

Un-Decadence: Counter-Poetries and Decadent Aesthetics in the British *Fin-De-Siècle*

Jeremy Valentine Freeman

A Thesis
In the
Humanities Program

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
For the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy (Humanities – Arts and Science)
Concordia University

Montreal, Quebec, Canada
August 18, 2020
©Jeremy Valentine Freeman, 2020

**CONCORDIA UNIVERSITY SCHOOL OF
GRADUATE STUDIES**

This is to certify that the thesis prepared By:

Jeremy Valentin Freeman

Entitled: Un-Decadence: Counter-Poetries and Decadent Aesthetics in the
 British Fin-De-Siècle

and submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
 Doctor Of Philosophy (Humanities)

complies with the regulations of the University and meets the accepted standards with respect to
originality and quality.

Signed by the final examining committee:

_____Chair
Dr. Kim Sawchuk

_____External Examiner
Dr. Michael Nicholson

_____External to Program
Dr. Mark Russell

_____Examiner
Dr. Andre Furlani

_____Examiner
Dr. Paul Bandia

_____Thesis Co-Supervisor
Dr. Jason Camlot

Approved by

_____Dr. Erin Manning, Graduate Program Director

August 18, 2020

_____Dr. André Roy, Dean
Faculty of Arts and Science

ABSTRACT

Un-Decadence: Counter-Poetries and Decadent Aesthetics in the British Fin-De-Siècle

Jeremy Valentine Freeman, Ph.D.
Concordia University, 2020

This dissertation examines and categorically reforms the accepted construction of *fin-de-siècle* decadence. In this study I grapple with how we understand the nature of *fin-de-siècle* cultural history and how theories of decadence during the late-nineteenth century may be usefully complicated by an analysis of *fin-de-siècle* decadence as a non-unitary discursive program. Cumulatively this study reimagines Victorian, *fin-de-siècle* and modernist literatures in relation to decadent aesthetics read through a sustained investigation of discourse and generic forms in the period. To this end I examine three late-Victorian poets' methods of construction and models of poetic and aesthetic form as they wrote, shaped and published their works in order to demonstrate how they incite us to alter and re-define our conception of decadence as a historical category. For this critical intervention I have chosen a set of authors—Edward Carpenter, John Davidson and Sarojini Naidu—whose work exemplifies three poetic models that, I argue, actively engaged with and reformed the tropes, arguments and methods of *fin-de-siècle* decadence. Edward Carpenter's poetry is emblematic of democratic decadence and exemplifies a homoerotic, vegetarian, fraternal, and socialistic decadence that combines late-century aestheticism and utopianism with the embrace of a cosmic Whitmanian self and an ardent embrace of Indian spirituality and culture. John Davidson's poetics are a case-study in muscular decadence with its roots in Nietzsche, the Nietzschean will to power and in a cross-fertilization of German and European pessimism with particularly British ideas of national culture and the great self. Sarojini Naidu's poetics are a case-study in poly-decadence, a poly-cultural, poly-theistic, and poly-valent poetics that explores the international shape of decadent symbolism and a wide movement toward an emancipatory decadence intertwined with a nationalistic feminism. By organizing and naming the key decadent aesthetic fields that the authors engaged with this study traces the dialectical interplay between poetry and decadent theory during the period and attempts to broaden and complicate how we understand decadence, discourse and aesthetics as key drivers in the production of culture.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank my committee members Jason Camlot, Andre Furlani and Paul Bandia who each in different ways contributed to the realization of this thesis. Jason Camlot, as my primary supervisor during my doctorate, has worked with me tirelessly and our shared thoughts and dialogues came to orient much of what this study would ultimately become. I would like to thank Concordia University for its key role in the development of my theoretical and creative mission. As well I would like to thank Goddard College of Plainfield, Vermont for providing the foundational tools for the development of both my intellect and my spirit. A number of figures at Concordia have shaped my life and work during the writing of this study including Bina Friewald, Judith Herz, Bonnie Campbell and Sharon Fitch as well as my colleagues and students. Finally I would like to thank my family and particularly Rebecca Jeanne Alice Ganem for her patience in my infinite and sometimes convoluted labour.

CONTRIBUTION OF AUTHORS

This work is solely that of myself.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction		1
Chapter One	Discourse Analytics, Decadent Aesthetics and <i>Fin-De-Siècle</i> Poetry	49
Chapter Two	Edward Carpenter, the Democratic Decadence	87
Chapter Three	John Davidson, the Muscular Decadent	135
Chapter Four	Sarojini Naidu, the Poly-Decadent	196
Conclusion		247
Works Cited		255
Notes		261

Introduction

I.

A commonly accepted definition of decadence refers to a cultural phenomenon in the nineteenth century that attracted a number of critics who denounced perverse, overly artificial or aestheticized culture as the product of a corrupt and declining civilization. The term decadence also refers to the decadent movement, a movement in art and literature in the nineteenth century with close ties to Symbolism, Aestheticism, Art Nouveau and the Arts and Crafts Movement. British literary decadence had close ties to French decadence in particular and to the works of Théophile Gautier, Charles Baudelaire and Stéphane Mallarmé among others. Works such as Baudelaire's *Les fleurs du mal* and Oscar Wilde's *Picture of Dorian Gray* became exemplars of decadence and of the decadent movement. Each of these works were widely used by critics to show the ill effects decadent ideas had upon moral character and moral values. The accepted definition of *fin-de-siècle* decadence notes particularly the way that hostile critics censured the movement for its perceived contribution to cultural, societal and civilizational decay and degeneration, emphasizing the works produced by decadent artists and writers as being excessively artificial, amoral, hedonistic and atheistic, and as promoting self-indulgent, effeminate and destructive ideas. Over time the term decadence became strongly associated with the late-nineteenth century in particular and with the term "*fin-de-siècle*" as the name for the decadent era.

My study examines and categorically reforms the accepted construction of *fin-de-siècle* decadence. Each of the authors selected in this study reflects a paradigmatic reformation of *fin-de-siècle* decadence and decadent cultural history—a reformation that challenges and

complicates established readings of *fin-de-siècle* culture. In this study I grapple with how we understand the nature of *fin-de-siècle* cultural history and how theories of decadence during the period may be usefully complicated by an analysis of *fin-de-siècle* decadence as a non-unitary discursive program. To this end, I examine three late-Victorian poets' methods of construction and models of poetic and aesthetic form as they wrote, shaped, and ultimately published their uniquely self-revelatory works in order to demonstrate how they incite us to alter and re-define our conception of decadence as a historical category.

For this critical intervention I have chosen a set of authors—Edward Carpenter, John Davidson and Sarojini Naidu—whose work exemplified three poetic models that, I argue, actively engaged with and reformed the tropes, arguments and methods of *fin-de-siècle* decadence. Edward Carpenter's poetry is emblematic of democratic decadence and exemplifies a homoerotic, vegetarian, fraternal, and socialistic decadence that combines late-century aestheticism and utopianism with the embrace of a cosmic Whitmanian self and an ardent embrace of Indian spirituality and culture. John Davidson's poetics are a case-study in muscular decadence with its roots in Nietzsche, the Nietzschean will to power and in a cross-fertilization of German and European pessimism with particularly British ideas of national culture and the great self. Sarojini Naidu's poetics are a case-study in poly-decadence, a poly-cultural, poly-theistic, and poly-valent poetics that explores the international shape of decadent symbolism, and a wide movement toward an emancipatory decadence intertwined with a nationalistic feminism.

Since early attacks on decadent literature and art by cultural commentators of the period such as Max Nordau's *Degeneration* (1892) decadent literature and decadent aesthetics have been routinely read in a deeply reductive manner. By limiting decadence to a preoccupation with aesthetic style, failure, morbidity, and a corrosive toxicity, Nordau and most modernist writers

and critics have established a prevailing orthodox reading of decadent literature. Joseph Bristow deftly articulates the cumulative intention and effect of Nordau's text:

In his 1893 volume *Degeneration* Nordau turns to the already degraded catchword "fin de siècle" in order to make the staggering assertion that modern artists shared the same degenerate mentality as criminals and neuropaths. Moreover, Nordau maintains that members of the artistic avant-garde, like these other reprehensible types, had the ability to contaminate everyone who came within their reach. (*The Fin-de-siècle Poem* 7)

In *The Decadent Movement in Literature* (1893) Arthur Symons diagnosed the turn to decadence and the linkage of decadence to spiritual and moral perversity:

It is no doubt a decadence; it has all the qualities that mark the end of great periods, the qualities that we find in the Greek, the Latin, decadence: an intense self-consciousness, a restless curiosity in research, an over-subtilizing refinement upon refinement, a spiritual and moral perversity. (58)

This diagnosis of decadence was soon echoed by cultural historians of the *fin-de-siècle* such as Osbert Burdett. Burdett, writing of Oscar Wilde as "The Man of Legend", voices what would become a commonplace of decadent and Wildean studies and a reflective commitment to the precise relations between the individual and the *fin-de-siècle* period. Burdett writes in a typically eloquent and comfortably generic way to describe Wilde as living in "symbolic relation to the age":

His career was the epitome of the decade, as his fall was its climax. In its lights and shadows, its colour, all that it offers to appreciation and distaste, it is symbolic. He had little new to say, but he said it vividly; and what seemed new was really the last flicker of an exhausted impulse, in which the Romantic movement, seeking throughout the century to escape the Victorian convention, rent at last its respectable robes, to release the human spirit for the building of some new synthesis on the ruins of forsaken formulae.

(*The Beardsley Period* 153)

Burdett's portrayal of Wilde's decadent style would become a recurrent trope of orthodox decadent scholarship, pertaining to Wilde and to the entire set of authors associated, however loosely, with decadent art and literature in the period. Late-twentieth century scholars R.K.R. Thornton and Murray Pittock continued this diagnosis of decadence, decadent style and decadent

aesthetics. Thornton in *The Decadent Dilemma* (1983) defined decadent literature in stark terms of failure:

Decadent literature is a literature of failure: of a failure to provide a literary synthesis for the disintegration of life; of an expression of that disintegration and failure in elegant cadences; of a fleeing into an artificial world or an ideal world to escape from the consciousness and consequences of that disintegration; of a somewhat indulgent melancholy at the contemplation of that failure; and of a wistfully gay self-mockery at the beauty and vanity of the attempt to escape that failure. (188)

Pittock's *Spectrum of Decadence: The Literature of the 1890s* (1993) reiterated this dominant mode of decadent scholarship: "For the self-styled Decadents, the decay of their civilization was part of their own growth as artists: they drew strength from what weakened their society, vampires of art sucking the life out of science, commerce, and imperialism"(7). Joseph Bristow captures the essence of the trope of fatality in relation to this overriding mode of critical analysis:

If English literary historians were to look anywhere for a period when poets resigned themselves to death's inevitability, they would probably turn to *fin-de-siècle* decadence. This era remains more or less synonymous with the ostensibly dissipated careers of Ernest Dowson, Lionel Johnson and Oscar Wilde: three undeniably gifted writers whose premature demises at the turn of the century prompted their most distinguished contemporary, W.B. Yeats, to characterize them, many years later, as leading members of 'The Tragic Generation'. (...) Yeats, who admitted he could not find a 'full explanation of that tragedy', speculated that 'perhaps our form of lyric, our insistence upon emotion that has no relation to any public interest, gathered together overwrought, unstable men'. (14)

Kostas Boyiopoulos in *The Decadent Image* (2017) continues the line of thought presented by Thornton and Pittock by delineating the potent powers of the decadent poetry of Wilde, Symons and Ernest Dowson and how they brought the decadent image into being by altering aestheticist principles and melding the 1880s aestheticist vision of beauty with that of horror, ugliness and ennui: "In Wilde Poetry diverges from Aestheticism into the Decadence of the 1890s. Symons immerses poetry in the cosmopolitan modernity which marks the peak of Decadence proper. With Dowson poetry enters a soporific state; it serves to elegise Decadence, playing on the

saturation and futility dealt by its terminal paradoxes” (5). Boyiopoulos importantly accentuates some of the complex modes that decadent poetry used in the period while largely formulating his thesis around the cluster of conventional decadent definitions that came to over-determine decadence both in public debate and as a literary movement from its first beginnings.

My research will move past this customary, orthodox identification of decadence as an aesthetic mode of failure, pessimism, weakness, depravity and fatality and instead explore a wide, intercultural, and ideologically complex vision of late-Victorian decadence and how both decadent and un-decadent poetry were capable of transforming decadent discourse into powerful new conceptions of the self in history. Regina Gagnier noted of her aims in *Individualism, Decadence and Globalism: On the Relationship of the Part to the Whole, 1880-1920*:

I explore the problem of Decadent individuation through the complex and often contradictory concepts of the will, which was simultaneously a social (social will), physiological (the materiality of the will), and psychological concept and often the negation of “rational” choice.” (26)

I base my study partly on Gagnier’s aims altering them to explore how individual subjectivities used the will as a means to create, express and interpret ideology and to create, express and interpret to the world new counter-histories wherein the *fin-de-siècle* self could orientate itself both as a “psychological concept” and as a unique subjectivity.

In this study I aim to alter the key terms and definitions of decadence and decadent aesthetics, and I endeavor to enlarge and complicate how we use the term decadence and how decadent discourse informed and shaped a variety of ideological and aesthetic frameworks that modernity would use to understand culture, society, progress, and the key issue of the individual’s relation to modern civilization.

II. Origin Story of this Project

I came to this subject of research through readings of such key figures of the period as William Morris, Walter Pater and Oscar Wilde. As my scholarship deepened in relation to their critical, aesthetic and ideological projects I came to appreciate the multiplicity of powers that influenced their work and I began to notice a distinct slippage in relation to how the *fin-de-siècle* was ultimately treated by critics, historians and cultural analysts. I came to see the concept of decadence as an overdetermined, historical generator and guarantor of meaning. Consequently, I began to see the un-decadent nature of much vital work that originated in the *fin-de-siècle*, work that used decadent themes and ideas but could at the same time be explicitly antiquarian, Victorian in a conservative moral and formal sense, unabashedly Romantic, profoundly idealistic and naively utopian or legitimately modernist and revolutionary in terms of both thematic contents and generic forms. At the root of this slippage between the obscuring dream of ideas of decadence and the Yellow Nineties, and the reality of the profound ideological and aesthetic transformations of the *fin-de-siècle*, is the crucial juncture where this study's ideas originated. The significance of poetry and of the poetic for Wilde, Morris and Pater lead me to investigate the significant role that poetry had for the period in the making of ideas of aesthetics and of ideological meaning in the *fin-de-siècle*. Symptomatic of this veneration of poetry was Pater's essay on Morris's *The Earthly Paradise* and Pater's articulation of aesthetic poetry's relation to history, to the reclamation of historical forms and its powers to renew and re-inscribe ideas of aesthetic experience:

The "aesthetic" poetry is neither a mere reproduction of Greek or medieval poetry, nor only an idealisation of modern life and sentiment. The atmosphere on which its effect depends belongs to no simple form of poetry, no actual form of life. Greek poetry, medieval or modern poetry, projects, above the realities of its time, a world in which the forms of things are transfigured. Of that transfigured world this new poetry takes possession, and sublimates beyond it another still fainter and more spectral, which is

literally an artificial or "earthly paradise." It is a finer ideal, extracted from what in relation to any actual world is already an ideal. Like some strange second flowering after date, it renews on a more delicate type the poetry of a past age, but must not be confounded with it. The secret of the enjoyment of it is that inversion of home-sickness known to some, that incurable thirst for the sense of escape, which no actual form of life satisfies, no poetry even, if it be merely simple and spontaneous. (213-4)

Pater's conception in this passage of aesthetic poetry is notable for its lack of melancholy, suicidal mania, pathological sexuality, incompetent failure, hedonistic excess or other vices associated with the decadent spirit—rather it points towards the creation of a new future, an artificial, perhaps decadent futurity extracted from the actual world. This search for a new futurity resonates in the counter-poetics of Carpenter, Davidson and Naidu and is a greatly obscured longing of *fin-de-siècle* poetry and the decadent spirit. My reading of decadent poetry in the *fin-de-siècle*'s implicit un-decadence originates exactly in this conception of the period's poetry, where the medieval has become modern, Hellas is renewed in new and strange shapes, and the art and literature of France, Germany, China and India among others was articulating itself in a wide variety of decadent and un-decadent poetic registers. My conception of the significance of poetry in the late-nineteenth century as a key medium for the construction of collective and personal narratives and collective and personal aesthetic standards comes directly from Pater's analysis of Morris and the latent powers that were implicit for Pater in the reading of poetry and in the aesthetic appreciation of poetry.

