckons, not by years.
Its patient form one crag, sole stranded, rears,
Type of whate'er is destined to remain
While you still host encamped on Night's waste plain
Keeps armed watch, a million quivering spears.
(I, 114)

But Watson offers no solution or answer to man's plight as does Arnold. Instead we are left with "Tremendous Silence, older than the world." The poem is bleak and near despairing.

"De Profundis," by S. Cornish Watkins, begins on a similar note, questioning the values of life, but finds a resolution in the speaker's realization that deep within man there is a "spark that might have been divine," and that, someday in the future, this spark may be rekindled and provide "A joyous ending to a grievous song." The lament is because

"we are weary and the way is long." Man is bound by Fate and cannot change his destiny; in fact, man does not know his end. There is no rhyme or reason to existence but this "divine spark," and upon this one must pin all hope.

C.W. Dalmon's "An Autumn Elegy," despite its title is also concerned with time. Autumn is but the occasion for musing:

Now it is fitting, and becomes us all
To think how fast our time of being fades.
(IV, 247)

In this poem Year is personified and becomes representative of all mankind. When one does think on the briefness of life, and realizes that one's allotted time on earth is fast coming to an end, it will not do, says Dalmon, to take cheer in the fact that others are just beginning to live. Death is a personal matter to be faced by each individual. Despite this, there is a note of optimism: the dying Year thinks:

"How fair the legend through the ages brought,
That still to live is Death's most sweet surprise!"

The resolution of the poem is reaffirming: the daily reprieve from death is a good thing, even in the knowledge that death ultimately awaits.

These poems, despite the melancholy or reality of their awareness that life is hard, are hardly decadent. The sentiment expressed ranges from sadness over Time's destructive powers, to an attitude that life is not bleak because of the after-life. The melancholy is not a pervasive feeling, but usually lapses in a half-hearted acceptance and, perhaps, the hint of hope in some sort of a resolution.

There is, however, one poem which expresses a carpe diem theme just because time passes and life ends. This is Arthur Symons' "Credo."

We are awake so little on the earth,
 And we shall sleep so long, and rise so late,
 If there is any knocking at that gate
 Which is the gate of death, the gate of birth.
 (III, 99)

Because "we are awake so little," Symons urges that we take advantage of every experience possible, of "strenuous virtue and the joy of sin." The successful life is to experience to one's maximum potential: this is the way in which one will not have "lived in vain." This is almost Paterian, but Symons qualifies:

For of our time we lose so large a part
 In serious trifles . . . and so oft let slip
 The wine of every moment at the lip,
 Its moment, and the moment of the heart.
 (III, 49)

The claim is that most men overvalue the so-called important things of life, while letting what for Symons are the true values slip by untasted. Pater would not have placed any limitations on the range of experiences from which one could live, in his own term, "successfully." Symons dismisses experience gained from conventional life and promotes the unconventional, the bizarre. Decadence in Symons' poem is in the attitude that the world is wrong, and that even the experience of sin is worthwhile.

Davidson contributed a light, mocking verse to the fourth number entitled "Proem to the Wonderful Mission of Earl Lavender" which may be included at this point. It is a spoof on the "decadent" writers of the 90's. It reflects

the then-current attitude that the "Century totters Downwards," and that there has been a decline in the status and moral fiber of the British,--especially in the ranks of the artists. But, to poke fun at these critics too, Davidson declares that all is not lost, that "We may laugh a little yet."

But we know a British rumour,
And we think it whispers well:
"We would ventilate our humour
In the very jaws of Hell."
(IV, 284)

He admits that things are wrong, that

On our sleeves we wear our sexes,
Our diseases, unashamed,
(IV, 284)

but that these things do not bode ultimate and complete doom. It is a double-edged statement: it hits both at the "decadent" artists, and their critics.

The philosophical poetry of The Yellow Book ranges from a proud concern about the artist's status in society to a lament about passing Time. The specific subject of each poem varies, but the general concern is about man's place in the universe. Most of these poems are innocuous. The exceptions are, of course, Symons' "Credo" and Davidson's "Proem." The general notion presented is that life is hard and time ruins, but that there is a transcendent justification for these things. Ultimately the view is optimistic. Ultimately, the view is not decadent.

As I have said, the poetry of The Yellow Book is of very uneven quality. Directly opposite views are presented in every area. Nature is seen as God's handiwork wherein

man may come to a more complete realization of his own situation. The yearning after the transience of the beauty in nature is a decadent trait, but this does not lead one to seek a substitute for it in the perverse or artificial. The melancholy is innocent.

The range of love poetry is more extended: from a glorification of the loved one, to a declaration of woman's fatal attractiveness, to the pronouncement that love--and specifically sexual love--is the answer to life's ills are indicative of this. The unattainability of the ideal woman, the ideal love, leads the speakers through the depths of melancholy. Some poets, like Symons, see the resolution in the love of a prostitute, which to the late-Victorians would be a perverse love. Others merely regret that love passes, or that they cannot attain their loved one.

The philosophical poetry is, as indicated, even more diverse. In general, though, it is not decadent. This, it seems to me, is true of most of the poetry. It is true that certain decadent poems can be selected to disprove this, but usually, there is not the intense search for the ideal, nor the inclination towards the perverse and artificial for their own sake. The one common decadent trait is the general melancholy tone throughout. This, however, does not seem to be sufficient to call The Yellow Book a decadent publication. And, if the other contributors are taken into account, one finds that great care was exerted to present a well-balanced magazine, for, after all is said and done, the editors of this periodical did fear the "frown of Mrs. Grundy."

POETRY OF THE SAVOY

In general, the poetry of The Savoy is much better than that of The Yellow Book. It seems that Symons was more consistent in his standards of quality and more adamant in his maintenance of them, for there is a fairly high degree of unity among the poems. Then, too, The Yellow Book strove for a balance between the young, modern poets and the established, respected poets, whereas The Savoy, as far as the poets were concerned, was exclusively for the young moderns. There was a core of suburban, sophisticated young writers who contributed the bulk of The Savoy's poetry; the rest of the selections were usually recommended for publications by one of the in-groupers. In actuality, there were but three major contributors of poetry,--Arthur Symons, Ernest Dowson, and William Butler Yeats. These three poets were responsible for twenty-three of the thirty-five poems that appeared. Aubrey Beardsley, the illustrator, made his poetic debut in The Savoy with two light-hearted verses of some considerable merit. The only other poet of significance to appear in The Savoy was Lionel Johnson: he submitted three sonnets on religious topics. The remaining seven poems, each by a different author, play but a minor part in the total effect of the poetry. My discussion will deal first with these poems briefly. The major part of the analysis will be on the poems of Beardsley, Yeats, Dowson, and Symons,

treating each man individually.

In the first number, Arthur Symons' "The Wanderers" is an obvious lament for the freedom of a nomad's life.