In this study I endeavour to contribute to the burgeoning field of *fin-de-siècle* studies by refashioning the nature of how we understand decadence and decadent aesthetics during the period. By redefining the aesthetic systems of ideological power relations within *fin-de-siècle* decadent discourse I complicate and enhance existing scholarship concerning the influence of decadent theories of culture upon British, European and trans-national modernity. By broadening *fin-de-siècle* ideas of cultural self-formation to include counter-decadents, poly-decadents, late-

Romantic decadent idealists, decadent Orientalist apologists, anti-decadent imperialists, and socialist Uranian advocates, this study adds to the critical body of work on decadence in the *fin-de-siècle* and to our lexicon of literary movements in the waning years of the nineteenth and the opening years of the twentieth century. This project intervenes within the larger frame of *fin-de-siècle* studies, scholarship concerning decadence and contemporary theories of culture in order to contribute to a rich body of research concerning how literature functions within history and how authorial production is imbricated in, and a producer of, cultural history.

Foundational to this study is the attempt to tie together decadents with counter-decadents and what I am calling “un”-decadents. To understand the *fin-de-siècle* as a potent and complex literary and artistic period; that the historical narrative of *fin-de-siècle* art and culture should include counter or un-decadents. Representative of this literature of un-decadence are the poetry works of Carpenter, Davidson and Naidu. Each of these poets wrote poetry that was deeply reflective of the *fin-de-siècle* decadent condition. Each of their poetries used poetic form to establish new and radically un-decadent aesthetic ideologies and each of these poets exist now as marginal literary figures within the late-Victorian and modernist Western canon. Each of these poets represent un-decadence and its complex re-organization of aesthetic ideology in the period: Carpenter who is primarily known through his writings on sex, socialism and society, Davidson with his materialist vitalism, revolutionary atheism and his pretensions to become the savior of the imperial English spirit, and Naidu who articulated a uniquely Indo-European vision of symbolist, devotional and decadent cultural poetics. Davidson, Carpenter and Naidu each in their unique way deconstructed and reconstructed theories of cultural decadence during the *fin-de-siècle* and broadened and complicated theories of decadence through their use of a rich variety of non-standard ideological and thematic subjects.

Carpenter, Davidson and Naidu were each representative of larger trends in the cultural history of the period. Carpenter's democratic decadent, Davidson's muscular decadent and Naidu's poly-decadent works emerged from key *fin-de-siècle* cultural movements that are emblematic of significant mutations to *fin-de-siècle* decadence and how decadent discourse shaped modes and models of aesthetic being. Carpenter, Davidson and Naidu each complicate how we understand the nature of the *fin-de-siècle* and are each representative of significant cultural movements that mark the *fin-de-siècle* as a vital historical staging point in the construction of modernity and many of the key meta-narratives that we use to organize history, literature and generic forms.

One of the central aspects of this broadening of signification is the explicit usage of non-British literatures and alternative or dissident theories of decadent aesthetics. Davidson, Carpenter, and Naidu each located culture not in a singular British, or Franco-British context but in trans-Atlantic, European, and Indo-British contexts. Their work may be understood as functioning as multi-modal generators of decadent culture where this hybrid, non-local, decadence functioned as the true location of culture.

Carpenter's democratic decadence was uniquely tied to Whitman, to a Whitmanian *ethos* of brotherly love, *and* to Carpenter's discovery of sexual freedom and liberty of the self in his visit to India and in such texts as the *Bhagavat gita*. Davidson's muscular decadence functioned explicitly in dialogue with Nietzschean ideas of dominant culture and the *Übermensch* *and* ideas of English or British natural culture and ideas of blank verse. Naidu's poly-decadence emerged from a synthetic construction of an Indo-British poetics (located in her native, poly-theistic Hyderabad) *and* in British and French ideas of poetry, aestheticism, and late-Victorian ideals of beauty and aesthetic self-cultivation.

By exploring these variant decadent theories of aesthetic being and the importance of multiple cultural powers on the creation of these poetic works this study will reconceive how we understand and define the nature of *fin-de-siècle* decadence and the way that poetry constructed aesthetic experience in the *fin-de-siècle*. Central to the resurgence of *fin-de-siècle* studies as a significant disciplinary object is the critical, theoretical and scholarly work that Linda Dowling and Reginia Gagnier have performed in relation to culture, language and literature in the period. Dowling and Gagnier's scholarly work explores the origin and teleological power of *fin-de-siècle* concepts of the self and the individual through ideas of the market and of decadence in order to construct a globalized field theory of *fin-de-siècle* individualism and self-formation and how individualism functions as an expression of *fin-de-siècle* literary style and culture. This study organizes its central aim in continuing Gagnier and Dowling's work while reforming their analyses in terms of the nature and possibility of *fin-de-siècle* decadent aesthetic orders.

Gagnier's scholarship plays a pivotal role in my attempt in this study to understand how poetry and concepts of cultural being during the *fin-de-siècle* interacted with dynamic, globalized ideological cultural structures. In *Individualism, Decadence and Globalization* Gagnier explores ideas of decadent economic, aesthetic and socialist visions of Individualism during the long *fin-de-siècle*. Gagnier analyzes how literary works, as a mode or medium for the cultured self, are used by the *fin-de-siècle* decadent aesthetic practitioners to create selfhood, individuality and subjectivity in the historically malleable ideological *fin-de-siècle* world. For Gagnier these "decadent interiorities" become expressions of "decadent will" and the *fin-de-siècle* must include such significant European thinkers of the period as Durkheim, Freud, Nietzsche, and the key British aesthetic philosopher, Walter Pater. Gagnier expands this reading of "globalized" decadence in her work with the "Literature Compass Global Circulation Project"; expanding how

we think about “decadence” as a global, historically persistent dynamic that is not singular to the British and French late-nineteenth century: “Decadence arose repeatedly and distinctly in response to changes or crises within various nations and cultures.”ⁱⁱ Gagnier explicates how decadence can be recognized as a significant cultural dynamic emphasizing the tortured relations between the individual and the state or global whole in a host of different cultural periods including China in the Late-Tang Dynasty and the Late-May movement in 1919, Japan of the 1930s, Modern Latin America, Russia during the imperial wars with Japan, and the Balkans in the 1920s and ‘30s. As Gagnier has observed, attacks on decadence and decadent aesthetics span a wide number of cultural moments and discourses:

In the twentieth century alone, the rhetoric of purgation of decadence indicated ideological targets under Hitler, Stalin, the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution 1966-76, the Khmer Rouge, Viet Nam Democratic Kampuchea 1975–1979, Idi Amin’s Uganda, Neo-Conservatives and the fundamentalist Right in the United States, and on and on. Those who see themselves as decadents, and those who target others as such, echo each other across cultures while continually reinventing decadent literatures. (80)

Gagnier’s discussion of decadence as a multi-focal and recurring cultural manifestation informs my analysis of un-decadence in terms of its engagement with decadence as a non-singular, multi-focal, and complex totality that helps construct both decadent and un-decadent literatures, reinventing these two types of literature in a Hegelian historical dialectic, and from these thetic (decadent) and antithetic (un-decadent) contents, continuing to produce new historical syntheses and new inter-fusions of aesthetic form and ideological content.

In *Language and Decadence in the Victorian Fin-de-Siècle* (1986), Dowling stages her key scholarly intervention in *fin-de-siècle* literature as a critique of decadent language where decadence must be read not solely as a description of excess and transgression but as a mode of rhetoric that actively engages with theories of cultural identity during the late-Victorian period. Dowling portrays the initial concept that she drew from in writing *Language and Decadence* in

relation to “counterpoetics and critique” the self-same spirit that I have embraced in my analytics of un-decadence: “The idea of Decadence as counterpoetics and critique, though scattered through various articles by various critics and as yet nowhere fully developed, possesses wherever it occurs “a genuine power of illumination” (x). However where Dowling would base her study on the idea of the “post-philological moment” (x) this study engages with the counterpoetics of the *fin-de-siècle* that un-decadent poetry manifested in its complex play with genre, aesthetic formulation and theories of history and meta-history. Dowling’s work telling the story of “Socratic Eros” and “The Higher Sodomy” in relation to Victorian manhood and models of masculinity plays a significant part in my reconstruction of Carpenter’s sexualized counterpoetics as well as how gender forms were altered, disrupted and ruptured by each of the poets in this study. Dowling’s analysis of the Wilde trial and the significance of decadent and un-decadent erotic ideology and erotic/aesthetic self-creation is foundational to my critique of the over-determined nature of orthodox decadence both in the public mind and in scholarly discourse: “Against this older discourse of the English common law, so visibly bearing the sedimented traces of an immemorial village or agrarian past, Wilde deploys a new and powerful vocabulary of personal identity, a language of mind, sensibility, and emotion, of inward and intellectual relations” (2). Dowling’s positioning of Wilde and the Wilde myth in exalted, non-degenerative terms, places him as an impassioned and articulate singer of a new vision of the modern self. This transfiguration of the Wildean literary aura is radically articulated by Dowling in her extravagant description of the trial, not as the end of the Wildean period, but as the beginning of a new vision of the self and its requisite powers. Dowling continues:

These are the relations of which male love, as the “noblest form of affection” represents the most exalted type, with “that deep spiritual affection between an elder and a younger man seen as so global in its reference to the full individuality of each as to involve the underlying and invariable substratum of personality traditionally regarded as constituting

identity. Wilde's triumph in the war of discourse symbolized by his exchanges with the Crown prosecutor was to have equated this thoroughly modern notion of personal identity with the ideal of male love surviving in the writings of ancient Greece." (2-3)

Dowling's construction of an un-decadent Wilde, triumphant in the "war of discourses", may be understood as a model type of un-decadent aesthetic expression.

Dowling's work in relation to discourse points towards the significance of generic forms and literary style for the representation of culture during the period. By using Dowling's engagement with the rhetorical nature and form of decadent language use in the *fin-de-siècle* and Gagnier's engagement with *fin-de-siècle* constructions of the relation between the self and global ideological actors during the period this study embraces the key methods of Dowling and Gagnier while notably altering the field of research to include decidedly "un-" or "counter"-decadent authors and the unique systems of aesthetic production and reception that are staged within the *fin-de-siècle* poetry. Here decadence transcends simple, mono-typical visions of selfhood and individualism in modernity, producing instead strange, *othered* histories and theories of decadent being and decadent will. Dowling and Gagnier's scholarship is central to the development of ideas of decadence and of the reach of decadent thought during the period. In a sense their development of "decadence" and its manifest significance across a variety of cultural, social and intellectual domains during the *fin-de-siècle*, has naturally culminated in my scholarship emphasizing the rich un-decadence of decadent thought, theory and aesthetic practice.

Victorian poetry, culture and poetics have been examined by a number of key scholars whose work informs this study's approach to *fin-de-siècle* poetry, particularly Isobel Armstrong's *Victorian Poetry: Poetry, Poetics and Ideology* (1993) and Lothar Hönnighausen's *The Symbolist Tradition in English Literature: A Study of Pre-Raphaelitism and Fin-de-Siècle*

(1988). Armstrong places Victorian poetry and Victorian poetics in direct relation to the ideological and material orders of the day. Victorian poetry, as Armstrong narrates, produces such influential poets of the Victorian era as Tennyson, Swinburne, Elisabeth Barrett and Robert Browning, and William Morris, all of whom continued to exert an inordinate influence for poets of the British *fin-de-siècle*. Armstrong articulates her attempt to provoke a re-reading of Victorian Poetry in relation to the “silence” that surrounds it in the twentieth century: “A way of beginning to rediscover the importance of Victorian poetry is to consider the heavy silence surrounding it in the twentieth century as a striking cultural phenomenon in itself” (2) This study draws on this theme in arguing that the silence and antagonism to *fin-de-siècle*, aesthetic and decadent poetry in the twentieth and now the twenty-first century points to the complex, subversive and iconoclastic energies that this illicit literature mobilized. Energies that in their potent psychosexual extravagance threatened both Victorian norms and modern theories of selfhood, aesthetic form and cultural identity. The entire orthodox reading of decadent literature emphatically silenced the complexity of Wilde’s literary significance as well as the numerous forgotten decadents, un-decadents and counter decadent authors of the period. Hönnighausen emphasizes the key role that Symbolism as a potent European nineteenth century theory had on theories of *fin-de-siècle* poetics, where a theory of Symbols and Symbolism animated many key strands of late-nineteenth century poetics. As well Hönnighausen emphatically defines the explicit generic powers at work in the period:

At the same time, while research into the prose poem and free verse was progressing, the “verse/prose” dichotomy lost its meaning. During the classical period the term “poem” was used to designate any literary form from tragedy to the madrigal; poetry was defined as “an ornate prose”, obeying rules which varied according to genre; writers of “poetry” were not aware of prose works. By the nineteenth century, however, prose had reached a dominant position in literature; versification was no longer a condition of the “the literary”. (93)

Hönnighausen emphasizes how the Symbolist strand of poetics in the *fin-de-siècle* was explicitly geared towards a finding of spiritual truth in philosophical correspondences and that “The task of the Symbolist poet seems to be to discover the idea through its representation; to grasp the connections between the visible, tangible things of this world and the intelligible essence of which they partake” (93). Hönnighausen goes on to elaborate how poets of the *fin-de-siècle* yearned to “re-conquer” “lost powers”: “powers lost to the linguistic morass of non-symbolic language in modernity” (91).

Work in the last several decades on decadence and its relation to modernism and the *fin-de-siècle* anchor a significant aspect of this study. Decadence and its significance for modernism has since the late twentieth century begun to play a crucial role in how modernist literary theorists articulate the origins of Modernism. Key studies such as Matei Călinescu’s *Five Faces of Modernity: Modernism, Avant-garde, Decadence, Kitsch* (1987), David Weir’s *Decadence and the Making of Modernism* (1995), and Cassandra Laity’s *H.D. and the Victorian fin-de-siècle: Gender, Modernism, Decadence* (1997) demonstrate the significance of *fin-de-siècle* cultural decadence as an origin point for the thought and art of modernism. Călinescu, by way of inaugurating Nietzsche as a founding philosophic father of Modernism, explicitly demonstrates the significance for Nietzsche of the term decadence and how directly Nietzsche’s “philosophy of Life” was constructed against the spirit of cultural decadence that Nietzsche recognized most pointedly in the philosophy of Schopenhauer and in the theatocracy of Wagner. Just as Călinescu engages with the significance of cultural readings of *fin-de-siècle* decadence upon Nietzsche’s work, so this study will attempt to stage the significance of ideological and cultural processes during the period upon the works of Davidson, Naidu, and Carpenter in order to organize a pointed investigation of how *fin-de-siècle* culture both produced, and was produced by, *fin-de-*

siècle poets and their works. Laity's work on H.D.'s relation to the *fin-de-siècle* is revelatory for the degree to which H.D.'s modernism may be understood as part of literary movements prominent in the *fin-de-siècle*, in relation to Classicism, the occult and the raw neglected vitalism of *fin-de-siècle* curiosity concerning history, aesthetics, spirituality, radical socialism, communism, and poetic stylization. Laity writes of H.D.'s early work *HER* and how H.D.'s early development was influenced, positively, by Swinburne and decadent thematics: "In *HER* Swinburne's songs of forbidden love give the young heroine access to transgressive erotic and poetic "masks"—the male androgyne and the femme fatale among them—that thwart the modernist poetic of male desire" (27).

Rather than serving as a negative example for modernist poetics here decadence, decadent aesthetics and decadent poetics become a potent precursor to the development of new modernist literatures—new modernist literatures that tended to subvert dominant ideological systems of control, masculine organization, and binding normative social orders. Laity's renegotiation of H.D. and the influence of *fin-de-siècle* decadence points toward the narrative over-determination of decadent literature, aestheticism and the *fin-de-siècle* in general and to the mutilation of specific *fin-de-siècle* icons such as Oscar Wilde. Laity writes that "Far from dissociating herself from the Wildean Aesthete, H.D.'s aspiring poet-heroine in her fictional autobiography, *Asphodel* (composed 1921-22), regards the Aesthetes, headed by Wilde, as a parental tradition of sexually transgressive artists" (29). Laity's incisive articulation of H.D. points to the gross over-determination and narrativization that successfully routed ideas of Oscar Wilde to that of a humorous, witty, playboy dandy and homosexual martyr who, though both queer and influential, lacked philosophical depth and political courage, poetic curiosity, or spiritual power—pects of his literary works that are well represented in essays such as "The

Critic as Artist” and “The Decay of Lying”, in the long poems *Ballad of Reading Gaol* and *The Sphinx* and in the reflective late-work, *De Profundis*. These counter-decadent or un-decadent aspects of the Wildean myth were radically neglected in conventional studies of his career in preference to the witty, cosmopolitan and a-moral dandy and to the over-emphasis upon Wilde’s plays, the novel *Picture of Dorian Gray*, and witty or ribald accounts from Wilde’s social life. These literary works and various, oftentimes sensational, biographies thus became the primary foci of this dominating order of popular and scholarly discourse concerning Wilde. These outward aspects of the Wildean persona were overemphasized in order to help construct and maintain the normative, orthodox trope of decadent excess and thus to relegate much of Wilde’s own ideas and creative production, as well as the greater share of *fin-de-siècle* literature, to an over-inscribed cultural black box of misrepresentation and delimited inconsequence.

In addition to the role of decadence in shaping the literatures and multiple cultural histories of the British *fin-de-siècle* and of European Modernism, decadence has been useful for contemporary scholars in articulating the shape of a variety of locales outside of the French and British context where decadence as a critical and theoretical tool has shaped debates concerning the influence of the term from the mid-nineteenth century onward. Studies such as Robert Pynsent’s *Decadence and Innovation: Austro-Hungarian Life and Art at the Turn of the Century* (1989), Olga Matich’s *Erotic Utopia: The Decadent Imagination in Russia’s Fin-de-Siècle* (2005), David Weir’s *Decadent Culture in the United States: Art and Literature Against the American Grain, 1890-1926* (2008), Stephen Downes’s *Music and Decadence in European Modernism: The Case of Central and Eastern Europe* (2010) and Frederick White’s *Degeneration, Decadence and Disease in the Russian fin-de-siècle: Neurasthenia in the Life and Work of Leonid Andreev* (2014) articulate exactly how fruitful decadence is as a critical tool and

how late-nineteenth century decadent ideology provoked a variety of cross-cultural and international aesthetic effects and cultural revolutions. Pynsent, Matich, Downes, Weir and White's dynamic inter-cultural investigations of *fin-de-siècle* correspondences is explicitly echoed in this study's analysis of Carpenter, Davidson and Naidu's ties to other international *fin-de-siècle* cultures whether they are Carpenter's relation to American transcendentalism and the literature and religions of India, Davidson's relation to German pessimism and the cult of Nietzsche or Naidu's development of a British-Indian-Hyderabadian poetics. Matich's particular discussion of psychosexual themes in Russian *fin-de-siècle* literature explicitly ties it to the works such as the anonymously authored late-Victorian pornographic fantasy *Teleny*, to Oscar Wilde's dramatic poem *Salome*, to the rich catalogue of Aubrey Beardsley's excessive drawings of sexual fantasy, and as well to the spiritual philosophy of Edward Carpenter as his attempts to justify homoerotic life through discussion of the nature of the embodied self. This movement in contemporary *fin-de-siècle* scholarship provides an important template for the development of *fin-de-siècle* scholarship and for recognition of the explicit powers that the theory of cultural decadence has for study of the period.

Recent work on female aestheticism, on Late-Victorian reading practices and on the writings of Michael Field exemplify new pathways that are opening up in *fin-de-siècle* studies. In *The Forgotten Female Aesthetes: Literary Culture in Late-Victorian England* Talia Schaffer advances a re-valuative theory of *fin-de-siècle* literature that remolds commonplaces of literary practice in the closing years of the nineteenth century. Her study importantly renegotiates *fin-de-siècle* aestheticism's relation to High Modernism and performs an important scholarly mission to rehabilitate how we think of the period, how literature has come to be canonized during the period, and how, through an analysis and documentation of the works by female aesthetes, the

complex map of gender relations in modernity have been erroneously linked to an almost entirely male mythic fraternity of aesthetic producers. Schaffer orients her work as a potent re-imagining of the aesthetic “brand” in the *fin-de-siècle* as she opens up the “elite” to the “popular” and the presentation of the “missing half”:

If aestheticism was a philosophical movement indebted to Ruskin and Pater, it was also a fashion inspired by Mary Eliza Hawes and Rosamund Marriott Watson. If aestheticism was a serious literary movement tailored to an elite audience, with authors like Henry James, it was also a popular literary movement designed for mass readers, with authors like Ouida. If aestheticism was a celebration of light literature like Max Beerbohm’s it was also the genre that produced Lucas Malet’s enormous novels. The high culture aspirations of the *Yellow Book* can be matched with popular counterparts from the *Woman’s World*. Every now-canonical male aesthete once competed with the female aesthetes whose critical and popular success made them formidable contemporaries. And the recovery of this missing half of aestheticism, this world of women, necessarily alters our view of the movement. (3)

Integral to Schaffer’s critique (as we come to an understanding of literary works in the *fin-de-siècle* in relation to the greater historical and cultural “whole” of the period) is the re-examination of the intense limitations of the terms decadence and aestheticism. The *fin-de-siècle* has, up to now, not been studied in such a way to give voice to the dynamic interplay between the host of often discordant vitalities existent in the *fin-de-siècle*. Works such as Schaffer’s help pave the way toward a more thorough, inclusive, and less regimented ordination of the *fin-de-siècle*’s complex vitalities during the period and how British literature of the *fin-de-siècle* interacted with the greater European literatures of the period. Schaffer’s analysis helps to thread together these divergent movements and to sketch out a complex map of interlocking historical wills and cultural and counter-cultural ideological formations.

Elizabeth Carolyn Miller in *Slow Print: Literary Radicalism and Late Victorian Print Culture* (2013) exemplifies this new path of *fin-de-siècle* research as Miller investigates Britain’s radical press between 1880 and 1910. Such figures as William Morris, George Bernard Shaw,

Annie Besant and Edward Carpenter become the primary figures through whom Miller performs her work. Miller writes: “By focusing on the literary culture of the radical press—the literature published within and around radical periodicals—I suggest that literature was a crucial means by which the turn-of-the-century radical counterpublic defined itself against capitalist mass print culture” (6). To vindicate her claim she quotes Kropotkin’s “Memoirs of a Revolutionist” “on the significance of this counter-discourse to the official world of large-scale print media: “the socialist cause: ‘has never been rich in books (...) its main force lies in its small pamphlets and its newspapers’” (6). By uniting Morris, Carpenter, and Kropotkin as objects of study in the *fin-de-siècle* Miller explicates an important way of seeing the literature of decadence as being integrated in a vociferous counter-discourse in the *fin-de-siècle*. The material nature of Miller’s subject which is rooted in the small presses, weeklies, and illustrations of the radical press helps tie her critique to a generic reading of historical forces and demonstrates that through such a reading a “total” critique of ideological or spiritual essences may be carried out through the examination of a highly localized historical textual moment. Writing of Morris’s Kelmscott Press Miller articulates an important subset of history that illuminates the intricate ties between elite academic aestheticism and proletarian movements in the period:

The Kelmscott books (and books from other such presses) were shown in exhibitions and discussed in the radical press. Indeed the Kelmscott volume of Morris’s lecture on Gothic Architecture was printed in public at the 1898 Arts and Crafts Exhibition in front of large crowds and sold for 2s. 6d (...) The books were part of a broader anticapitalist counterculture, and their influence extended beyond those who could afford to purchase them (...) the Kelmscott books were artifacts from the future, material and aesthetic reminders that after the revolution labor and production would no longer be the alienating, repetitive industrial enterprise that mechanized mass print so neatly symbolized. (57-58)

By tying together the “future” of Morris’s *News from Nowhere*, Morris’s re-telling of Ruskin’s “The Nature of The Gothic” in his lecture on Gothic Architecture, and the radical press, Miller

neatly interprets and re-imagines how the *fin-de-siècle* used aestheticism within the “decadent” moment. Rather than decadent art as a degenerate bearer of illness that would destroy subjectivities and lead to “ego-mania” as Nordau defined it, or decadent art as the representation of symbolic “correspondences” as Symons re-imagined them, Miller’s work prompts us to re-define what decadent art is, what locales we find it in and what it does. Miller’s re-formulation of *fin-de-siècle* literary “materials” demonstrates a unique approach to modern literature that helps re-organize the dominant canons of late-Victorian literature, just as Gagnier emphasized in her key studies of decadence, where decadent literatures existed between “individual independence or separation from others and interdependence with others” (3). Miller’s investigation of the use and circulation of radical values in the radical press of the era presents a highly situated, materialist appreciation of the sentence, poem, or illustration in relation to the whole of *fin-de-siècle* literature rather than an over-determined reading of decadence in the period. Schaffer and Miller each help provide the template from which my analysis of *fin-de-siècle* poetry originates.

III. Poetry, Prose and Decadent Modernity

To pursue this line of thought I have turned to decadent *fin-de-siècle* poetry. Decadent poetry, in its particular engagement with the individual and the development of a highly individuated concept of the *fin-de-siècle* self may be seen in contradistinction to the role that prose had in turn-of-the-century newspapers and their relation to the crowd and to the development of modern urban collective consciousness. Peter Fritzsche in *Reading Berlin, 1900* comments upon the extravagant powers of journalistic prose to incite collective behaviour in *fin-de-siècle* mass urban society: “Mass circulation newspapers not only reported on but helped assemble the metropolitan crowd on the street. (...) By gathering together hundreds of thousands

of spectators the press also redefined the nature of the public and transformed a passive readership into an active metropolitan culture” (222). Margaret Stetz neatly documents the transformations that mass publishing had upon the *fin-de-siècle*, transformations that are central to how decadent and un-decadent poetry constructed the author-reader-contract: “This transformation quite literally was stoked by the factory-like conditions of mass production created by high-volume and high-speed papermaking, typesetting, printing and binding. As publishing came unmistakably to resemble an industry, it both generated and bolstered other industries, particularly advertising and public relations, in order to reach a mass market with its goods” (27). Decadent and un-decadent poetries activated particular, highly defined and specific cultural groups in direct relation to the predatory powers of the modern press and the vital powers of modern prose to generate collective existence. Hobbs and Janeszewski have written convincingly of the significance of local poetry published in local newspapers throughout the nineteenth century as the greatest producer of Victorian poetry: “Local newspapers, particularly weekly titles, are studied here because more of them were printed than any other type of publication containing poetry throughout the nineteenth century. This means that, in aggregate, more poetry was published in this way than in books, magazines, or London newspapers” (2). They go on to state that, “The millions of poems published in the Victorian local newspaper helped to create a great sea of poetry in which authors and readers swam”. The prose-poetry division may be understood not as a wall between genres but the gradual and gradually all-consuming prose-ing of what poetry was by the turn of the twentieth century and the powers that mass production had, for better and for worse, in relation to the formation of cultural and ideological formation in the period. The prosing of poetry attended to the disciplining of knowledge structures and how poetry made what it meant is an aspect of the development of

media and the construction of the history of mediated modernity in relation to emotion, sentiment and the public and private uses of this generic and psychological mediation. The significance of *fin-de-siècle* decadent and un-decadent poetics came to fruition in direct relation to this generic accumulation of hyper-mediated experience—where the *fin-de-siècle* poem came to exist as articulated through newspapers, small magazines, and then only minimally, the publication of poetry books.

I argue that decadent poetry is uniquely situated within the *fin-de-siècle* to articulate complex cultural, civilizational and psychological anxieties and conditions in several distinct manners:

1. Through decadent poetry's unique relation to concepts of history and literature's relation to ideas of canon formation and nation building particularly in its direct ties to Ancient, Medieval, late-Medieval, Elizabethan, Enlightenment and Romantic poetry traditions;
2. Via decadent poetry's unique relation to the generic infrastructure of media during the late nineteenth century with its embattled relation to prose, to the "prose-ing" of poetry, to the freeing of closed verse forms, and as a unique barometer of national ideas concerning the natural and the unnatural or simple and artificial usages of language.
3. Via decadent poetry's status as a historical outlier that allows for hidden, obscure, inchoate and unconscious powers of the *fin-de-siècle* to manifest themselves.
4. Through decadent poetry's unique relation to individual psychologies, to private spaces and to interiority in the *fin-de-siècle* and to the construction of ideas of the self within a pointedly intimate and sub-commercial exchange of poems, manuscripts,

small journals, poetry books, and the readings or recitation of poetry within small coteries and friendship circles of shared aesthetic taste and social ritual.

In this study I attempt to read poetry in direct relation to the complex relation that the prose/poetry dialectic generated in the *fin-de-siècle*, paying particular attention to the relational nature of decadent poetry and to the ideologic and aesthetic construction of decadence in the period as opposed to reading the *fin-de-siècle* poem or poetry book as an isolated object of self-created being as Pierre Macherey asserted in his conception of the modern literary work and its “relational” nature. As Macherey stated as a core tenet of his methodology in *A Theory of Literary Production*: “We shall not then be studying the literary work as if it were a self-sufficient totality” (53). Macherey elaborates upon this point by further emphasizing the ideologic and aesthetic dialectic that the work exists in as an object of labour. The poetry book, particularly in the *fin-de-siècle* may be seen as particularly resonant with the aura of labour as the relation between the author, the editor, the printer, and then the reader, existed in a close, often personal, exceedingly intimate, and highly confined space of limitation. In this sense the obscurity, marginality, and liminality of decadent and un-decadent poetry particularly exposed the labour of the aesthetic contract between author and reader in contradistinction to the relational powers that journalistic prose, novelistic prose, and popular factual prose had in the period. The over-defined, over-cultured, and excessive aesthetic requirements of reading or writing decadent poetry and decadent prose, helped create a much closer, smaller, and more intimate “decadent republic of letters” as Mathew Potolsky has elaborated in relation to European decadent literature in the *fin-de-siècle*.ⁱⁱⁱ

With the rise of prose as the modern genre *par excellence* in the late-Victorian period, the dominance of the novel, the significance of mass printing, and the power of the newspapers in

the late nineteenth century, *fin-de-siècle* poetry, and particularly decadent and un-decadent poetry published in particular small magazines or in limited book editions, becomes a key site for the contestation of decadent discourse. Mallarmé was pointedly aware of the complex relations between the newspaper and late-nineteenth-century literature:

Seated on a garden bench where a recent book is lying, I like to watch a passing gust half open it and breathe life into many of its outer aspects, which are so obvious that no one in the history of literature has ever thought about them. I shall have the chance to do so now, if I can get rid of my overpowering newspaper. I push it aside; it flies about and lands near some roses as if to hush their proud and feverish whispering; finally, it unfolds around them. I will leave it there along with the silent whispering of the flowers. I formally propose now to examine the differences between this rag and the book, which is supreme. The newspaper is the sea; literature flows into it at will. (*The Book: A Spiritual Instrument* 1)

The complex ideological dialectics of prose and poetry, of poetic knowledge and scientific knowledge, of truth and myth and of genre and medium came to inform the creation of decadent and un-decadent poetics in the *fin-de-siècle*.