Because life holds not anything so good
As to be free of yesterday, and bound
Towards a new tomorrow;

(I, 149)

This is a cry for experience wherein lies the true joy of life: this is

the only gift
That God, being repentant, has to give.
(I, 150)

God is the villain who has condemned Symons, and the rest of security-minded people, to stagnation, while granting the nomads the ultimate gift of freedom.

And we, beneath our comfortable roofs,
Lamplight, and daily fire upon the hearth,
And four walls of a prison, and sure food.
(140)

All these things--shelter, light, heat, and food--which usually are sought after, are, for Symons, bad things, for their possession acts as a restriction to freedom. The nomads can possess the world "because they forego it." This freedom is what Symons yearns for, but the implication of the poem is that he will never achieve it.

Wendell Harris claims that "there is no suggestion in the poem that the wanderers' goal is to have an experience of life broad, deep, or intense; their wish is simply to find themselves everyday 'A little nearer somewhere'."³⁸ He amplifies this argument by stating that later, when Symons

³⁸Innocent Decadence, p. 633.

collected these poems for Amoris Victima,³⁹ "The Wanderers" was included in the "second, miscellaneous section in which the unsatisfied lover is finding the world generally unprofitable."⁴⁰ The upshot of the whole argument is that Harris regards the poem's statement as the unsatisfied lover's complaint rather than as a personal view. The fact remains, however, that two groups of people are defined in the poem, --the wanderers and the non-wanderers. It is evident that Symons, though the speaker of the poem, envies these wanderers because they are free to move from experience to experience. The lack of an express goal, such as heaven, or possession or fame, is Paterian: their success in life is the ever present moment of experience: the concept is non-Paterian in that the wanderers seem not to know that they have the choicest of lives and must be told this and enjoined to persist in it. Melancholy, perhaps a bit bitter, is the speaker's attitude, for he cannot possess this freedom himself. Artificiality is in the reversal of values, applauding possessionlessness over property, and placing the onus of guilt on God. The speaker expresses a distinct attitude, and in the light of my definition of decadence, this attitude is decadent.

There are, however, a number of poems in The Savoy which are not decadent. John Gray's "The Forge" is a realistic poem picturing one contemporary evil, the poor working

³⁹London, 1897.

⁴⁰Innocent Decadence, p. 633.

conditions of London smithies. The detailed descriptions present a picture unclouded by sentiment: clarity and exactness is one aim of the poet. The bias is in the selection of the most unfavourable scenes to describe. Sense imagery of the forge sounds and odours is the major vehicle which carries the poem's impact. After the description of the grim conditions of the forge, Gray adds the "pièce de résistance:" "And this is the type of many days." The reader is left with no consoling resolution; no attempt to find meaning to the smiths' lives is made. The poem is social and describes a situation that requires reform: the technique is photographic. There is no trace of decadence.

Similar to this insofar as it is also a social poem is Ford Maddox Hueffer's (now Ford) "The Song of the Women: A Wealden Trio." The form is that of three Voices with alternate choruses. The narrative tells of the poverty-stricken plight of the three women speakers, and their subsequent difficulty in overcoming their personal problems to offer praise to the newborn Christ child.

When ye've got a child 'at's whist for want of food,
 And a grate as grey's y'r'air for want of wood,
 And y'r man and you ain't nowise not much good;
 Oh--
 It's hard work a-Christmasing,
 Carolling,
 Singin' songs about the "Babe what's born."
 (IV, 85)

Despite their worldly troubles, the third voice summons up a note of optimism and draws the analogy that Christ was also poor, "poor as us, very near," and hence will have special compassion for the three wretched singers. Even so,

this happy thought cannot dispel their earthly problems. The poem makes the realistic statement that it is very difficult to praise the goodness of God when one is plagued with problems.

Edith M. Thomas contributed "A Soul at Lethe's Brink" a poem urging the benefits of leaving this world in forgetfulness, to the sixth number of The Savoy. There is, for the speaker, nothing on earth to warrant any hesitation: it is far better to "cease from toils, from strife, from thought." Evidently, the troubles of life have no balancing counterpart; even the feelings of her beloved are not sufficient to warrant her to remain. The plea is traditional:⁴¹ the speaker seeks the peace of "the Great Deep of Sleep."

The most significant non-decadent poems are three sonnets by Lionel Johnson. They present his judgment on three religious subjects, the Vicar Hawker of Morwenstow: Ann Lee of the Shakers, and the Münster heresy of 1534. The first, "Hawker of Morwenstow," is addressed to the Robert Stephen Hawker, Vicar of Morwenstow, a poet and cleric who, during his last hours was received into the Catholic faith.⁴² Apparently, Johnson feels some kinship with this death-bed convert, for Johnson, a convert himself, understands the Vicar's feelings. Now, however, that the Vicar is supposedly in heaven, Johnson pleads with him to remember the Celtic race which is undergoing difficult times. The poem is something

⁴¹Innocent Decadence, p. 633.

⁴²Ibid., p. 631.

of a eulogy to Vicar Hawker because he did embrace the Catholic faith, perhaps at the best of times, on his death bed.

"Mother Ann: Foundress of Shakers" is, of course, addressed to Ann Lee, the foundress of the American Shakers, a splinter Puritan group.⁴³ The speaker lauds the fervour of her faith, but laments the fact that it was misdirected

Thou knewest not: yet thine was alter flame astray:
 Poor exiled, wandering star, that might'st have strayed
 and stood
 Hard by the Holy Host, close to the Holy Rood,
 Illuminating the great one Truth, one Life, one Way!
 (IV, 76)

The resolution is tinged with optimism: the speaker declares that the Blessed Virgin Mary prays for her because of her zeal. The poem is the lament for zealous, but erring soul.

The third sonnet, "Münster: A.D. 1534" is concerned with the anabaptist heresies of the mid-sixteenth century. The poem is sarcastic in tone. Through this technique Johnson lashes out at what he considered to be betrayers of the faith.

We are the golden men, who shall the people save:
 For only ours are visions, perfect and divine;
 And we alone are drunken with the last best wine;
 And very Truth our souls hath flooded, wave on wave.
 (IV, 76)

Johnson believed that the Catholic faith was the one true religion, and that the anabaptist revolters were presumptuous and wrong. They are calling people away from God rather than towards him.

⁴³The Dictionary of National Biography, IX, 202-203.

Come! from the Tree of Eden take the mystic fruit:
 Come! pluck up God's own knowledge by the abysmal root:
 Come! you, who would the Reign of Paradise begin.
 (IV, 76)

The call to partake of the fruit from the Tree of Knowledge is in direct opposition to God's first command to Adam and Eve in the Eden story. The irony is bitter.

But, over all, there is no trace of any decadent characteristics in any of the three sonnets. They are expressions of Johnson's Catholic faith about three religious occurrences in the past. The conclusions reached were pre-determined by his faith.

Bliss Carman, a Canadian poet, published one poem in The Savoy. This was "In Scituate." It is a philosophical-nature poem concerned with the transient nature of an artist's impressions of the scenery on the Massachusetts' sea coast interspersed with related ruminations about art.

Art is a rubric for the soul,
 Man's comment on the book of earth,
 The little human summary
 Which gives that common volume worth.
 (V, 71)

In general, art--man's comment--is placed about nature, the artificial (in the best sense of the word) above the natural. This is a decadent trait, but within the context of this poem, art's primacy in this scale of values is innocuous, for the impression one gets is that nature is not assigned a lower level than before, but that art is just placed above it. The focal point is the particular relevance each has to man, and the poem maintains that art is the record of man's experience with the natural.

Perhaps most interesting is the note of modernity this poem strikes. The structuring is built about several conceits well founded in fact, but these notions are kept simple, if not somewhat stark. There is an impact of juxtaposition of words that were seldom found before, and remind one of the freer, more specialized poetry of an Ezra Pound or a W.H. Auden. The following three quatrains are apt illustrations.

Selective merely, bent to save
The sheer delirium⁴⁴ of the eye,
Which best may solace or rejoice
Some fellow-rover by and by;

That stumbling on it, he exclaim
"What mounting sea-smoke? What a blue!"
And at the glory we beheld,
His smouldering joy may kindle too.

Merely selective? Bring me back,
Verbatim from the lecture hall,
Your notes of So-and-so's discourse;
The gist and substance are not all.
(V, 70-71)

There is a tone of immediacy so often present in modern poems here too, and the rhythms of speech, the diction so near to common idiom, the personal-yet-detached engagement make this poem significantly different from any other of The Savoy, a difference that, through hindsight, we can determine as modern.

"Sea Music", by Mathilde Blind, is another poem that is free from any decadent traces. As an explanatory note tells the reader, the poem is an actual impression that the

⁴⁴The italics are my own. The words, "sheer delirium" are an illustration of the special, forceful impact of hard, stressed word juxtaposition.

poetess had from a real experience at Woods Bay in North Devon. The poem's major merit is the inter-relation of sense imagery, but there does not appear to be the tendency to integrate the images so that the effect is not the Baudelairean notion of correspondence. The poem simply tries to present the magical effect experienced: in this sense the poem is an impression,--a word picture.

Quite similar to this is Sarojini Chattopâdhyây's "Eastern Dancers". This poem is much richer and more sensuous in its imagery, and as Wendell Harris claims, at first reading appears "shot through with eroticism."⁴⁵

Eyes ravished with rapture, celestially panting, what
 passionate spirits aflaming with fire
 Drink deep of the hush of the hyacinth heavens that
 glimmer around them in fountains of light?
 O wild and entrancing the strains of keen music that
 cleaveth the stars like a wail of desire,
 And beautiful dancers with Hourî-like faces bewitch
 the voluptuous watches of Night.

(V, 84)

Subsequent readings prove otherwise: the poem is a highly wrought, but objective description of a Hindu dance by this "well-educated Hindu girl of seventeen"⁴⁶ The choice of words in the poem adds richness and an exotic, lavish tone, but does not really propel one towards any sensual artificiality. The effect is rather that of a very richly coloured, mosaic-like picture, which, for all its richness retains its critical distance.

Another poem in The Savoy which is quite free from any

⁴⁵Innocent Decadence, p. 631.

⁴⁶Ibid., p. 631.

tinge of decadence is Selwyn Image's "The Truants' Holiday." This predominantly light-hearted poem is the speaker's plea to his lady-love to forget all her obligations and flee with him to spend a day in the country away from the drudgery of the city. It is only by way of the implicit contrast between country and city that urban life is indicted, and this condemnation is quite fleeting. It is not an appeal to forsake city life for the splendours of communing with nature: it is a plea for a temporary escape, indubitably made more appealing by the thought of female companionship.

This same notion is the subject of one of the two poems Aubrey Beardsley contributed to The Savoy, namely "The Three Musicians". There is quite a wide gulf between this poem and Image's innocent verse. Beardsley's poem may be a satire on the infamous triumverate of George Sand, Frederick Chopin, and the French poet, Alfred de Musset. The verse itself is a narrative ballad variation. The story is as follows: the three musicians are walking together in the country, enjoying nature. The pianist with "A light heart and an iron wrist" lags behind in a field of poppies where, presumably because of the narcotic effect of these particular flowers, he has the hallucination of conducting an imaginary orchestra, "Enchanted that for once his men obey his beat and understand." The "slim, gracious boy" and the "soprano, lightly frocked" go on alone. On finding a suitable place, the woman reclines on the grass, "And fans herself, half shuts her eyes, and smoothes the frock about her knees." The youth is quite aroused by these seductions.

The gracious boy is at her feet,
 And weighs his courage with his chance;
 His fears soon melt in noonday heat.
 The tourist gives a furious glance,
 Red as his guide-book grows, moves on and offers up a
 prayer for France.

This verse is perhaps the most delightful of all The Savoy poems. Beardsley's wit is operating on many levels here. Until the last two lines, the verse satirizes the infamous trio in their openly scandalous ways. The last two lines, the resolution, re-directs the barb against the "tourist" who has witnessed this "episode d'amour", and is properly scandalized. From the poem's point of view, the tourist is the most guilty for he cannot understand the way of life the musicians follow. From here, it is a brief step past the thinly disguised allegory. The "musicians" are, of course, artists: the tourist represents the rest of society, especially those who pretend to appreciate art. The irony lies in this parallel: the tourist is utterly dependent upon a "guide-book" to enable him to appreciate his travel. The masses, in turn, are lost without art critics to direct them to "good" art. Implicit here, is Beardsley's attack on the popular art critic, for neither this critic nor the public have any glimmering of art appreciation.

A personal interpretation is also possible. The "three musicians" may represent the "decadents", and the tourist, their critics. Again the satire is directed against the non-understanding public.

But there is more than levels of meaning. The craftsman's

skill in techniques is worth noting too. The form of each stanza, of each line, is near perfect. The turn of phrase is highly polished. The inversion of the first phrase of the final line accentuates the controlled artifice that abounds throughout the poem.

There is also a significant play on words. Of the three musicians, only Chopin, the "Polish Pianist" is truly accomplished in music. The "soprano" and the youth are engaged in making a different kind of music.

Beardsley's only other original literary contribution is "The Ballad of a Barber". It tells the story of a most wonderful hair stylist who did a thriving business with the upper classes of society. There is a hint of something magical about his talents, and of something latently perverse about the man.

Such was his art he could with ease
Curl wit into the dullest face;
Or to a goddess of old Greece
Add a new wonder and a grace.

All powders, paints, and subtle dyes,
And costliest scents that men distil,
And rare pomades, forgot their price
And marvelled at his splendid skill.

The curling irons in his hand
Almost grew quick enough to speak,
The razor was a magic wand
That understood the softest cheek.