Decadent poetry as an embattled generic medium functioned as a key vehicle for the period's concern with loss, decay and civilizational change. We can understand this state of contestation as being informed via decadent poetry's existence as a mediated genre, part prose/part poem, part evil/part good, part civilizer and part degenerator—if we understand medium and mediation as John Guillory helpfully defines it in relation to modernism in his essay "Genesis of the Media Concept": "If we think of mediation as a process whereby two different realms, persons, object or terms are brought into relation, the necessity for mediation implies that these realms, persons, objects or terms resist a direct relation and perhaps have come into conflict" (342). With decadent poetry's ancestral ties to an English, Classical, and Biblical past, to the hagiographic tradition of Romantic greatness and to rich traditions of folk poetry, *fin-de-siècle* poetry functioned as a powerful generic medium of history and of *fin-de-siècle* social being. Decadent and un-decadent poetry, in this sense, presents a cultural embodiment of *fin-de-*

siècle decadence and *fin-de-siècle* anxiety concerning the nature of the self in modernity. With the rise of prose, experimental fiction, modern printing methods, and modern science the non-usage of poetry within a wide range of disciplines is clear as knowledge and popular literary appreciation rapidly disciplined itself into largely prose-driven epistemic postures. As prose slowly conquered poetry as *the* modern literary medium so poetry's relation to the rise and decline of civilization mirrored concerns involving cultural evolution and devolution, social progression and social degeneration, and civilizational rise and civilizational decay during the period. The cultural history of prose and poetry is radically manifest in decadent literature and in the complex ways that decadent and un-decadent aesthetic practitioners used poetry as an embattled and obscure generic medium to stage their largely private dramas of cultural reformation.

In *fin-de-siècle* poetry the collective imagination of the period attempted to transform and represent decadent cultural history—a cultural history that would come to frame the origins of modernism including such pivotal struggles as those associated with industrialism, the rise of the proletariat, the deployment of new technologies, the emergence of international communism, twentieth century fascism and the imperial and post-imperial state. Decadent poetry as an embattled and archaic genre of the *fin-de-siècle* functioned as a medium for the study of these decadent cultural anxieties concerning history, the future of modern civilization and how art should frame the representation of the self in modernity. In this study my methodology is in explicit inversion of György Lukács' theories of the modern novel and the now often forgotten cultural wars between healthy and sick art that were a violent aspect of avant garde modernism's rejection of *fin-de-siècle* decadent discourse with both its sickly and its vigorous manifestations consigned to the rubbish bin of history. Lukács' privileging of the novel is, in this study,

dialectically inverted via the privileging of the *fin-de-siècle* poem as a unique locus of history, knowledge, and ideological and aesthetic construction. To fully appreciate the degree to which Lukács attacked “sick art” I will quote him at length:

It is no accident that the decadent view of art, in love with decay, carps continually at healthy art, even at its outstanding productions. Between these two conceptions of art, between the two class ideologies they represent, there is really irreconcilable enmity. Gide says: “Hold on only to what can’t be found elsewhere than in you.”

In such and similar tendencies (even when they may seem superficially in opposition) lies the reason why all sick art is ephemeral. At best it seeks its subject matter in what is secondary, peripheral, merely momentary and without future. The more honest the artist is his subjectivity, the more strongly the form represents a fixing of what has been doomed to destruction. And no one who follows the development of modern ideology carefully can miss the swift change and short life of its fads. What yesterday pretended to be smart avant-garde today is dull *vieux jeu*. The older generation still distinctly remembers the impressive effect of the English *fin-de-siècle* religion of evil of Swinburne and his school, and above all of Oscar Wilde. Today’s spokesman for decadence, T.S. Eliot, writes that these men understood nothing of evil or sin.

(*Writer and Critic* 109)

In a forceful sense I endeavour to develop the aesthetic and ideologic aspects of that which was “secondary, peripheral, merely momentary and without future”, by asserting that decadent and un-decadent poetry, when released from its cage of historical over-determination, possessed unique keys to decoding the ideologic and aesthetic template of the modern.

As early as 1859 writing in the *National Review* William Rathbone Gregg pointed to the inordinate powers of the nineteenth century novel and the “moral” powers of influence that the novel had come to possess over the thought and sentiments of the learned and unlearned masses: “There are peculiarities, again, which must always secure them a vast influence on all classes of society and all sorts of minds. (...) novels either need no digestion or rather present their contents to us in an already digested form.”^{iv} The pressing powers of mass-produced prose in terms of both the novel and the newspaper were explicit themes of *fin-de-siècle* cultural life— influences that had an inordinate power over the minds and aesthetic subjectivities of the period.

The mass production of the newspaper and the nineteenth-century novel were central players as well in the construction of decadent literature and most emphatically, in the construction of decadent and un-decadent poetry. This study is built upon understanding *fin-de-siècle* poetry's experimentation with traditional verse forms, with impressionist verse, heroic verse, free-verse, dramatic verse and arch-traditional resurrections of antiquated verse forms. I believe that the rich generic construction of poetry in the nineteenth century speaks pointedly to the deep historicization of poetics during the period. Decadent poetry in its close relation to Victorian mid-century poets, to the Pre-Raphaelites and to the Romantics allowed it to exist within a generically and formally complex state of inter-mixing, an inter-mixing of forms, styles and languages that, when further elaborated through its intensive and precocious cosmopolitan European or international hybridity allowed it to manifest much more severe, extreme and highly individual elaboration for history and of potential future histories. This power, in turn, helped to present the consciousness of the *fin-de-siècle* psyche in terms of the self in relation to narrative structures and discursive power in historically explicit manners as poets of the period came to frame their work and themselves as poets in direct relation to specific theories of history, theories of civilization, and theories of the rise and fall of distinct cultural, spiritual or ideological orders.

Poetry in the *fin-de-siècle* spoke intimately to many of the central concerns of the period about the self and its relation to society within modern civilization. These concerns were foundational to the development of critiques of decadent culture in the period. Poetry, in its unique status as a guarantor of deep-field historical forms and as an object used to create communities of intimacy, eroticism, and aesthetic friendship, allowed for a complex analysis of how decadent discourse functioned in the *fin-de-siècle* and how decadent aesthetics framed models of being, belonging and becoming. The poetry of "Michael Field" (the pen name of

Katherine Bradley and Edith Cooper), as elaborated by Marion Thain, details these modes of self-creation through aesthetic and then religious meditation, as a means of joining a local, international and cosmopolitan elect of aesthetic readers, and as a means for the Michael Field couple to articulate themselves within a dynamic and mysterious interplay with theories of history, devotional practices, ideas of civilization and modes of aesthetic practice. Thain writes of the explicit author-reader contract in Field's poetry and how the complex sexuality of their works would be read by a knowing, aesthetically trained, set of readers:

Michael Field editions were limited in their sales and circulated primarily among a group of readers who knew the women, there are good reasons for believing that Michael Field's audience did find within the poetry a double narrative which spoke about both hetero- and homoerotic desire. Bradley and Cooper may have sometimes been drawing on idiosyncratic and novel sources for their erotic discourse, but readers of an educated type would have been conversant with the models they were using and the strategies they were employing to invoke a deliberately ambiguous narrative. (53)

In obscure verse dramas, copious life writing, and the continual production of new verse models Katherine Bradley and Edith Cooper chronicled their life together and used an explicitly un-decadent poetry as a means of thinking through religious, historical and aesthetic questions as well as developing a complex, largely interior, conversation concerning the nature of God, art and civilization. Michael Field's work presents us with a strong definition of un-decadent poetry, a poetry that uses decadent themes and has generally aestheticist and decadent tendencies, but that in its totality builds a life-mission, an intimate sense of poetic identity and an aesthetic meta-history from both decadent and un-decadent materials. Where conventional prose works of the *fin-de-siècle* might vaguely or associatively be aligned with the individual artists' personal thought and historical consciousness I advance that the demands of the market, and the potent demands of prose as a stable genre of both aesthetic mass consumption and as a law-giving, knowledge-making resource for conventional British culture, largely created the terms wherein

the peculiar, idiosyncratic and more heterodox works of decadent and un-decadent poetry might participate in a full investiture of the unique identity of the *fin-de-siècle* poet into the holistic dialectic of historical form.

The intimate nature of the reading public of Oscar Wilde's poetry is attested to by Joseph Bristow as he discusses the significance of the Bodley Head and this small presses significance as a publisher of literary avant garde work in the period:

Like many of the volumes issued by the Bodley Head until the middle of 1894 (when the partnership between Lane and Mathews broke up), Wilde's 1892 Poems circulated among a restricted market of bibliophiles, connoisseurs and literary enthusiasts, many of whom were well acquainted with one another in the *fin-de-siècle* metropolis. (16)

Both decadent and un-decadent poetry in the period often tried to reach a small audience of like-minded readers whose intellectual and aesthetic sympathies would be capable of fully entering into the highly coded worlds contained within. Like Wilde, we will see that Carpenter, Davidson and Naidu's poetries participate in a similar construction of author-reader intimacy wherein both author and reader are expected to possess a shared grammar of aesthetic experience even if each of these un-decadent poets construct their ideal readership out of grossly different materials.

Nicolas Frankel in *Oscar Wilde's Decorated Books* comments on Wilde's own relation to his poetry and to the presentation of his poetry for the reader in explicit terms:

The act of publishing poetry assumed a tremendous importance to Wilde's imagination; and though Wilde was in other respects so thoroughly mocking, he performed virtually no act with greater seriousness than publishing his own poetry (...) He professed himself primarily a poet throughout his life, soberly insisting to his publishers, "The maker of a poem is a 'poet,' not an 'author'" (Letters 318) and it was as poetry that he justified the publication of some of his most controversial work. His poetry thus illuminates his textual practices with a clarity his other writings do not always possess, in part because he insisted on greater care with its publication, as well as an exquisiteness of decoration, that was not always matched in his other writings. (18)

Frankel's interpretation of Wilde's poetic vocation is significant in terms of the relation between conventionality and the ideal of the *fin-de-siècle* poem and the importance that decoration and

design had on the *fin-de-siècle* poetry book. The complex generic stylization of decadent and un-decadent poetry was a key aspect of its relation to the author-reader contract and to the level of care and attention that decadent and un-decadent poetry paid to the construction of the shared interiority of the *fin-de-siècle* poem as a reading/writing experience where both the reader and the writer could construct visions of the self and aesthetic meta-histories capable of totalizing ideas of historical structure. Field and Wilde's use of poetry cut deeply into the poetic image of themselves which *fin-de-siècle* authors routinely invested themselves into. By not only writing poetry but by intimately concerned with how it was to be read and experienced within its organic totality as a singular aesthetic medium, decadent and un-decadent poets of the *fin-de-siècle* stressed the significance of aesthetic experience and the grand powers that this experience could bestow in an engagement with aesthetic experience where self, art and historical forms could be tasted, consumed and then transform the self of the reader. The increasingly subversive, non-popular and hidden nature of decadent and un-decadent poetry in the *fin-de-siècle* came to provide an open medium for the development of highly idiosyncratic, diverse, strange, and non-normative visions of subjectivity, identity and history—Sarojini Naidu, John Davidson and Edward Carpenter's works are emblematic of this tendency in the period.

Research into decadent poetry of the *fin-de-siècle* as an obscured and largely ignored literary field of Modernity allows for a glimpse of modern culture and society through the lens of a significant historical outlier. Decadent and un-decadent poetry were able to articulate an arcane understanding of cultural history through their ability to access deeply intuitive, emotional and intimate states. The otherness and complexity of *fin-de-siècle* discourse and of *fin-de-siècle* aesthetic codes presents the student of modern culture with a largely forgotten, hidden and untouched historical moment from which large-scale historical processes may be examined

anew, supplementing the massive analyses that such key figures in nineteenth century prose as Charles Darwin, Karl Marx, Henry James, or Charles Dickens have received. Mostly forgotten poetic figures of the *fin-de-siècle* such as Lionel Johnson, John Gray, Ernest Dowson, and Rosemarie Garland Thompson have received barely a fraction of the attention that monumental figures in nineteenth century prose have garnered both in popular and in academic discourse. The unworldly, anti-commercial, and arcane aspects of treating these obscured authors gives to *fin-de-siècle* poetry its unique powers as a subject for study, interpretation, and theorization.

Michel Foucault's treatment of sex, power and discursive production of ideological being in his early works is partially representative of my desire to recreate a counter-history and counter-poetics of decadence and decadent aesthetics in the *fin-de-siècle*. Foucault's presentation of Herculine Barbin is significant to my critical ethos in that decadence and *fin-de-siècle* poetry may be read as a symbolic hermaphrodite of modern culture, a creature that is both and neither, evil and meaningless, powerful and worthless, something better left abandoned or for that matter, constructed by revision. Foucault's early criticism evokes the specific mode of criticism that this study draws upon as he specifically articulates the necessity of reversing normative orders of historical power and forcibly and radically undermining established canons of narrative normativity, particularly in relation to discourse and discursive models of narrative power. In this reading orthodox decadent discourse as a narrative power functioned to effectively arbitrate, patrol and circumscribe decadence and un-decadence in the *fin-de-siècle* through its policing of discursive regimes much as Foucault articulated the need of power to censor, author, inscribe and arbitrate the nature of the modern citizen in the face of the pathological: "The registration of the pathological must be constantly centralized. The relation of each individual to his disease and to his death passes through the representatives of power, the registration they make of it, the

decisions they take on it” (*Discipline and Punish* 197). In the process of naming whereby decadence assumed its present condition I believe that modern discursive engines, through no singular institutional framework, authored, inscribed and coined this naming of both what decadence was, what it would be and what, in the end, a “decadent” would be, “not masks that were put on and taken off, but the assignment to each individual of his ‘true’ name, his ‘true’ place, his ‘true’ body, his ‘true’ disease” (198). Foucault recognized the significance of discourse in the policing and production of sexuality and I partially develop the theoretical model of this study from this manner of studying discursive power and its attempts in the nineteenth and twentieth century to normalize aesthetic pleasure and to convert decadent being into objects of criminality, sin and illicit/dissident cultural energies—energies that polluted both self and state as Foucault wrote in relation to pleasure and power in the first volume of his *History of Sexuality*: “Pleasure and power do not cancel or turn back against one another; they seek out, overlap, and reinforce one another. They are linked together by complex mechanisms and devices of excitation and incitement” (43). For just as pleasure and power do not negate each other so the aesthetic pleasures of decadent and un-decadent poetry exist in direct relation to the formation of ideological networks in the *fin-de-siècle* —ideological networks that both enforced orthodox readings of decadence and proscribed orthodox models of aesthetic pleasure derived from these readings.

V. Chapter Outline

The first chapter of my study outlines a typology of decadent poetry and of the dominant models of decadent discourse in relation to their theoretic origins. In this theoretical chapter I develop a discursive critical methodology of aesthetic experience through the works of Roland

Barthes, Maurice Blanchot and Pierre Macherey, paying particular attention to how we can construct an understanding of *fin-de-siècle* discourse via a discursive analysis of poetry, poetics and ideology in the period. This analysis constructs an architecture of generic relations whereby *fin-de-siècle* poetry assumes its key significance as a generic textual shaper of *fin-de-siècle* being and of aesthetic economy. Methodologically this analysis leads to a formulation of the key modes of decadent aesthetics during the period based on an analysis of poetic discourse and how poetics are a reflector and shaper of the *fin-de-siècle* condition. To do this work I develop several key discursive operators that inform the author-reader relation in *fin-de-siècle* poetry and the significance of the decadent will, decadent registers and orthodox decadence for understanding how *fin-de-siècle* poetry negotiated meaning construction in the reading and writing of poetry in the period. By organizing and naming the key decadent aesthetic fields that the authors engaged with, this study will be able to tease out the dialectical interplay between poetry and decadent theory during the period.

In the second chapter I turn to Edward Carpenter's complex long poem *Towards Democracy*. Carpenter's work in *Towards Democracy* elicits a key strain in *fin-de-siècle* discourse as it emphasized the vast homoerotic literature that came of age during the era of decadent cultural wars as well as emphasizing a unique instantiation of democratic decadence. First published by Carpenter in 1883 *Towards Democracy* originated for Carpenter in his mother's death and in his first reading of the *Bhagavat Gita*—from these two sources Carpenter crafted a spirited, personal, and ideologically critical vision of the self in explicit relation to the world.