(III, 91)

But love comes to interfere with his art in the guise of a thirteen year old princess. The "Barber" can no longer create.

His fingers lost their cunning quite,
His ivory combs obeyed no more;
Something or other dimmed his sight,
And moved mysteriously the floor.

The gifted coiffeur realizes his plight. The only answer is to destroy the object of his love. He slits the young beauty's throat with a broken cologne bottle.

He left her softly as a dream
That leaves a sleeper to his sleep.

He left the room on pointed feet;
Smiling that things had gone so well. .
They hanged him in Meridian Street.
You pray in vain for Carrousel.

(93)

The whole poem is unified--in diction, in hard precision of statement, in tone. The murder--and perhaps more--is treated so lightly and daintily that the reader is inclined to do likewise. The form--the use of all the techniques--so overrides the content that one gladly overlooks the seriousness of the deed to delight in its telling.

Beneath the surface one can detect certain analogies. Beardsley presents in this poem, in a seemingly light-hearted manner, the age-old problem of the artist versus society. For the artist, his art must be supremely sacred: there can be no interference. From this point of view, Carrousel was justified in destroying the princess, the obstacle. The re-inforcement of his technique also indicates this. But, the world too must have its due--and Beardsley, perhaps embittered by his Yellow Book experiences, fully realizes this, both in his own life, and in the poem. The artist can never win his battle: society remains ignorantly unvanquished. The hanged the Barber: he is even beyond prayer.

Both poems revel in artifice--and in the perverse. Public fornication and child-murder, both acts of passion, are

not accepted at all by the public. There may even be a touch of melancholy in the whimsical realization of the artist's state of affairs. One can see that for Beardsley, art is raised over nature and all things natural. There is no bitterness in "The Three Musicians", for there is no mention of any incurred reprisals. But in the "Barber", the offender pays for his "crime". Both poems are truly decadent in their maintenance of art over morals, their defiance of society, their artificiality and, what would be commonly accepted as perversity, and in their melancholy realization that the artist's fight is a losing one--by society's standards.

The remaining three poets--Ernest Dowson, William Butler Yeats, and Arthur Symons,--are the major poets of The Savoy. Each is different from the other, and it seems their points of intersection are quite fleeting. Dowson is sentimental, Symons is realistically melancholy, Yeats is also melancholy, but his melancholy is detached whereas Symons' is very personal. Then too, Yeats is by far the most intellectual of the three.

Before discussing Dowson's seven poems, I would like to give a brief sketch of his personal tragic love affair so that his lyrics may be seen in perspective. Dowson was madly in love with Adelaide Foltinowicz, a Polish cafe owner's daughter. She was very young--still in her teens--and was, or so it seems, unaware of Dowson's love for her. Each evening, the wretched lover would go to the cafe and play cards with Adelaide's father, just so he could be near

her. However, when the time came to close, the young waitress would go off with someone else, leaving Dowson alone. The distraught poet then abandoned himself to an evening of drunken debauchery. Eventually she married a Polish waiter who worked for her father.⁴⁷ But perhaps the ultimate tragedy is not that Dowson was the loser in this game of love, but that the young Foltinowicz was totally oblivious to his sufferings, and to his creations, for much of Dowson's work was directed towards his young love.

"Impenitentia Ultima" appeared in the first number, and may be taken as presenting the essence of Dowson's poetical themes, expressed in all his Savoy poems.

Before my light goes out for ever, if God should
give me a choice of graces,
I would not reck of length of days, nor crave for
things to be;
But cry: "One day of the great last days, one face of
all faces,
Grant me to see and touch once more, and nothing
more to see."

(I, 131)

The "one face of all the faces" is, of course, a reference to his beloved, and the stanza constitutes a complete and utter commitment to his love. The woman is placed above everything else--even above God.

Before the ruining waters fall, and my soul be carried
under,
And thine anger cleave me through, as a child cuts
down a flower,
I will praise Thee, Lord! in Hell, while my limbs are
racked asunder,
For the last sad sight of her face and the little
grace of an hour.

(I, 131)

⁴⁷Mix, op. cit., pp. 121-22.

There is an air of melancholy, desperate resignation to his plight: Dowson is trying to be as realistic as possible in his romantic self-pity. He realizes that he has chosen "the world's sad roses,/And that is why I must eat my bread in bitterness and sweat:". The primacy of his loved one raises her to the ideal--the unattainable ideal. She is such that God must take second place to her: an hour with her more than compensates for an eternity in Hell.

This is essentially Dowson's outlook. It is reflected in varying degrees in all seven poems, and it is this attitude which puts these poems in the decadent category. The loved one is the unattainable ideal: his love for her is unnatural in that God--and everything else--is relegated to secondary positions. For the realization of his aspirations Dowson is willing to undergo any punishment, to accept any fate. And because the loved one is beyond his grasp, there is the atmosphere of an all-pervasive melancholy permeating the poems.

"Saint-Germaine-En-Laye, 1887-1895" is but a variation of this theme. It is, to be sure, not as obvious as "Impenitentia Ultima," but the melancholy desire for the unattainable is still present, and again there is the attempt to be as realistically objective as possible. He pictures himself

Tripping fantastic with a mouth that jeers
At roseal flowers of youth, the turbid streams
Toss in derision down the barren years
To Death, the Host of all our golden dreams.
(II, 55)

There seems to be not a single ray of hope on his horizon: the only release from his suffering will come with Death.

The concluding two lines of "Breton Afternoon" echo this same accepting sentiment:

"Mother of God! O, Misericord! Look down in pity on us,
The weak and blind, who stand in our light, and wreak
ourselves such ill!"
(III, 40)

Perhaps in this last poem there is a more questioning air. The speaker wonders why he has "wept for a white girl's paleness, passing ivory?" when this unsatisfied yearning has brought him only suffering. The concluding two lines also move the poem from the personal and specific to the humanitarian and general. Apparently, Dowson felt that he was not the only one in such circumstances, but rather that his plight was a microcosmic reflection of mankind at large.

The yearning for the solace of Death is the central notion of "Venite, Descendamus" in the fourth number of The Savoy. Again there is the move away from the specifically personal to the general.

Let be at last: colder she grows, and colder;
Sleep and the night were best;
Lying, at last, where we cannot behold her,
We may rest.

(IV, 41)

Wendell Harris regards "Impenitentia Ultima," "Breton Afternoon," and "Venite, Descendamus" as representing "a logical sequence of mental states."⁴⁸ He hastens to qualify, however--and I agree--that this sequence may not be taken as a chronological one. The poems are illustrations of Dowson's recurrent mood, of his state of mind. The progression of the sequence, from a magnificent and monumental

⁴⁸Innocent Decadence, p. 634.

yearning for the loved one through the realization that she is beyond attainment to the final desire for the solace of death, is, I believe, an often-used one. What sets Dowson's poems apart from this tradition, if it may be truly called such, is the tortured seriousness of each poem's tone and atmosphere. Each verse revels in despair and abject melancholy. There seems to be some hidden strength in his best poems, which set them above convention and give them pertinence. Perhaps this effect is largely due to the tension set up between the light, lyrical form of his verse and the seriousness of his matter.