Carpenter's work as critic and polemicist in the 1880s and 1890s nurtured the creation of *Towards Democracy*. In *England's Ideal*, a socialist tract that Carpenter published during the

early years of *Towards Democracy*'s composition, Carpenter wrote of the corruption of late-Victorian society in blatant terms: "At the bottom, and behind all the elaborations of economic science; theories of social progress, the changing forms of production, and class warfare, lies to-day the fact that the old ideals of society have become corrupt, and that this corruption has resulted in dishonesty of life" (1). *England's Ideal* proclaimed the need to return to a simplicity that Carpenter found represented in Henry David Thoreau's *Walden*. *England's Ideal* incited its readers to turn away from the degrading life of living on others' labour and pointed to the "honest" and "true" life of pure simplicity as the means to overcome the corrupting influence of "abstraction", "abstract labour" and Capital's diseased spirit. In addition to Carpenter's writings on the failings of Victorian civilization Carpenter followed John Addington Symonds in attempting to create both in reality and in polemic the capacity for visions of the self and of homosexual life that were powerful challenges to heteronormative conceptions of Victorian marriage and concepts of property, inheritance and erotic identity. In works such as *Homogenic Love, and Its Place in a Free Society* (1894) and *The Intermediate Sex: A Study of Some Transitional Types of Men and Women* (1908) Carpenter became an early advocate of "brotherly love" and addressed explicitly the meaning of male-male sexuality. In *The Intermediate Sex* Carpenter explored, "the distinctions and gradations of Soul-material in relation to Sex—that the inner, psychical affections and affinities shade off and graduate, in a vast number of instances, most subtly from male to female, and not always in obvious correspondence with the outer bodily sex" (10). These "gradations of human type" lead Carpenter to even foresee future sexes that are emerging in the present which will "have an important part to play in the societies of the future" (11). In *The Intermediate Sex* Carpenter advanced the argument that "the sexes do not or should not normally form two groups hopelessly isolated in habit and feeling from each other,

but that they rather represent the two poles of one group—which is the human race“ (17).

Carpenter’s work as social critic and his work towards the advancement of new theories of sexual identity fused together to form the thematic mechanism that propelled *Towards Democracy* into its final form.

Carpenter’s *Towards Democracy* is a truly obscure work of literary culture, but a key if obscure work that demonstrates the inextricable ties of counter-poetries and global ideological forces during the *fin-de-siècle* as well as the implicit ties of East and West, of straight and gay culture, of England and America, of poetry’s prosefication by ideological demand and of free and closed verse during the period. Carpenter’s work is uniquely potent in helping us understand how ideas of the natural and the artificial functioned during the period and how *fin-de-siècle* poetics used this literary, cultural and ideological discursive machine concerning the nature of the natural or the artificial in order to construct ideas and manifestations of the self during the period. Carpenter desire to proclaim: “joy”, to announce a new world of freedom and of emancipated bodily selfhood is enunciated in the opening passages of the text where Carpenter writes:

Deep as the universe is my life-and I know it;
nothing can dislodge the knowledge of it; nothing can
destroy, nothing can harm me.

Joy, joy arises—I arise. The sun darts overpowering
piercing rays of joy through me, the night radiates it from me.
I take wings through the night and pass through all the
wildernesses of the worlds, and the old dark holds of tears
and death – and return with laughter, laughter, laughter.

(*Towards Democracy* 4)

In this passage the intensity of the work’s autobiographical nature, its emotional naiveté and its romantic sentimentalism immediately expresses itself. The expressive innocence of the text’s central voice echoes almost bizarrely in relation to the dominant cadences of forlorn, bitter,

solipsistic artificiality that decadent verse came to possess as a dominant model in the *fin-de-siècle*.

In his autobiographical notebooks Carpenter wrote pointedly of how his reading of the *Bhagavat Gita* created in him a realization of a new “consciousness”, a new sense of self and a new sense of the nature of the decadent will’s relation to the world as an English, British, and Global whole. A revaluation of orthodox decadence is radically manifest in the style and substance of *Towards Democracy*. Carpenter in his autobiographical notebooks situated *Towards Democracy* as a mixture of Eastern mysticism and the Whitmanian poet-bard. Carpenter brought this vision to a criticism of the fallout of industrialism and capitalism in the era. Carpenter’s autobiographical notebooks emphasized how Carpenter brought into daily practice his poetic vision as he went beyond simply writing his text but devoting his life to radical Socialism, to making his own shoes, to the practice and celebration of male-male Uranian love, and to engagement with the radical labour groups that existed in Sheffield, Carpenter’s chosen home. Carpenter, like Davidson and Naidu, was not interested in only writing about the terrors of cultural destruction and the nightmares of civilizational decadence but of actively living out these new models of post-decadent being.

The close ties of queer literature and art during the period with aesthetic visions of decadent thought emphasized the complex mutations that decadent aesthetics helped generate in terms of constructing new sources of the self and unique constructions of decadent aesthetic being. Decadent aesthetics helped produce counter-discourses and deep sources of selfhood and self-making that altered decadent sexualities and counter-decadent theories of gender by synthesizing homosexual and socialist egalitarian strains of *fin-de-siècle* discourse into a radically democratic vision of *fin-de-siècle* poetics, sexuality and ideology. Carpenter’s flight

from urban cosmopolitanism into rural socialism, Hindu mysticism, vegetarianism, communalism and homo-erotic social utopianism powerfully inscribed the malaise of *fin-de-siècle* thought concerning the end of civilization and the profound decadent dilemma concerning the great self and the mass. Carpenter mutated elitist decadent discourse concerning the aesthetic cosmopolitan soul to focus upon the queer, communal, and egalitarian vision of the self as belonging to a universal spirit of post-secular human divinity. Carpenter's espousal of a homosexual democratic decadence promoted a sexually liberated and racially de-natured aesthetic *programme* that illustrates the complex ties of decadent fear to decadent hope in the era.

Built upon a distinctly Whitmanian vision of the poetic self, Carpenter's long poem *Towards Democracy* illustrates the explicit ties of *fin-de-siècle* cultural conflict, intra-cultural poetic traditions, and the unique attempts of poets during the period to synthesize biographical and ideological experience into distinct works of decadent cultural creation. Just as Davidson would come to incorporate a Nietzschean vision of the self as prophet and the decadent will as the means to Empire so Carpenter incorporated a Whitmanian vision of the self as poet and democratic soul who is intimately linked to all other selves in the world through a shared sense of spiritual being, of erotic filiation, and of post-national labour. Carpenter's ties to Whitman and similarities to Nietzsche are evident in the style and subject matter of this work. Carpenter used the template of brotherly love and the long poetic line that Whitman established in *Leaves of Grass* to construct *Towards Democracy*. Carpenter subtly altered Whitman's vision by de-emphasizing the imperial and assimilative Americanization of global identity that Whitman employed in *Leaves of Grass*. Whitman's proclamation that "I project the history of the future" (*Leaves of Grass* 11) became, in Carpenter, the need to call to the world and to project not the

history of the future but a possibility and in the end, a hope of “the soul’s slow disentanglement” (*Towards Democracy* 64) where the new democratic world of gradations and affinities might await humanity. Carpenter’s *Towards Democracy* is a large, rambling, and complicated spiritual exercise that documented Carpenter’s own coming of age to political revolution and his attempts to envision the *fin-de-siècle* self as an English, Global, and ultimately cosmic self—a self that is in a complex relationship to the powers of modern capitalism, industrialism, and *fin-de-siècle* sexual and gender politics. Carpenter’s work in *Towards Democracy* was part of larger cultural movement during the period—the movement toward a universal, cosmic declaration of democratic selfhood, and of selfhood as a shared state of being imagined as the antidote to the unnatural perversions of *fin-de-siècle* society that was built on radical iniquities of wealth, power, and freedom. Carpenter’s work critiqued the excesses of a decadent civilization and beckoned the reader toward new, progressive, post-decadent visions of the self, labour, and of the modern subject as a being enmeshed in a rich variety of post-global local cultures.

Carpenter as a key model of democratic decadence multiplied the number of possible identities available to the *fin-de-siècle* subject—mutating in essence what it meant to be decadent. Whether as aesthete, as hedonist, as decadent, as anti-decadent, as social-reformer, or as heroic martyr or intellectual messiah, the *fin-de-siècle* poet used *fin-de-siècle* poetry and decadent cultural discourse for a variety of active aesthetic projects.

The third chapter works through John Davidson’s series of long poems, *The Testaments*, published in the early years of the twentieth century. Davidson’s *Testaments* present a radical manifestation of what I call muscular decadence Davidson framed his final Testament, *The Testament of John Davidson*, as an attempt to remake the world through the new Man, “the very form and substance of the universe”:

Thus I break the world out of the imaginary chrysalis or cocoon of Other World in which it has slumbered so long; and man beholds himself, not now as that fabulous monster, half-god, half-devil, of the Christian era, but as Man, the very form and substance of the universe, the material of eternity, eternity itself, become conscious and self-conscious. This is the greatest thing told since the world began. (32)

In the *Testaments*, Davidson negotiated a heroic decadent poetics and the vigorous powers that decadent discourse in the *fin-de-siècle* disclosed to modernity. Muscular decadence synthesized late nineteenth century ideas of “the muscular” in terms of the rise of Muscular Christianity as associated to the writings of Charles Kingsley and the ideological vision of Christianity associated with the un-feminine and the physically and spiritually healthy young man and the physically and spiritually healthy England nation. As well the term “muscular” was used by Nordau in 1896 in a speech to the Second Zionist Conference in reference to the idea of an Israel nation and the development of a new vision of Jewish manhood. Davidson’s construction of the decadent will and of a decadent prophetic-savior figure embodied the decadent mythic imagination as it struggles to make sense of poetry, self, and the history of civilization in radically *fin-de-siècle* and romantic works. Davidson’s interest in giving divine powers to the autobiographical decadent self crystallized the conflicts of the era between the artist as aesthetic diviner and the artist as cultural hero.

In a key moment in Davidson’s *The Testament of John Davidson*, Davidson’s mythic and prophetic poet-hero rapes the great goddess of classical romantic love, vanquishing weakness, feminine imagination, effeminacy and the fear of death. By overcoming the weakness of false modes of life Davidson proclaims himself the new savior of both the English people and of English verse. In this fantastic episode of Davidson’s last major work before his suicide, Davidson gestured toward a uniquely virulent manifestation of decadent discourse in the period,

where he heralds the birth of the new race from his own suicidal death and the rape and death of the goddess:

No; but with man with me, you shall unite !
The gods have paired with women and begot
Beloved sons and daughters : dynasties
Divine ; but unenduring, and beyond
Restoral banished. Let a greater race
Than any hitherto adored in Heaven,
In Asgard or Olympus... (125)

By using a directly referential mode of poetics that emerged from Wagner and by equating his self-overcoming with the overcoming that the English Nation must submit to if its imperial future is to be consummated, Davidson's poem acted in direct relation to the powers of cultural and civilizational degeneration that decadent discourse in the *fin-de-siècle* had created. In this scene Davidson as a representative of muscular decadence modeled civilizational and cultural discursive registers via the powers of the decadent will in order to master destiny.

Through a close reading of Davidson's *The Testament of John Davidson* (1908) we are able to glimpse a potent strain of counter-decadent self-making and cultural reformation that had developed through the thought of Schopenhauer, Stirner and Friedrich Nietzsche as Davidson drew on this largely Germanic tradition of philosophical criticism concerning the will and the construction of a uniquely self-possessed vision of the self in relation to ideological and aesthetic cultural content to craft a distinctly "English" vision of great man: "The Englishman is the Overman; and the history of England is the history of his evolution" (18). Davidson reformed the decadent self and his overwrought and eccentric text *The Testament of John Davidson* transfigured the historically over-determined biographical John Davidson's failed authority into the mythic decadent savior and salvific hero—the great poet as a post-historical redeemer figure. Davidson's final Testament acts as the denouement of the series of Testaments Davidson began

publishing in 1901 with *A Testament of a Man Forbid* and acts as a monumental incarnation of Davidson's thought concerning English blank verse and the mythomaniacal vision of poetic power that Davidson represents in a Wagnerian mythic rhapsody concerning the self, and in this case, the unique powers that the *fin-de-siècle* poetry book bestows upon John Davidson as seer, prophet, and modern messiah, allowed Davidson to alter and mutate the nature of *fin-de-siècle* decadence itself. Davidson's final *Testament* was representative of a larger trend in cultural poetics during the period that included works by William Ernest Henley where the decadent poet responded to decadent aesthetic discourse during the *fin-de-siècle* by mutating and transforming key terms of decadent or degenerate art in order to stage a reformation and reconstruction of decadent rhetoric and the decadent will.

My study of Davidson builds on Sloan's *John Davidson, First of the Moderns* (1995), Peterson's *John Davidson* (1972) and Townsend's *John Davidson: Poet of Armageddon* (1961). These studies are largely biographical interpretations of Davidson's work treating Davidson's life and thought and how this infused his books. My own work stresses the importance of Davidson's thought as a unique representative of the decadent will and its significance for *fin-de-siècle* conceptions of cultural poetics. It also focuses on Davidson's work in relation to a material and symbolic economy of poetry and of unique English and European historical models of the poet as a revered being. Patrick Bridgwater's study *Nietzsche in Anglosaxony* (1972) augments Sloan, Peterson and Townsend's work, particularly in clarifying the significance of Nietzsche's thought in England and America during the period and clarifying the significance of Nietzschean thought for our understanding of late nineteenth century European conceptions of the self's relation to history and how the *fin-de-siècle* desire to experiment with representations of the self that radically re-shape cultural processes. Davidson's development of muscular decadence

through his reading of Nietzsche articulates a particular interest in terms concerning strength, the will, the nature of cultural identity in the period and how *fin-de-siècle* poetics staged, in dramatic mythological verse, the decadent *fin-de-siècle* self and the practice of un-decadent self-making.

Davidson's work in its direct ties to Nietzsche, to Nietzsche's key nineteenth-century long poem *Thus Spake Zarathustra* and to the conception of the Nietzschean *Übermensch*, elicits a fascinating play in late-modern British and European thought concerning the modernity of the self. These links to philosophical pessimism and nihilism contributed to modes of decadent self-making and *fin-de-siècle* cultural forms linked to imperial nationalistic histories of verse, and how *fin-de-siècle* poetry helped shape the staging and location of local, national, and imperial culture during the period.

The fourth chapter treats the poetry, poetics and aesthetic ideology of Sarojini Naidu. This chapter engages with three collections of lyric poetry by Naidu: *The Golden Threshold* (1905), *The Bird of Time* (1912) and *The Broken Wing* (1917). Each of these collections was published in England and used English and Indian poetic modes. The collections emphasize the poly-cultural ties of late-nineteenth century aestheticism and decadence. In these three works Naidu created a radically transgressive and democratically progressive reformation of decadent aesthetics by uniting British decadent literary styles and poetic forms with Indian poetic styles, mythological constructs, and ritualized traditions to articulate her ideas. Naidu's transformative poetry emerged directly from 1890s' British poetic styles and from the decadent and aesthetic movements that she inherited. Naidu's poetic mission emerged from the decadent and symbolist poetics of the period to announce the possibility of a new vision of the self in history that would end colonial domination, the subjugation of women and the obeisance of India. In an early essay for an Indian Women's magazine Naidu expressed the state of decadent languor and its relation

to the powerful currents of history: “I am merely a spectator from the watch-tower of dreams; and I watched the swift and troubled, sometimes chequered but nevertheless indomitable, time-spirit marching on in a pageant of triumph to the desired goal” (*Speeches and Letters* xiv). As Naidu became invested in political work in India with Mahatma Gandhi so her poetry became transformed by an activist vision of generic forms—prose coming to replace poetry in terms of its relevance for modern society and the public and moral duties of modernity. Naidu’s un-decadent poetry became intimately tied to the “time-spirit” of historical being resulting in poems that synthesized political, historical and religious content and “Lakshmi the Lotus-Born”, “The Imam Bara”, self-suicide in search of godhead, Indian Woman of today, the delights of Delhi or Hyderabad, and the Rose and the Lotus would all become key themes of her collections.

Naidu’s polytheistic, polymorphous, and poly-cultural aesthetic decadence was reflective of the complex desires of the decadent imagination in the *fin-de-siècle*. Naidu’s poetry like W.B. Yeats’s conjuration of an ageless Celtic civilization and Lionel Johnson’s imagining of a polytheistic pagan decadence, attempted to mold the past and the future vis-à-vis decadent aesthetic practice into an evocative imaginary universe that can harmonize dissimilar ancestral traditions into a unified vision of aesthetic totality. Santani Das writes of Naidu’s hybridity and the clashing aesthetic and ideological elements of her war poem: “The Gift of India” in terms of violent internal oppositions: “What is remarkable is the way that the nationalist/feminist image of the ‘abject’ Indian mother – a recurring trope in Naidu’s poetry – is here exploited to legitimize and glorify India’s ‘gift’ to the empire: a standard trope of anti-colonial resistance flows into and fuses with imperial support for the war with breathtaking fluency” (“India, Empire, and First World War Writing” 303). Naidu’s complex poetics ultimately combined French, Indian and British poetic traditions to build a poly-decadent synthetic universe that

melded together aestheticism and nationalism, decadence and un-decadence, mysticism and political activism. Naidu's poetry functioned in such a way as to attempt to fuse together decadent, aestheticist and anti- decadent activist aesthetic ideologies of the period. Naidu's dialectical synthesis of aesthetic ideology merges together the either/or position that Dowling articulated regarding decadent writing of the period: "the conflict between two opposing models of language, namely, written language and speech, was to force many fin de siècle writers to choose between the self-consciously elaborate mode of literary Decadence on the one hand, and the aggressively unencumbered mode of the 1890s ballad revival on the other." (16) Naidu's poetic development was largely informed by the either/or contradiction between prosaic political activism and poetic aesthetic devotion, an either/or dialectic that she came to ultimately embody as the female spokesperson of the free India movement.

In the poem "An Indian Love Song" from *The Bird of Time* Naidu uses traditional Tantric visions of the self in relation to iconic visions of Hindu deity, but placed these devotional poems within a symbolist and late-Victorian poetic register. Here Naidu emphasizes the similarities between traditional Indian poetics and Hindu ideas of aesthetics with decadent aestheticism. By harmonizing Indian and British theories of aesthetic experience Naidu's work emphasizes the potent power of poly-decadence as a movement in the *fin-de-siècle* —where poly-decadence was a movement that twined together occident and orient into a uniquely decadent vision of shared culture and shared aesthetic engagement.

Naidu controversially used decadent, aestheticized verse forms and traditional Indian theories of poetics to stage a polyvalent drama of imperial masters and colonial oppression, of spiritual sacrifice and of cultural transgression. Naidu's poly-decadence in this case is rooted in an extreme transgression of orthodox decadence, that emphasizes her varied poetic personae as

functioning within a globalized *fin-de-siècle*, early-Modernist moment that bears deep resonances with the homeless, atavistic, postmodern, post-colonial figure that Bhabha conceptualizes as representative of the theoretically “crucial” need to complicate how we understand modern subjectivity in its imperial totality:

What is theoretically innovative, and politically crucial, is the need to think beyond narratives of originary and initial subjectivities and to focus on those moments or processes that are produced in the articulation of cultural differences. These ‘in—between’ spaces provide the terrain for elaborating strategies of selfhood—singular or communal—that initiate new signs of identity, and innovative sites of collaboration, and contestation, in the act of defining the idea of society itself. (*The Location of Culture* 2)

Naidu used the author reader contract and manipulates generic mutations within the modern moment to alter and transform modern womanhood, aesthetics and ethics, and to imbricate the spiritual and the political into a new vision of post-decadent selfhood.

Sarojini Naidu’s poetry existed at the borderland of multiple literary traditions—a borderland that presents the possibility of allowing the construction of a unique instantiation of the decadent will and of a unique reformation of modern aesthetic theory. Naidu’s contribution to decadent discourse in the period globalized and radically altered the potential source materials of decadent discourse and decadent aesthetic ideology. Naidu’s polyvalent decadence not only integrated Eastern and Western stylistic modes but it integrated a number of key modes of personal experience that were rarely treated in orthodox decadent literature. By treating themes such as motherhood, community, and the possibility of creating a monumental post-romantic, salvific feminine figure of romantic power, Naidu molded the nature of how we understand the *fin-de-siècle* and how *fin-de-siècle* theories of gender and poetics interacted with decadent discourse.

Naidu, Davidson and Carpenter’s work presents to us the complex problem of how poetry affects culture and how culture affects poetry. Each author studied presents a unique vision of

culture and modernity—visions of decadent aesthetic being and of cultural history that are significant actors in the making of modern history. By working through a reformatory vision of *fin-de-siècle* decadence this study re-models the nature of what decadence *was* and how decadent aesthetic practice made and remade particular models of cultural decadence and cultural degeneration as part of a globalized movement concerning the nature of modern history. In order to do this work my study engages with an ideological and aesthetic reading of the primary texts, a study of relevant key texts that informed the making of each text, analysis of biographical and cultural documents including biographies, letters, and cultural histories of the period concerning the poets and their societal experiences, and the construction of a methodological apparatus with which to accomplish this work.

The *fin-de-siècle* provides a complex template of rich ideological contents with which to work with. When *fin-de-siècle* poetry is examined in its native element, as a genre produced by both authorial intention and by complex historical and cultural forces, it allows for a unique reading of Victorian and Modernist literatures and a unique reading of how decadent aesthetic discourse shaped and continues to shape modernity. Each of the individual studies contained within this examination helps us better articulate a complex vision of decadence and cultural aesthetics during the period and how decadent aesthetics modelled a variety of cultural powers that radically reshaped pivotal visions of sex, selfhood, power and culture. This study attempts to understand and analyze how the *fin-de-siècle* poetry of Sarojini Naidu, John Davidson and Edward Carpenter fashioned mythic visions of a deeply historicized *fin-de-siècle* self that both built and was built by the complex cultural matrix of *fin-de-siècle* thought. It is my belief that this line of research helps uncover the obscured poetics of the late-Victorian period—that Sarojini Naidu, Edward Carpenter and John Davidson each used the rich tapestry of *fin-de-siècle*

aesthetic modes and ideological structures in order to interact with multiple global historical cultures to craft unique, strange and radically transgressive and transformative visions of historical being.

1

Chapter One

Discourse Analytics, Decadent Aesthetics and *Fin-de-Siècle* Poetry

I. *Précis*: To Structure a Theory of Discourse, Decadent Aesthetics and Decadent Poetry

In order to proceed with a cumulative study of un-decadence in the *fin-de-siècle* it is necessary to begin to develop an initial theory of decadent aesthetics and decadent poetry in the period. The following chapter will attempt to answer several key questions including: what are some of the key types of decadent poetry in the period and how do they function both as individual types and as part of a larger system? how does decadent discourse function? how can we define decadent discourse, classify it and organize it into an anatomy of discursive forms operating in the late-nineteenth-century? how do these discursive forms relate to pre- and post-decadent discursive temporalities? what are the specific discursive and aesthetic powers that this study uses as key terms to negotiate its theoretical project? and from what critical and theoretical traditions may we fruitfully draw from in order to develop a discursive theory of poetry analysis and a developmental theory of ideological and aesthetic networks in relation to decadent poetics in the period?

In this chapter I attempt to organize a generalized theoretical and classificatory model of *fin-de-siècle* poetry, *fin-de-siècle* decadent discourse and decadent aesthetics in order to answer these questions and to provide a useful method of inquiry through which the analysis of un-decadence can take place. To do this work this chapter will stage a theoretical introduction to the key terms and domains of the study itself. The chapter is divided into three sections: aesthetic-discourse analytics: poetry, aesthetics and the production of aesthetic ideology; an aesthetic economy of decadent discourse, and a classificatory typology of *fin-de-siècle* decadent

discourse. This chapter will provide us with a theoretical line of analysis and a general thematic background to facilitate the reading of the works of Davidson, Carpenter and Naidu in the succeeding chapters of the study. In this chapter a number of *fin-de-siècle* poems by authors of the period will be discussed to situate the study as a whole in a short primer as to some of the operating modes and poetry-systems that the decadent poem participated in. The full text of these poems may be found in the endnotes when not directly quoted within this chapter in order to allow the reader to engage in the full aesthetic experience that this chapter repeatedly returns to involving the reading, re-reading, and the necessity of thinking through the complex relations between reader and writer within the matrix of decadent discursive theory and the wars of aesthetic representation of the *fin-de-siècle*.^v

This chapter's analysis of decadent poetics leads to a formulation of the key modes of decadent aesthetics during the period based on an analysis of poetic discourse and how poetics are a reflector and shaper of the *fin-de-siècle* condition. By organizing and naming the key decadent aesthetic fields that the authors engaged with this chapter aims to trace the dialectical interplay between poetry and decadent theory during the period and to broaden and complicate how we understand decadence, discourse and aesthetics, as well as the role of art-objects and theoretical texts in the production of discourse, aesthetic experience and culture.

II. Aesthetic-Discourse Analytics: Poetry, Aesthetics and the Production of Aesthetic Ideology

In order to attempt to analyse *fin-de-siècle* poetry and individual *fin-de-siècle* poems it is necessary to organize and attempt to disentangle political, social and cultural analytic frameworks and then to re-mould them into an organic and synthetic operational method or line of theoretical mediation that may be useful for the exploration, analysis and classification of

poetic, literary, artistic and theoretic cultural objects as existent in history and as operating within a distinct textual interchange of historical and subjective actors. For the sake of this study this analysis is limited to poetry and individual poetic works in the British *fin-de-siècle* but aspects of this theoretical line of aesthetic-discourse-analysis may be applied in art, literature and theory in a broad range of aesthetico-discursive habitats.

Discourse analysis and the analysis of structural relations of power dynamics provides the study of decadence, decadent aesthetics and the *fin-de-siècle* decadent poem with a matrix of interpellation in which the art work being studied may present to the analyst its necessary relation to the dominant and underlying ideological contents that inform the creative production, critical reception and unconscious contents of the historically present work. By re-organizing a Bakhtinian analysis of language and discourse in the modern novel through an Althusserian matrix of ideological interpellation the time-space continuum of the *fin-de-siècle* poem may be understood as dialogical process of aesthetic interpretation as the *fin-de-siècle* reader partakes of the aesthetic object in the fullness of its interpretive network.

Michel Foucault's work on structural power relations as well help annotate my reading of *fin-de-siècle* poetry by emphasizing the means by which generic and discursive power structures convert their repressed or unconscious energy into the phenomenal, temporal, and historically situated cultural artefact. The attention to long form thetic-historical powers and their discursive agendas when deconstructed from any singular hegemonic power structure enables the analyst of the poem to organize and elaborate the multiplicity of discursive regimes that produce and manage content and meaning in the *fin-de-siècle*. Foucault's analysis highlights the significance of "counter-discourses" and how these counter-discourses must be understood and heard to construct an "archaeology" of dominant epistemic orders such as that of modern science and

modern scientific method, Enlightenment Humanism, revolutionary democracy or orthodox decadence: “As Foucault explains, prisoners ‘possessed an individual theory of prisons, the penal system, and justice’ that served as a necessary corrective to academic and official accounts. ‘It is this form of discourse which ultimately matters, a discourse against power, the counter-discourse of prisoners and those we call delinquents—and not a theory about delinquency’” (*Foucault’s Philosophy of Art* 88). For this study the counter-discourses of late-Victorian un-decadence exist as potent counter-histories and potent shapers of culture that must be understood if the dominant models of Victorian late-Victorian and Modernist culture are to be adequately recognized. Each of the counter-poetries of Carpenter, Davidson and Naidu exhibit this counter-discursive model and each participates in the production of new, strange discursive theories of knowledge and theories of historical structure via their development of the reader/author relation.

Mikael Bakhtin outlines the significance of the reader/author relation for the analysis of signification and its ideological conditioning thus:

All rhetorical forms, monologic in their compositional structure, are oriented toward the listener and his answer. This orientation toward the listener is usually considered the basic constitutive feature of rhetorical discourse. It is highly significant for rhetoric that this relationship toward the concrete listener, taking him into account, is a relationship that enters into the very internal construction, of rhetorical discourse. This orientation toward an answer is open, blatant and concrete. (*The Dialogic Imagination* 281)

The exchange of aesthetic representation may be understood as an economy of aesthetic exchange constructing meaning via the exchange unit of the word, or in the case of this study, the poem or singular aesthetic object. Via Bakhtin we may understand the decadent poem or decadent aesthetic object as being discursively modelled via aesthetic and ideological discourse in its “orientation”—where the rhetorical powers of discourse help “orientate” both the abstract and concrete aspects of the reading, publishing and writing *dialogy*. Within this *dialogy* decadent ideology both informed the writing and the reading of the texts. Decadence as a dominant engine

of discursive production may be understood as both the outcome of ideological dialogism and the informing discursive regime that oriented meaning production during the period. The formation of the orthodox decadent episteme was formulated in part by the result of conservative or traditional cultural forces facing the fears of cultural erasure, the malaise of modernity and the dangers of transgressive, anarchic and occult cultural energies. Decadent poetry may be understood via this line of theory as the product of this site of thematic generation. In this sense the decadent poem is organized by ideological actors that conform life to the process of discursive representation.

We may understand ideological discourse in terms of its “unconscious powers” where for Louis Althusser “ideology is primarily the kind of discourse that we do not consciously appropriate for ourselves, rationally judging it to be true. It is not the kind of discourse to which, having critically reflected upon it, a person makes a conscious act of assent. Rather, ideology comprises the stream of discourses, images and ideas that are all around us all the time, into which we are born, in which we grow up, and in which we live” (*Louis Althusser 77*). In this sense of discursive habitation and the discursive production of ideological and aesthetic content, the art-object or decadent poem exists as a contested site of meaning-making where meaning-making is produced by author, reader and by the totalizing *fin-de-siècle* discursive systems that produced an almost unconscious collective ecosystem of both form and content. In this sense we may approach the *fin-de-siècle* poem as a dialogical rhetorical object where the dialectical nature of discourse forms and un-forms the nature of the decadent or un-decadent poem.

In the case of decadent aesthetics, decadent aesthetics presents itself to us as both an art-movement in the nineteenth century and a powerful modality that governed the presentation of individual subjectivities to representation and the orientation of individual art-works or poems to

the representing agencies and mediated organs of modern culture, society and civilization. Here discourse came to be produced in mass-produced new modes of generic representation that created complex mutations to generic traditions and the mediation of the nineteenth century collective. As modern civilization and the nature of its governing nature became one of the foundational aspects of the growth of decadent aesthetics and cultural argumentation around theories of cultural decadence and civilizational degeneration, the dominating powers of discursive power relations informed, objectified and mutated what and how poetry was when placed within the governing discursive structures of the period. Discourse analysis is implicit in an analysis of the *fin-de-siècle* poem's relation to generic structures and to the particular manifestation of truth-claims in the development of genre in the nineteenth century.

As this generic narrativity interpellated and informed the time-space continuum of decadent aesthetics, the genre-specific *fin-de-siècle* poem was sacrificed to this cult of meaning-making and genre definition in relation to the rising powers of prose and the truth-value syntax of mass-market prose networks of structural power relations—including mass-publishing, mass-reading habits, mass-market scientific dogmatism, mass-market journalism and the value-matrix of informational reason and social scientific truth-value matrices. Each of these dominant discursive regimes participated in the construction and nature of decadent aesthetic ideology and the particular reading and writing “situationism” of *fin-de-siècle* poetry in its ostracised excess, precocious vulnerability and over-determined idea-structures. In this example *fin-de-siècle* discourse may be likened to a Bakhtinian expressive figure such as that of the overpopulated modern city (i.e. London or Paris), particularly in its irrepressible representation of the nineteenth-century (and post-decadent) imagination.

This “overpopulated modern city” naturally began to locate the proper home and placement of the *fin-de-siècle* poem in the “garret”, with the madman, the drug addict, the inebriated occultist and the sex-fiend. The raw dynamism of discursive relations and power structures in nineteenth-century thought and the nineteenth-century imagination overpowered the nature and status of the possibility of the poem’s individual identity, and via this persecution the decadent poet (and then the modernist poet) was lead to exaggerated fields of ideological and historical over-generation, as Nietzsche, Whitman, Baudelaire and then Carpenter, Davidson, and Naidu each took it upon themselves to redress the excess of generic domination and to supplant the rise of discursive power relations and the interpellation of the self and the art-object that this process consecrated.

Discourse analysis and the analysis of structural relations of power dynamics provides the necessary framework and modelling of discursive being in order to articulate the varieties of decadent aesthetic experience used by aesthetic practioners during this period and most importantly, as a means to organize and delineate the discursive registers that defined and anatomized decadent discourse. Such key models of decadent discourse as civilizational decadence and high decadence, as well as the growth of such key models of decadent aesthetics as muscular decadence, democratic decadence, poly-decadence and counter-decadence informed the making and structure of the individual poems and the individual artistic oeuvres of art workers in the period. Registers of decadent discourse were embedded in the structures of power relations and nineteenth century discourse analytics as an informing time-space habitat and informing interpellative network of historical desire.