Harris also maintains that "the ideal love which Dowson laments [is not] to be identified with his beloved Adelaide." He claims that Dowson's concern with the subject of love was a popular one, and hence should be regarded as the abstract ideal. To be sure, there is no simple mathematical relation between "his beloved Adelaide" and the subject of his poems, but it does seem quite likely that his experiences with love predisposed Dowson to this particular attitude.

The three remaining poems Dowson contributed to The Savoy, "A Song," "The Three Witches," and "Epilogue," are variations on his usual theme. The last stanza of "Epilogue" is representative.

Let us go hence somewhither strange and cold,
 To hollow lands, where just men and unjust
 Find end of labour; where's rest for the old,
 Freedom to all from fear and love and lust.
 Twine our torn hands! O, pray, the earth enfold
 Our life-sick hearts and turn them into dust!

(VII, 87)

It seems as though the emphasis in this group of poems is more on the state of the speaker than upon the actual experience. The poet seems to wallow in something very close to self-pity, and he does seem to take a kind of masochistic pleasure from it. The focal point is on the experiencer rather than on the experience. The actual occurrence is of importance only insofar as it affects the inner state of the one involved. The many notions presented, that the experience of life is truly painful, that one is isolated in a vast world, that death is the only comforter, are part and parcel of the emotional and intellectual make-up of the speaker, and not attributes of the world itself. The essential bleakness of the experience of life is constantly hammered home to the reader.

Certainly more subtle and more complex are the eight short poems which William Butler Yeats contributed. In these early poems there is the difficulty of the overlay of Irish folk-lore which tends to obscure the meaning. Add to this his then-current enthusiasm for theosophy, and his approval of the French symbolist literature, and the complexity of his work increases. However, it is not my purpose to delve into the intricacies of Yeats' poetry, but rather to determine the qualities of those poems published in The Savoy.

In the first number appeared "Two Love Poems". The first, "The Shadowy Horses", proposes love as a refuge from the world of "sleep, hope, dream, endless desire." Escape from the worldly cares rests not in Death, but in love --

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a love narcotically placed and yet intense.

Beloved, let your eyes half close, and your heart beat
Over my heart, and your hair fall about my breast
Drowning Love's lonely hour in deep twilight of rest;
And hide their tossing manes and their tumultuous feet.

(I, 83)

These closing four lines carry the solution: immersion in the opiate of love can shield one from the "Shadowy Horses", from one's secret, half-known self-doubts. This love is the means by which the speaker can avoid the demands of the world.

"The Travail of Passion" re-inforces this concept.

Love, while it offers no immediate or absolute solution to life's problems, does make each of its trials easier to bear.

When the flaming, lute-thronged angelic door is wide;
When an immortal passion breathes in mortal clay,
Our hearts endure the plaited thorn, the crowded way,
The knotted scourge, the nail-pierced hands, the wounded
side,

The hessop-heavy sponge, the flowers by Kidron stream:

(I, 83)

The obvious reference to Christ is the link between mortal and immortal, made through the reference to Christ's sacrifice to Himself because of his love for the world. In a similar way, mortal love makes the weight of daily life less heavy. All the images refer to the Passion, but the complex of imagery is sensuous. The mosaic-like juxtaposition further heightens the tension between the opposing spiritual and sensual impressions one receives.

We will bend down, and loosen the hair over you
That it may drop faint perfume and be heavy with dew,
Lillies of death-pale hope, roses of passionate dream.

(I, 83)

The very tone of the phrases, the distinctly sensual appeal of the imagery subtly, and yet decisively, moves the poem

away from a strict Christian orientation. The reader is still aware of the Christian meanings: in fact, the "hair" imagery might well refer to Mary Magdalene's washing of Christ's feet and anointing with oil. But the symbol is deeper than this. The loosening of hair over a loved one becomes representative of the protective powers of love. The Christian tale is the framework which adds but one dimension of the total meaning. Love is an active force among people. Yet, there is a note of melancholy about these poems. The world is seen as a trying place. Love is the desired euphoriant.

The two poems of the second number, "A Cradle Song" and "The Valley of the Black Pig", rely on Irish folk-lore. "A Cradle Song" declares the immortal world to be far superior to the real, mortal one--

the unappeasable host
Is comlier than candles before Maurya's feet.
(II, 109)

"The Valley of the Black Pig" is prefaced by an explanatory headnote which provides the background. It explains that, according to Irish legend, the enemies of Ireland will finally be completely vanquished in the last clamorous battle in this mystical Valley of the Black Pig. But this victory will be so costly that only a few of the Irish will survive. This poem is uttered by a visionary who, in a fit of inspiration, recounts a description of the coming battle. The resolution is quite wistful.

We, who are labouring by the cromlech on the shore,
The gray cairn on the hill, when day sinks drowned in dew,
Being weary of the world's empires, bow down to you,

Master of the still stars, and of the flaming door.
(II, 109)

The visionary realized that there is a fate which transcends the material world, and he willingly submits to it. But the realization of this vision, the attainment of this ideal state remains dimly in the future: it is still the far-off goal.

In the fifth number "O'Sullivan Rua to the Secret Rose" appears. Like the previous two, this poem is filled with allusions to Irish folk-lore. The speaker is yearning, somewhat impatiently, for the coming of the Secret Rose, his symbol of "beauty, of transcendental love, of mystic rapture, of the inner reality, of divinity," and signifies the achievement of his ideal state of being. The actualization of this coming will bring with it the fulfilment of one's being. Exactly what the nature of this fulfilment is, Yeats does not reveal in these poems, but he makes it plain that this is a personal yearning.

I, too, await
The hour of thy great wind of love and hate.
When shall the stars be blown about the sky,
Like the sparks blown out of a smithy, and die?
Surely thine hour has come, thy great wind blows,
Far off, most secret, and inviolate Rose?
(V, 52)

The coming of the Secret Rose is in fact the coming of the ideal.

The seventh number contains "Windle-Straws," two short poems. A windle-straw has two related meanings: either it is a dried stalk of grass which is used for plaiting, or it is a slender and weak person or thing. It is a combination

of the two meanings which is applicable to the two poems, for in each poem the speaker is troubled by doubts and memories. In this sense the speaker is weak and dried out.

"O'Sullivan Rua to the Curlew",⁵⁰ the first of the two, is addressed to a curlew, beseeching the bird not to cry out as its cries bring sad memories to mind. The memories are of

Passion-dimmed eyes and long heavy hair
That was shaken out over my breast:
(VII, 62)

It seems that the speaker has been a rejected lover, and now wants to forget the whole affair. But he cannot do this for

There is enough evil in the crying of the wind.

The poem is the lament of a lost lover.

"Out of the Old Days" is also a lament, but this time not for a lost loved one. The speaker in this poem seems to have abandoned a former way of life for a time and now is admonishing himself to embrace it once more.

Be you still, be you still, trembling heart;
Remember the wisdom out of the old days:
Who trembles before the flame and the flood,
And the winds blowing through the starry ways,
And blowing no evil and good;
Let the starry winds and the flame and the flood
Cover over and hide, for he has no part
With the lonely, proud, winged multitude.
(VII, 62)

The speaker sets himself apart from the masses. Apparently, he is tempted to forget the "wisdom out of the old days", but he forcefully rejects this. The speaker chooses to pursue a lonely path of acceptance rather than fear.

⁵⁰It is the most frequent judgment of Yeats scholars that O'Sullivan Rua is a persona for Yeats and represents the personality he sought to become. Jeffares, Ure, Ellman, Hove.

These poems of Yeats are quite different from either those of Beardsley or of Dowson. The ideal for which Dowson sought was true permanent love as embodied in a perfect woman. For Yeats the ultimate goal is not so straight forward: he begins with love as an escape from worldly troubles ("The Shadowy Horses") but subtly the scope of this utopia expands and expands until the ideal is not just pertinent to himself alone, but encompassed the entire sphere of being. "O'Sullivan Rua to Mary Lovell" is perhaps the best illustration of this.

When my arms wrap round you, I press
 My heart upon the loveliness
 That has long faded in the world;
 The jewelled crowns that kings have hurled
 In shadowy pools, when armies fled;
 The love-~~tales~~ wrought with silken thread
 By dreaming ladies upon cloth
 That has made fat the murderous moth;
 (III, 67)

The speaker is projecting, through his love, to envisage his ideal world. Gone are temporal things. The vision is mystical and yet quite sensual; and it is brought on by possession of his loved one. But this, too, is not a permanent state.

And, when you sigh from kiss to kiss,
 I hear pale Beauty sighing too,
 For hours when all must fade like dew.
 Till there be naught but throne on throne
 Of seraphs, brooding, each alone,
 A sword upon his iron knees,
 On her most lonely mysteries.
 (III, 67)

Time passes and in doing so ravages all mortal things. It is not just the empires and possessions which decay and fall to nothingness, but beauty too must fade. The only inviolate

things are those which are immortal. Love, for Yeats, is one of the immortals, for it will endure--even if only in memory.

But the state of final resolutions is not a joyous one. Dowson pleaded for Death as an escape: Yeats can see no complete oblivion. Even in his ideal state, a state transcending the material world, there is an over all melancholy atmosphere. We are left brooding on Beauty's "most lonely mysteries". This tone of melancholy forms the bond between Yeats' work and the decadent poems of Dowson.

Perhaps another reason for Yeats' inclusion in The Savoy is because of his friendship with Symons and Beardsley. Yeats was an admirer of French symbolism, but he could not read French,⁵¹ so most of his knowledge of their work came from their English advocate, Arthur Symons. Symons was much taken with symbolism, and because Yeats' work also had the aura of mystery about it, he probably liked it too. And, in fact, Yeats does rely heavily on symbolism to express himself. A great part of these eight poems are mosaic-like structures of sense imagery and related symbol. But his symbols are, and remain quite personal, and thus increase the obscurity of his meaning. This would readily fall in with the editorial policy of the magazine whose editors obviously felt the multitude too ignorant to appreciate 'good art'.

Yet for all the policy-making of Symons, his own poetry reflects very little of the then-contemporary symbolism, and

⁵¹Morton Irving Seiden, William Butler Yeats: The Poet as a Mythmaker--1865-1939 (East Lansing, 1962), p. 207.

As I have said, this is a sentimental notion, an idealized love. But more significant are two other features. The first is that the transmutation is an event recalled from the past. Symons looks back on the event, separated by the intervening time, whether that time be years or only the passing of a night, and tries to evaluate the experience in an objective and emotionally detached manner. His mood is one of melancholy rather than elation or gratification. In fact, it seems that it is the act of transmutation rather than the resultant love which the speaker relishes. The loved one, to whom the poem is probably addressed, has no personality, no activity, and seems to be little more than a handy object upon which the mystical forces act. The poem is one sided, unidirectional, and the reader can only glean what the speaker chooses to reveal, and this only after crossing the gulf of impersonality.

The second aspect is the aura of mystery which permeates the poem. The time is midnight--which suddenly brightens into morning. The all-enclosing silence and darkness have the hint of supernatural power about them: they are closely associated with God, with "the creating Dove." This force is the active agent in the action of the poem: the lovers are passive receptors. The force always remains mysterious and hidden.

These two characteristics, the almost clinical objectivity and the sense of heavy mystery save the poem from being just one more sentimental idealization of the phenomenon of love. With these aspects, the hint of "love

for love's sake" is discernible, for the emphasis is not on the lovers, but on the actual experience of love.

But this is just the first step in Symons' investigation. The third number of The Savoy contains the poem "In Carnival" and a different outlook. The "carnival" is, of course, life itself, and the speaker has grown weary of his life:

All has been ours that we desired,
And now we are a little tired
Of the eternal carnival.
(III, 58)

Life has been tasted to the full: the speaker's palate is jaded. The speaker is evaluating his present circumstance in the light of past experience, and past experience dictates that another experience is hardly worthwhile, for:

you and I have come too late
Into the Carnival of Flowers.
(III, 58)

Love, for in all probability this is the experience in question, no longer holds any special attraction. The "immortal love" of "New Year's Eve" has died a mortal death. What does live on is the melancholy view, plus the notion of the transient worth of worldly things, including love. Symons is still impersonal and objective--and jaded.

"Stella Maligna", in the fourth number, develops further this disillusioned view. A woman speaks, telling her lover that he is trapped until death.

My little slave!
Woulds't thou escape me? Only in the grave.
(IV,)

The concept of love as a living experience has changed from

the wondrous and fulfilling thing it was in "New Year's Eve," to the notion that it is just one of the many experiences that life offers, to finally, the view that love is a murderous thing. By forcing the lover to focus his entire being upon the loved one, everything else in the world is pushed into insignificance. What makes the situation worse for him, and the third stanza tells us this, is that the woman has committed only her body, and not her heart and soul. Her justification is that it is only through the physical that one can know love here on earth. She says: "Not to have know me is to know not love." Unless one realizes that one can never hope to possess another's entire being, the understanding and achievement of love is impossible.

ah, take,
 The gift I have to give, my body, lent
 For thy unsatiable content,
 For thy unsatiable desires compelling,
 And let me for my pleasure make
 For my own heart a lonely dwelling.
 (IV, 65)

Gone is the ideal love! The woman is quite unromantic, but perhaps she is nearer the truth. Love cannot bridge the gap between two people: the individual is forever isolated in his "lonely dwelling".