Jerome McGann’s construction of reading and “the textual condition” in the making of meaning-generation is useful for this reading of the individual aesthetic object, particularly in

order to understand the structural relations that informed both the author's desire and the reader's desire, two desiring subjects that are deeply entwined in the decadent poem's attempts to generate meta-historical imaginary orders, orders that are impossible to adequately understand without the necessary interrelation of the reader/author dualism. McGann in attempting to decode the hidden codes of Pre-Raphaelite poetry emphasized the potent connections between readers and texts that structure what McGann termed "the textual condition"—a "textual condition" that possesses levels of presence (and absence) that are foundational in the construction of aesthetic and ideological forms. This "textual condition" is important for the line of analysis proposed in this study as it emphasizes the intimate relations of reader and writer engaged in the textual relationship that was the reading/writing of poetry during the late-Victorian period.

The aesthetic economy of textual experiences and of meaning construction that existed within this "textual condition" allows for a deep level of analysis concerning the aesthetic, ideological and psychological import of poetry reading and poetry writing in the period. Here we may attend to the intimate relations between poetry and culture where this textual condition generated the "scripting of multiple presences" (*The Textual Condition* 1), presences that McGann emphasizes as a key aspect of the textual condition in relation to Pre-Raphaelite poetry.

McGann writes:

Literary works are distinct from other linguistic forms in their pursuit of extreme concrete particularity. That special feature of "literature" has two consequences we all recognize. First, literary works tend toward textual and bibliographical dispersion (signaled at the earliest phases of the work by authorial changes of direction and revision, which may continue for protracted periods). Second, they are committed to work via the dimension of *aesthesis* (i.e., via the materiality of experience that Blake called "The doors of perception and that Morris named "resistance" In each case, literary works tend to multiply themselves through their means and modes of production. (*The Textual Condition* 82-3)

Decadent poetry and the reading and writing of said poetry is deeply tied to this “textual condition” and importantly to “aesthesis” as the materiality of aesthetic experience in the period. The textual conditions and the experience of aesthesis push subjectivitis to the point where self and culture interpenetrate each other within the late-Victorian economy of aesthetic experience, in particular in the reading and writing of poetry. Decadent poetry, when analyzed within its cultural and ideological milieu, manifested particularly strong ties to the construction of aesthetic forms within the period. Decadent theories of culture routinely organized their definitions of aesthetic form based on the significance of reading as aesthetic experience and in relation to ideas of aesthetic experience that originated in Victorian perfectionism and in German Idealism. Gayatri Spivak’s delineation of Hegel’s conception of knowledge and aesthetic experience is particularly relevant for this discussion as it can inform our understanding of both how ideas of aesthetic experience were constructed during this period when Hegel was first heavily read and translated in England and as a potent architecture of how we can organize and think through the reader/author binary in relation to aesthetic experience, particularly in relation to ideas of perfectionism and the persistent desire to attain the “true meaning” of aesthetic experience.

Spivak writes:

According to Hegel, there are three moments in a work of art. The form or Gestalt, the content (Gehalt or Inhalt), and the meaning or Bedeutung. The true meaning, not only of a work of art, but also of any phenomenal appearance, is the situation of the spirit on the graph of its course toward "self-knowledge." (This, too is basically a graphic intuition: It is not that the spirit, in a subjective model, "knows itself" progressively. It is rather a graph leading toward the exact coincidence of the spirit and its knowing, when superimposed)" (*An Aesthetic Education in the Era of Globalization* 40).

Spivak’s elucidation of Hegel points to the significance of reading the art-object as a multi-tiered process of aesthetic elaboration just as Pierre Macherey and Barthes help orientate different aspects of the textual reader/writer duality.

We may understand aspects of aesthetic experience and the textual condition as being naturally allied to Macherey's analysis of the book and the book's place within the author/reader experience. This analysis is radically informative for any reading of the *fin-de-siècle* poem's "otherness", its existence as a Foucauldian "counter-discursive" object or its existence as an unstable and complex aesthetic object. Through Macherey we may endeavour to read the *fin-de-siècle* poem and to touch on the "silence" that underlies the poem in its material or textual forms. Here we can understand the "decadence" of the *fin-de-siècle* poem as being a series of discursive irruptions, engraving meaning production upon the late-Victorian aesthetic experience of poetic being. Following Macherey we can question the *origins* of the poem (if we translate Macherey's theory of "the book" to that of "the poem"), as what "endows it with form" and the "absence" that anticipates "knowledge of the book":

The speech of the book comes from a certain silence, a matter which it endows with form, a ground on which it traces a figure. Thus the book is not self-sufficient; it is necessarily accompanied by a certain absence, without which it would not exist. A knowledge of the book must include a consideration of this absence.

(*A Theory of Literary Production* 85)

To ascertain the poem, art object or book is to reach toward a "knowledge of the aesthetic object", the existence of the real art-object here is called into question. Macherey continues by interrogating this silence, grasping at a way to signify the incoherence of that which underlies language and that precedes the birth of the identifiable art-object as a possible object of trade or study—to use words to countenance meaning: "Can we say that this silence is hidden? What is it? A condition of existence—point of departure, methodical beginning—essential foundation—ideal culmination—absolute origin which lends meaning to the endeavour? Means or form of connection?" (85). The silence that precedes the poem, book or art-object is in a sense that which separates the poem as a textual object. The layers of discursive desire that narrate and insist on

cultural meaning may in this sense be seen as the dimension that narrates or attempts to narrate the original silence of the poem or art object and the silence that creates meaning from the reader/author interplay as the aesthetic spatial dimension that asserts form, colour and meaning upon chronology. Here the poem (or the articulated singular aesthetic object of discourse analysis) becomes autonomous from the array of texts about it, not separate, nor dignified by a rarefied singularity of essential being, but predicated on its existence as an object made real by the absence underlying its textual existence or the intricate historical mechanisms at work in its material embodiment as an object comprised of words, ink, paper, or data. Here the art-object becomes an archive unto itself—an archive that is made whole by the existence of the shadow-works, that underlie and makes real the presence of the *writerly*. In this sense the writerly poem that demands re-reading. Here the writerly may be understood as the act of articulating this silence and the readerly as the desire of the cultural subject to assert discursive control over the spatial dimension.

Where Macherey conceives the art object as existing in a rarefied singularity of essential being that at once participates in networks of mass-market publishing and the interpellative matrices of discursive information and that has access to an underlying non-existent vanishing point that is part of this “silence” that is the ground of aesthetic immersion and the origin point of communication between the reader and author. By bridging the text’s authority to speak and its dialogical representation within the time-space of aesthetic-discursive production, this mode of textual analysis helps to resist the powers of abject alienation that absolute power matrices (that discursive forms tend toward) and their analysis tend to construct in the over-determination of the complex and ever-re-emerging historical present.

The “intertextuality” of late-Victorian poetry is a key aspect in how it was constructed as a generic object and how it came to be “decadent”. Roland Barthes writing on intertextuality speaks pointedly to the powers of “influence” and how the text may be “possessed” by the spirit of discursive power:

The intertextuality in which any text is apprehended, since it is itself the intertext of another text, cannot be identified with some *origin* of the text: to seek out the "sources," the "influences" of a work is to satisfy the myth of filiation; the quotations a text is made of are anonymous, irrecoverable, and yet *already read*: they are quotations without quotation marks. The work disturbs no monistic philosophy (there are antagonistic ones, as we know); for such a philosophy, plurality is Evil. Hence, confronting the work, the Text might indeed take for its motto the words of the man possessed by devils: "My name is legion, for we are many" (Mark 5:9). The plural or demonic texture which sets the Text in opposition to the work may involve profound modifications of reading,
(“The Work as Text” 60-61)

The plurality of the *fin-de-siècle* text is particularly “demonic”—in the sense Barthes gives to the reading and writing of the textual object in “The Work as Text”—in the always vanishing horizon of cultural textual objects. This ever-retreating object is particularly manifest under the unique powers of *fin-de-siècle* discourse where there are several key “operators” at work in the construction of texts, the reading of texts, the managing of works and texts, and the killing and then resurrecting of textual forms. The pervasive nature of the decadent discursive habitat with its intractable aesthetico-ideologic machines generating meaning production and informing identity allowed for the construction of nearly limitless textual plurality. The mass-nature of late-nineteenth-century industrial manufacture had gifted to modernity the propensity of reproduction, of copies of copies, and the means to mediate selfhood via nearly infinite reproductions of textual forms and print matter. The copy, copying processes, mechanisms of mechanical reproduction and the interrelations between textual material reached out to imbricate

material, ideological and spiritual discursive habitats—taking Barthes’ theory of the text/work duality to new, strange and inter-meshed worlds of meaning production.

Within this operational condition we may delineate two key discursive operators that attempted to form, inform and construct meaning in the *fin-de-siècle: orthodox decadence* and *decadent registers*, each of which played a significant role in the construction of decadence and for the understanding of decadence as a discursive arrangement of textual being in the period. Where Barthes constructs a work/text binary I insert the situated object interleaved as it were, into the textual organism—the two poles of work and text not antagonistic or separate but the two faced Janus of mechanical/textual being, both the writing and the reading of the text, both the book and the spiritual textual object in its fluidity and its intrepid demonic nature.

In Barthes’ formulation, he separates the work and the text into a duality, even if said dualism is largely nullified via the circular nature of Barthes’ impressionistic Aristotelianism. For the sake of this project I do not unify the two but try to marry the material conditions of book production within a theory of author-reader relations in that I believe the shared intimacy of the author-reader relation, the author-reader contract, presents the interiority of the text and the exteriority of the work to become inter-meshed and entangled in a messy, corporeal and affective analytic process where reason, truth and discrete epistemes of rigorous or absolute meaning production are not capable of dealing with the enmeshed nature of ideologic or aesthetic experience in the fullness of its radicalized negativity and in the truly ‘demonic’ nature of literary or philosophical interpretation. Decadent poetry, in its devalued pluralism of origin, provides a rewarding point of engagement with the nature of the author-work relation. Here the author-text relation is secondary to the *fin-de-siècle* poem’s relation to its nesting within the

discursive and aesthetic situation of the *fin-de-siècle* metanarrative—a metanarrative where decadence, as the dominant discursive operator, informs and establishes meaning, playing the parental role in the production of meaning and organizing bodies, minds, texts and systems.

To further understand the work-text duality and its significance for this study we can look at how Barthes evolves the work-text duality in highly particular terms to what in the end appears to be good and bad art, or more specifically new, modern, good art under the sign of the mother and bad, conservative traditional books under the sign of the father where the filial line must somehow be evaded if the text is to participate in the liberatory emancipation of its pure textual, random, chance dominated and non-angelic nature. Later in his essay “The Work as Text” Barthes orients the process of author-text/author-work relations in greater detail:

The work is caught up in a process of filiation. What is postulated are a *determination* of the world (of the race, then of History) over the work, a *consecution* of works among themselves, and an *appropriation* of the work to its author. The author is reputed to be the father and the owner of his work; literary science thus teaches us to *respect* the manuscript and the author's declared intentions, and society postulates a legality of the author's relation to his work (this is the "author's rights," actually a recent affair, not legalized in France until the time of the Revolution). The Text, on the other hand, is read without the Father's inscription. The metaphor of the Text is here again detached from the metaphor of the work; the latter refers to the image of an *organism* which grows by vital expansion, by "development" (a significantly ambiguous word: biological and rhetorical); the metaphor of the Text is that of the *network*; if the Text expands, it is by the effect of a combinative operation, of a systematics (an image, moreover, close to the views of contemporary biology concerning the living being); no vital "respect" is therefore due to the Text: it can be *broken* (moreover, this is what the Middle Ages did with two nonetheless authoritarian texts: Scripture and Aristotle); the Text can be read without its father's guarantee; the restoration of the intertext paradoxically abolishes inheritance.

(“The Work as Text” 62)

In this paragraph the fear of inheritance and the Father’s “due” is palpable whereas the joy of the ‘broken’ the non-filial, the dis-inherited is acutely joyous, free and unmediated by the excesses of the past. The desire to re-route meaning from the past, to de-fuse ‘authoritarian texts’, to

denature the ‘natural’ from the biological is provoked in their formulation. In Barthes’ fear of paternal traditions we can notate an early arrangement of the decadent will in its need to de-associate itself from the dominant modes of cultural production, from the signature of the “Father” and from the overpowering “doxa” of parental traditions. As decadence, decadent theory and in particular, decadent poetry, became the maligned hybrid mother-father of modernism, so the anxiety of touching the maligned decadent work is evident. Here aesthetic ideology imprints itself upon the nature of the inscribed “period”, particularly when it is a “late”, “fallen” or “secondary” period, becoming the excess, the fallen angel, the demonic plurality of the abyss. The decadent poetic project is, thus, retrospectively organized into its orthodox container and the author-reader compact is over-inscribed by the dominating hieratic model. We may understand the origin(s) of decadent plurality in the grotesque interchangeability of decadent poems and the effects of failed decadent aesthetics as belonging to a metanarrative were the nature of the *fin-de-siècle* was excised and then fused together again into a singular image—a singular ‘minor literature’ face inscribed upon orthodox decadence as the origin story of the period. Decadent literature employed what I term the decadent will as a means to assert itself within this grotesque interchangeability of intertextual dominance.

The decadent will may be seen as a natural apparatus seeking the ‘silence’ beneath the ‘book’ as the decadent will strives for a means of re-arranging the totality of discursive regimes that over-determine and nullify the possibility of authentic, organic or historically significant existence. The decadent will may be understood as a key medium that poets and aesthetic workers in the *fin-de-siècle* used to mould and create aspects of decadent culture and ideas of decadence in order to pursue the possibility of counter, anti-, ambi-, poly- and post-decadent ideas of selfhood, nation, civilization or visionary totality. The decadent will presents the

possibility of re-organizing discursive registers and the demands of orthodox decadence as the poet or poem attempts to assert a sense of power upon the dominating structures that discursive registers and regimes place upon language-usage, generic conventions and the production of aesthetic ideology.

Reginia Gagnier develops a definition of decadence in relation to the decadent will thus: “Decadence was thus a pan-European and trans-Atlantic phenomenon that entailed a falling away from or a rejection that could also be a creative repudiation.” (*Individualism, Decadence and Globalization* 90). Gagnier elucidates an analysis of what I term the un-decadent will in direct relation to the Irish Literary Renaissance: “The Irish Literary Renaissance countered a materialistic and global Englishness by way of a chthonic Irish literature and theater, including models of heroic will, epic vision, classlessness, and emotion connected with the land” (111). In this description of the Irish Literary Renaissance Gagnier explicitly outlines how we can understand the variety of decadent registers at work in the *fin-de-siècle* and in particular the way that different literary movements in the period developed similar manners of attempting to transform and liberate dominant discursive regimes. In a sense the decadent will may be understood as an early outlier of existentialist striving for genuine meaning, identity and value in the face of bureaucratic and totalitarian hegemonic thought structures, or the search for meaning in the annihilatory death fugue of death-march modernity.