From this, the meaning of the poem expands. "Stella Maligna", "Malignant Star", becomes a symbol for any insatiable yearning. Love is but one interpretation--Beauty or Art are other possibilities. In any event, the object of desire is the unattainable ideal: one may taste of it in part, but possession of the whole is impossible. From this point, the references to love can be usually taken as

representative of the yearning for satisfaction, for fulfilment. From this point the connotation of this desire is established: it is a corrosive, malignant obsession which ultimately will destroy the person. And the mood is firmly established too. Once a person is aware of the ideal's unattainability, only melancholy is left. The remaining four poems pursue these conclusions into specific areas and in turn, result in similar conclusions.

The poems, "The Unloved," "In Saint Jacques," and "The Old Women," are similar to each other in that they investigate the phenomenon of insatisfied yearning into specific circumstances. The poem, "In Saint Jacques" pictures a disillusioned man watching an old woman find relief in her prayers from the troubles of life. The young man wishes that this avenue of redress was also open to him, but, because of his experiences, and the hint is that they were amorous ones, he has become very skeptical and is now quite unable to have faith in any source of escape from his torments.

I have believed in Love, and Love's untrue:
 Bid me believe, and bring me to your saint,
 Woman! and let me come and kneel with you!...
 But I should see only the wax and paint.
 (VI, 31)

Love, here, may be grander than the love between two people, for, obviously the effects of disillusion are not confined to only romance. The man is a complete skeptic. Rather than being the fulfilling agent, love is the force which takes away from a person. Love is crueller than the hard life the old woman has had to face, for she is still left

with her faith. The young man is left with nothing.

"The Old Woman"⁵² depicts very old women going about their inconsequential daily routines, uncared-for by the rest of the world. On occasion they break through the constant reveries of their youth to make the claim that they, too, were once young and vital, and very much alive. To their hearers they remain babbling old women. At other times one may catch a glimpse of one of them on a dark midnight, reeling drunkenly like an apparition up some dark alleyway. These women, now useless to themselves and others, tormented by their memories, have seen their youthful hopes come to naught. The conclusion of the poem reflects Symons' general disillusion.

And all these have been loved,
And not one ruinous body has not moved
The hearts of man's desire, nor has not seemed
Immortal in the eyes of one who dreamed
The dream that men call love. This is the end
Of much fair flesh; it is for this you tend
Your delicate bodies many careful years,
To be this thing of laughter and of tears,
To be this living judgment of the dead,
An old gray woman with a shaking head.

(V, 56)

Love is but a youthful dream. Youth's most cherished hopes and dreams can never be realized. Love is impotent against the ravages of time. All love is quite useless.

"The Unloved" presents the opposite side of the problem. The subjects are still old women, but now

⁵²This poem is illustrative of the heavy influence the French poets exerted upon Symons. Symons had in mind one of the poems from Baudelaire's Les Fleurs du Mal, "Les Petites Vieilles" The treatment is, of course, quite different.

There are the women whom no man has loved.
 Year after year, day after day has moved
 These hearts with many longings and with tears,
 And with content; they have received the years
 With empty hands, expecting no good thing;
 Life has passed their doors, not entering.

(VII, 37)

From this description it would appear that the absence of love from their lives has caused this rather bleak and dreary existence. This is obviously a different experience from that of the previous poem. But Symons continues and tells us that these women have had secret dreams of love, of being great Beauties, and of capturing the hearts of countless men. In their imaginations, each has become as other women: each one, in imagination, has cast aside conquest after conquest. In their fantasies they have not hesitated to destroy a man's love for them, for it "is the way of Beauty on earth." This is the only love these women have known, a fantasy love. They lamented not having conquests, not being loved, not having children. They have wept over their losses. But this is only a transient mood for them and it soon passes, returning them to their knitting. These old women

must never fail
 For a dream's sake; nor, for a memory,
 The telling of a patient rosary.

(VII, 38)

Here, in the final lines, we have a strong indication that these old women are nuns. They are woman who have, ostensibly at least, forsaken the world, but yet harbour deep, secret desires to share in the game of love. They believe that if they had chosen to remain in the world they too could have competed successfully in the contest. The condemnation of

all womankind is complete. The irony becomes clear. Women are all the same: Sisters of God, drunken hags or cold-hearted mistresses. The picture presented is cruel and barren.

But women are alike in yet another way. All are alone. And all will grow old and be left with nothing but memories. The woman of "Stella Maligne" is doomed to isolation; in "In Saint Jacques" the woman has only blind faith; the "Old Women" escape the world through alcohol and memories; the sisters have but their fantasies and secret dreams.

The men fare no better. From the belief that they are fulfilled by love ("New Year's Eve") they move to apathetic boredom ("In Carnival"). They become slaves to cruel mistresses, having death as their only escape, or they are mere pawns in the game. All illusion is stripped away from life by their encounters with love: they, at last, can only see the "wax and paint".

The final poem is Symons' "Mundi Victima", victim of the world. It is a summing-up of the conclusions reached in the previous poems. Here it is most readily apparent that Symons intends a much larger meaning for love than the specific man-woman relation. The narrative traces one instance of love from the initial, ideal stage to the final rejection and disillusion. But now, even from the outset, the lover is not so naive: he knows he must suffer the consequences.

I knew that I should suffer for this thing,
 For this completion of the impossible,
 This mystical marriage of heaven and hell,
 With anguish and extreme agony,
 Knowing that my desire had come to me.

(VIII, 14) ,

There is still the sense of mystery--of spiritual forces at play, but now it is coupled with the sense of foreboding danger.

The woman subsequently rejects this lover for a wealthier suitor, but she still retains her initial power over the hopeless victim. Love--no longer the ideal--has become dependent upon the ways of the world.

Love, to the world, is the forbidden thing;
 And rightly, for the world is to the strong,
 And the world's honour and increase must belong
 To the few mighty triumphing through hate
 And to the many weak who humbly wait
 The drudging wage of daily drudgery.
 The world is made for hate, for apathy.
 (VIII, 20)

The world will not tolerate true love. Only the strong win: the weak are repaid with drudgery. Any attempt to pursue a true love is doomed.

Has not the world hate ever crucified,
 From age to age, rejoicing in its loss,
 Love on the same inevitable cross,
 In every incarnation from above
 Of the redeeming mystery of love?

This is the most definite proof that love, for Symons, is not just the man-woman type, but the power by which a person is enabled to realize his fullest being. It is the vehicle by which a person may achieve the ideal, the perfect--perhaps Eden or Heaven. But the world cannot allow this to be. Every attempt at true expression of love the world has seen has been squelched. That true love cannot exist in the world is quite plain, and yet the lover, rejected though he is, is still enchained by his yearning for true love. He will seek it at any place, and accept any part of it, in any form. The final section of the poem is the lover's re-affirmation

of his love, and his acceptance of his fate.

Yet, if it might but save my soul from her,
 O come to me, Folly the Comforter,
 Fling those wild arms around me, take my hand
 And lead me back to that once longed-for land,
 Where it is always midnight, and the light
 Of many tapers has burnt out the night,
 And swift life finds no moment set apart
 For rest, and the seclusion of the heart,
 And the return of any yesterday.

(VIII, 25)

This is his plea for a life unplagued by memories, for escape in forgetfulness. The escape is in folly--in a life which is ultimately of little use. The things of the world must so occupy him that he has no opportunity to remember. The conclusion further reinforces this.

grant, O grant
 That the loosed sails of this determinate soul
 Hurry it to disaster, and the goal
 Of swiftest shipwreck; that this soul descend
 The unending depths until oblivion end
 In self-oblivion, and at last be lost
 Where never any other wandering ghost,
 Voyaging from other worlds remembered not,
 May find it and remind it of things forgot.

(VIII, 26-27)

The loss of love has led to purposelessness. The rejected lover can hope only for a memoryless self-oblivion, for once having glimpsed the paradise of ideal love, the sight of this world is hideous.

Symons, in all his Savoy poems is concerned with the ideal. This ideal is but ostensibly romantic love. The relation between a man and a woman may be the starting point, but there is much more to be gained. The ideal is perfection: it is the perfect state of being. And the achievement of utopia in this world is impossible. The attempt to attain it can lead only to melancholy dejection. Escape is not

possible in this world. Symons is pessimistic--and perhaps he is true.

In general, the poetry of The Savoy is more uniform in quality and in temper. The thirty-five original English poems are testimony to the fact that Symons, as Literary Editor, was true to his aims as set down in the "Editorial Note" of the first number, which denied any partisanship for the sake of "good art." As I have already illustrated, the "decadent" poetry is the work of but three contributors, Aubrey Beardsley, Ernest Dowson, and Arthur Symons, and there are major differences among these three. The poems of Lionel Johnson and William Butler Yeats can hardly be classed as "decadent". Then there is the host of single contributions of all styles and on all subjects. The unifying characteristic, and this I attribute to the Literary Editor, was the general melancholy temper that seemed to hover over the vast majority of poems. In most of The Savoy poems one detects this sense of yearning after some fleeting or unattainable goal, no matter whether that goal be true and ideal love, or the peace and serenity of a seascape.

Beardsley is a special problem, for his two poems are heavily laden with irony. In fact, he is the sole contributor of satiric verse to The Savoy, and , because of this, I feel his poetry--verse, is more indicative of his own theories of poetry than of the editorial policy. It is a pity that the "decadence" of the magazine has been seen to reside so greatly in his work, especially in his illustrations, for much other and better work has been grouped with his under one label.

However, with Dowson and Symons we find most nearly the characteristics of decadence. They both seek the ideal; both are melancholy when they find they cannot attain it; and they both, perversely, place their personal notion of ideal above the values of conventional morality. But even in this there is nothing really sinister. There were aesthetes who turned melancholy.

CONCLUSION

The first problem to which I addressed myself was to determine whether or not the poetry of The Yellow Book and of The Savoy was decadent according to the critical definitions reached by several previous writers. With The Yellow Book this task is quite simple. The answer is "no!" The poetry is uneven, the range of subjects is extended, and the viewpoints propounded are often diametrically opposed. One cannot find the general yearning after the ideal, for, indeed, according to certain love poems in The Yellow Book, the ideal just lives down the street, and eventually, through persistence, will be attained. The perversity, if in fact there is any, is quite intermittent: the prime example is lauding of purchased sexual love. The melancholy is not corrosive, but, usually, quite enjoyable and there is no sense of urgency. One could hardly call The Yellow Book's poetry decadent for all its notoriety.

The poetry of The Savoy is quite a different matter. Certainly not all the poetry is decadent, but neither is all the poetry devoid of the taint of decadence. In fact, the poetry is almost evenly divided. Beardsley, Dowson, and Symons may be considered decadent, the rest of the poets and versifiers not. Even with the non-decadent poems, one usually finds a melancholy feeling and, if not a yearning for the ideal, then at least a questioning of the present condition. But of course, there are significant exceptions even to this.

In the final analysis, I would have to agree with Wendell Harris, who says: "The Savoy, I believe, represented accurately the range of poetry which the "decadent" coterie of the 1890's either wrote themselves or could approve in their contemporaries. The variety of their poetic attempts and the catholicity of their tastes were much more extensive than has been recognized."⁵³ In other words, although not all The Savoy is decadent, one may find poetry within its covers which is representative of English "decadent" poetry.

Concerning just the decadent poetry, one can determine, in the most general terms, a specific theme. It is not, as Wendell Harris claims, a lament for the transience and unattainability of ideal love, but rather the deep, brooding and all-possessing yearning after the absolute ideal. Ernest Dowson sees this ideal manifested in a loved one. Symons' ideal is much grander: love is only the apparent manifestation. Perhaps it is this general theme which gives The Savoy a greater unity than that of The Yellow Book, for even in the major non-decadent, William Butler Yeats, one can find this intense longing for a release from present conditions and solace or security or happiness in a projected ideal state. It seems to me that this theme is peculiarly characteristic of the English decadents of the 1890's. True, there have been other periods of British poetry which also have a sense of yearning for the ideal, but there has not accompanied it any destructive, soul-corroding effects. The English decadents

⁵³ Innocent Decadence, p. 636.

soon realized that the ideal could never be achieved, and besides the resulting melancholy, they were overcome with bitterness and cynicism. Dowson's life was destroyed by this: Symons went violently mad.

There is no peculiar style which is strictly decadent-- at least not in The Savoy. Dowson's is as straight forward as can be. Symons' narratives offer a minimum of difficulty. Yeats is complex, but certainly not perverse. Where, then, does the perversity lie? It lies in the decadent scale of values, in their holding the unnatural over the natural. Their ideal is the ultimate: anything else must take secondary positions. Perhaps this is more artificial than perverse.

Melancholy resulted when these decadents discovered that they had before them an impossible goal, that the ideal was transient and unattainable. They were, in fact, aesthetes who sought "to burn always with this hard gemlike flame" but found this could not be done. They were, in fact, melancholy aesthetes who yearned for their own peculiar variety of perfection--the realization of ideal beauty.

There are, by way of summation, several conclusions to this study. The first is that The Savoy is of much higher quality and more unified than The Yellow Book. This is due in part, I believe, to the fact that The Savoy came closer to achieving its goals.

The second conclusion is that The Yellow Book is not a decadent periodical. Nor is there sufficient proof within either magazine to justify the label, decadent. The variety

of work published is too vast to be neatly covered by any single epithet.

There are instances of decadence in The Savoy, but these characteristics belong more properly to the individual poets, Aubrey Beardsley, Ernest Dowson, and Arthur Symons. These were the three poets who, barring William Butler Yeats, made the major poetic contributions to this periodical, and each sought for the absolute ideal, each tended to a personal scale of values and each became melancholy when they found that their ideals were unattainable.

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