The act of reading the decadent poem and of re-reading that was part of the aesthetic structure inherent in the possible and potential construction of aesthetic meaning that the decadent poem demanded of its ideal lover was part of the dialectical production of knowledge that the decadent poem manifested and the organization of aesthetic forms that the decadent will

attempted to create. The poem, and in this case the decadent *fin-de-siècle* poem, was an object predicated on its construction of a singular decadent habitat of discursive meaning production—discursive meaning production that was built upon on the necessity of re-reading. In this need to re-read, to re-experience, to notate the variety of decadent codes embedded in the overwrought demonic text is the origin of its weakness and a testament to its relation to the silence that precedes—to the semiotic, or collective, imaginative and mythic unconscious of the *fin-de-siècle* itself. Here we touch on the formation of plurality of the critical and creative act, and how decadent aesthetics tended to mutate the creative and the critical into a singular organic mode of operation. Barthes sketches out a model of re-reading thus:

[r]ereading (...) multiplies [meaning] in its variety and its plurality: rereading draws the text out of its internal chronology (...) and recaptures a mythic time; it contests the claim which would have us believe that the first reading is a primary, naïve, phenomenal reading which we will only, afterwards, have to “explicate”, (...) we immediately reread the text, it is in order to obtain, as though under the effect of a drug (that of recommencement, of difference), not the real text, but a plural text: the same and the new. (*S/Z* 16)

Here we may begin to place decadent poems into categorized discrete acts. The *writerly* acts against the dominant registers of affect, stylization, narrative naturalism, and generic identification. As the *writerly* decadent poem functioned it prohibited or safeguarded its allotment of meaning and, due to its difficulty, delimited its meaning by demanding acknowledgment of the silence that preceded it. This is exactly then the *provenance* of the *writerly* book as opposed to the *readerly* novel. Fundamental to this discussion is to accept this either/or logic as the basis of our understanding if we are to be able to discriminate and understand how specific *fin-de-siècle* poems and poetry collections could produce meaning and function as receptacles and origins of the *fin-de-siècle*'s attempt to generate a recognizable image of itself. By placing these two terms as oppositional (if intermarried) modes of textual relation

the naming of “poetry” may be distinguished from “commercial prose” or, as well, “the novel”. Umberto Eco develops a similar opposition between “open” and “closed” works (*On Literature* 32-42). Where open works (such as Kafka’s novels, or Joyce’s *Ulysses*) invite the collaboration of the reader as opposed to ‘closed’ works (such as Fleming’s Bond novels) where “the text’s linear manifestation and the discursive structures remain what they are: a museum of déjà vu, a recital of overcoded literary commonplaces” (*On Literature* 39).

Following this line of inquiry we can separate the *writerly* text, as it distances itself from the textual array and arranges itself in an intimate relation with the possible or potential reader, by using the generic as a means to climb the ladder of signification. To follow this line I reference Blanchot’s construction of “narrative” and the powers of generic unification that articulate the “literary dimension” and the discursive habitat that this line of analysis is advancing in my attempt to understand how the decadent poem relates to the un-decadent poem, as Blanchot writes: “The book does not consist in an immediate narrative, but in a confrontation of this narrative with all the books of the same type, which, though they may be of dissimilar age, origin, signification, and style, in advance occupy the literary dimension in which it, too, would like to find a place” (*The Space of Literature* 391).

Within this textual habitat the individual poem asserted a fixed intensity of meaning that required of the *fin-de-siècle* reader an “excess of attention”—an excess of re-reading. Here the act of re-reading became continual renegotiations with the aesthetic object and with the codes of aesthetic representation that were distilled throughout the reading experience via discursive codes of experiential being. In this analysis the *fin-de-siècle* poem performed the decadent will as a means to organize and resolve discursive conflict and over-definition. The decadent will acted as the inter-medial lever that pushed meaning and definition in relation to the aesthetic

economy of *fin-de-siècle* decadence. To understand this aesthetic economy I have attempted to arrange it using two key operational matrices: *orthodox decadence* and *discursive registers*. In the next section of this chapter I investigate these matrices and then outline two of the central organs of discourse in the period: *civilizational decadence* and *high decadence*.

III. An Aesthetic Economy of Decadent Discourse

The plurality of texts that are at work in any given historical epoch can lead the critic to a point of vertiginous nausea, where the critical desire to understand is faced with the excess of the textual abyss. As a means of delimiting this abyss of reference In this section I outline a general sketch of *fin-de-siècle* discourse as it functioned as an aesthetic economy shaping spiritual and material production. In order to shape the plurality of texts and meanings into a coherent image of decadence's overriding import in the *fin-de-siècle* I stage a theory of reading aesthetic and ideological poetics in regards to both culture and tradition as they are informed by discursive forms. In order to pursue this work I delineate the dominant engines of discursive construction at work in the *fin-de-siècle* and outline how the operational models produced, managed and policed aesthetic production during the period.

—*Orthodox Decadence and Decadent Registers*

There are two key operational models that organize the *fin-de-siècle*'s aesthetic economy: *orthodox decadence* and *decadent registers*. Each of these key operational models help articulate and organize the larger architectonic structure of discourse, *fin-de-siècle* subjectivity and the post-decadent reading and analysis of the period. Each can be seen as functioning within the works of Carpenter, Davidson and Naidu and each provides a significant point of emergence and

clarification for understanding how Carpenter, Davidson and Naidu's works interacted with the greater habitat of aesthetic power struggles in the period. Carpenter, Davidson and Naidu's works each helped to shape and were shaped by these key operators. Each of these operational models were significant in the formation of how discursive practice functioned in prose and poetry of the period and they were particularly significant in the representation and post-decadent categorization of "decadence" as a large-scale historical meta-system. Orthodox decadence and decadent registers were prominent operational models that it is necessary to understand in order to generate a greater analytics of how decadent poetry existed within the *fin-de-siècle* and, as well, how we recognize decadent poetry's primary characteristics today.

Orthodox decadence was the tradition that came to dominate the critical heritage of twentieth-century thought concerning decadent studies. Orthodox decadence originated in early appraisals of what it meant to be "decadent" of what "decadent style" was, and the formulas and rules for the nature of what decadent art did upon the receptor of decadent artistic or literary products. Orthodox decadence emerged quickly in the years following the *fin-de-siècle* and in books such as Osbert Burdett's *The Beardsley Period: An Essay in Perspective* (1925) and Richard le Gallienne's *The Romantic '90s* (1925), among numerous other journalistic and impressionistic sketches of the period. It helped to establish a dominant and ultimately orthodox vision of what decadent art and literature were and how decadent aesthetic ideology functioned. Conjoined with the model of orthodox decadence that Nordau's *Degeneration* presented in 1895, these works were a key point of origin of this dominant critical tradition that linked ideas of decadence with ideas of perversity, weakness and stylistic excess. Symons' publication of *The Decadent Movement in Literature* in 1892 may be seen as the work of a decadent practitioner inscribing upon himself the nature of orthodox decadence as a critical and aesthetic hegemony

that can help us understand exactly how powerful the need was within the *fin-de-siècle* to narrate, define, organize, and ‘harness’ the disruptive, transgressive and complex political, emotional and psychic forces present within decadent literature and art during the period.

Orthodox decadence grew directly from ideas circulating with civilizational and high decadence although it generally did not attempt to develop a deeper stylistic portrait of the unique poetics that decadent art was establishing during the period. A key aspect of orthodox decadence was and is the tendency to inscribe a dominant and authoritative definition of “decadence” upon the aesthetic economy of the period and upon the key authors of the time. This normative modelling of decadence leads my analysis to the relative and highly complex nature of decadent discourse in the period.

Decadent registers are discursive registers that represent a host of different, alternating and interchanging and/or overlapping aesthetic or ideological variables where the constancy of decadent definition and interpretive matrices is sacrificed to the possibility of a variety of rich, contradictory, and sometimes alienating forces within a single decadent poem, a decadent novel, or the “life-work” of a single decadent subjectivity. Here we can understand that within a single decadent poem will exist both profound decadent and counter-decadent impulses. For instance the figure of the barber in Aubrey Beardsley’s “Ballad of the Barber” where the decadent dandy is at once satirized and articulated as a figure of aesthetic perfection and heroic, anti-ethical Zarathustrian decadent will. Decadent registers are types of discursive registers that may be understood as the cultural and ideological organisms that construct, imagine and haunt the representation of the art-work within each stage of its emergence into presence from absence. Each of these slices of the isolated artificiality that is the totality of the aesthetic art work is participated in by the reader/viewer, where the totality functions as an object of aesthetic

construction and a site of aesthetic experience—multiple levels of aesthetic interpretation and aesthetic ideology informing the whole of the aesthetic economy that governed the experience of decadent poetry in the *fin-de-siècle*. Each discursive register may be tasted or sampled as a separate sphere of ideological and aesthetic dimensionality within its own textural reference-field and its own ideological planar orientation. Lionel Johnson’s poem “The Dark Angel” may be read as a symbolic illustration of the decadent poem and of the complex totality of aesthetic experience that the *fin-de siècle* poem existed within, particularly when the poem is read within its full confessional complexity of decadent and anti-decadent emotionality and decadent and anti-decadent thematic and generic content. This poem contains within itself multiple discursive veils of interpretation, pointing at once to biblical lyric, to pagan adoration rites, to ideas of the satanic and the Promethean, as a retreat from popular language and an immersion in English and classical antiquity and in antiquated rituals of language construction, as a not-subtle pledge of transgressive sexual desire and repressed erotomania, as the desire to purge the decadent subject of its unethical and unappeasable desire and as an attack on normative models of poetic discourse in the nineteenth century as well as upon common speech, populism and journalistic models of truth and representation. Decadent discourse in the *fin-de-siècle* always possesses multiple architectural modelling systems of ideological formation, and these modelling systems are created through the thetic formulation and reformulation of aesthetic content. Within this aesthetic economy, decadent discourse mutates along a bending arc of complexity and signification, with pro- and contra-decadent impulses and aesthetic ideologies naturally feeding off of each other in a feedback loop of poetics and cultural-historical thematic content. By using the term discursive registers in this study it is possible to analyse discreet aspects of works or oeuvres without refusing to witness the multiple discursive registers that a poem such as

Johnson's "To a Dark Angel" produces within the aesthetic economy of *fin-de-siècle* decadent discourse.

—*Civilizational Decadence and High Decadence*

Poetry in the British *fin-de-siècle* was conditioned, provoked and generated via decadent aesthetic ideology and several key types of *fin-de-siècle* decadent discourse. Cultural, civilizational and sociological forms modeled discursive power and ideas of decadence in the late-nineteenth century. Decadent discourse in the *fin-de-siècle* may be usefully understood as having two dominant engines of discursive construction: civilizational decadence and high decadence. Each of these models of discursive construction worked to shape the conditions, modes, and styles of decadent poetics and in particular of the aesthetic ideology that decadence came to form as it became a central generator of cultural content and social and political life.

In the complex societal and cultural landscape that decadent poetics emerged from discursive power and discursive form were partially produced by standardized models of poetics and models of subjectivity in the newly industrialized, urbanized and internationalized *fin-de-siècle* ideological habitat. Civilizational decadence emerged from the growing concern that modern, Western, European Society had entered into a "late" period of cultural disintegration based on a direct analogy of fallen empires and specifically based upon the analogy of the Fall of Rome. Civilizational decadence was deeply influenced by the growth of scientific discursive systems in the nineteenth century and ties to popular evolutionary theories of history. These ties lead to fears of counter-evolutionary and degenerative movements in contemporary nineteenth century society. These fears of lateness, of decadent cultures and of decadent or degenerative viruses within the body politic helped create the sense of Western "man" as living in the "end of

times”, a “*fin-de-siècle*” where “great”, “real” and “vital” actions were something predominantly seen as existing in earlier, more vigorous, innocent and youthful eras as compared to the “decadent”, “degraded”, “fallen”, “weak”, “artificial”, “effeminate”, “dissolute”, “amoral”, “derivative” or “dangerous” modern world. Such cultural critics as Mathew Arnold and John Ruskin used theories of Western History that emphatically traced the fallen nature of late-nineteenth-century civilization in comparison with earlier, more youthful, creative, and rich cultural epochs such as the Early Renaissance and Classical Greece. The utopian Hellenism of nineteenth-century thought came to influence this theory of decadent cultural and civilizational history.

With the rise of scientific discursive systems the desire to locate, hypothesize and cleanse the body politic of degenerative and pathological bodies epitomized the virulent discursive power of these models of decadent history. Penal, sexual and ideological discursive power systems in the eighteenth and nineteenth-century arose in the period that applied complex discursive systems to combat and organize dangerous elements of “man”. The rise of criminology, anthropology, economics, sociology, and modern psychology emphasized the need to articulate and understand the aspects of modern, fallen existence and the ailments that possessed late-nineteenth civilization in terms of both its material and cultural ailments—ailments and decadent or degenerative viruses that could be transformed through the organization and employment of discourse itself. The arrangement of theories of race and species was endemic of this need to ascertain the best generalized “traits” of Western Man as opposed to the primitive, savage, or alien other, and the threat that “savagery” and “primitiveness” had for the permanence and endangered futurity of an at least theoretically “higher” if not “purer” Western Civilization. The increasing contact with Non-Western Peoples of Arabia, the Far East, the

Americas and Africa militated for the need to find methods to combat pathological diseases of the mind or the body and to insure the future of the self, the healthy, clean western body, the most advanced species and the very nature and substance of an endangered, embattled and fragile, Western Civilization, as Edward Said has documented in his studies of the “Orient” and its key place in the development of Western theories of civilization, culture, sex and selfhood. Such key European thinkers of the period as Emile Durkheim, Henry David Thoreau, Richard Wagner, Sigmund Freud, Friedrich Nietzsche and Karl Marx each used models of civilizational decadence as part and parcel of their analyses of corporate civilizational being, searching for a means to model modern selfhood, subjectivity, capital, society and cultural economies within ideological discursive frameworks that could re-orientate failed or failing civilizational and existential concepts. Pathological decadence sought to use the scientific method to construct classificatory models of human beings that would locate, diagnose, and counter the effects of decadent bodies, viruses, cells and cultural, psychological or sociological totalities. Degenerative decadence focused its discursive powers upon degenerative cultural, societal or biological strains that would lead to a devolution of the evolutionary project and the rise of higher, enlightened, and rational civilizations. Each of these aspects of civilizational decadence operated within both more semi-academic and intellectual circles of devoted amateurs and newly developing scientific societies as well as fostering more generalized, opinionated, vociferous and gross manifestations within popular books, newspapers and other popular organs of discursive media. The growth of printed matter in the nineteenth century and its consumption by ever-widening numbers of readers and reading publics multiplied radically which served to radically increase the deployment of civilizational decadence as a generative discursive engine in the nineteenth-century. With the rise of journalism, the social sciences, the professionalization of authorship and

the exponential proliferation of governmental bureaucratic forms so the power and reach of analytic, descriptive and classificatory knowledge systems increased exponentially. With these deployments of prose as the medium par excellence of knowledge transmission so the language of criticism, of empiricism and the search for definition of societies, classes, histories, psychologies, animal behaviors, criminal behaviours and sexual behaviours multiplied. The rise of this systemic typological impulse attempted to identify and characterize this from that and to produce clear, explicable and rigorous systems of knowledge in a medium that could clearly articulate both the news of the day and the underlying systems that that defined human anatomy, human psychology, human sexuality and human society.

With this manifest multiplication of organs and medias, the discursive powers of civilizational discourse multiplied as well, influencing esoteric ideas of spirituality, of elite poetry, and of other seemingly esoteric and unrelated cultural and philosophical modes. The significance of ideas of decadence upon modern capital and economic systems, of modern psychology and enfeebling psychotic or neurotic maladies, of degenerative or dangerous criminological and racial types, are just a few of the many key modes that civilizational-decadence deeply influenced in the mid-to-late-nineteenth-century as the *fin-de-siècle* emerged in the British and European context. The emergence of British nostalgia, British myth and militant masculine British ideologies emerged in an attempt to redress these fears of civilizational collapse and the malaise of the civilizational spirit in direct relation to fears of imminent civilizational collapse and the future chaos that democratic, effeminate, multi-racial, sexually profligate, and globally multi-focal mass society promised. Such ideas as the people, the race, the class, and the folk emerged within theories of societal being as attempts to organize and diagnose the nature of modern being and importantly to diagnose the decadent or degenerative

objects, bodies, subjects or theories that were most dangerous in terms of their influence upon this theory of civilizational history, identity and futurity.

High decadence was a widespread intellectual, cosmopolitan and international movement originating in the mid-nineteenth century and culminating in the 1890s and the early years of the twentieth-century. Aspects of high decadence continued to exist in disparate art works, literary movements and idea-systems of Modernism and early twentieth century culture. High decadence emerged from a fascination with an aristocratic, republican, counter-cultural, self-making, epicurean, hedonistic, aesthetic and /or highly individualistic visions of *fin-de-siècle* decadence and played out complex variations upon the nature of decadent thought and the representation and meaning of decadent aesthetic ideology in the *fin-de-siècle*. The movement emerged as numerous artists, writers, publishers, intellectuals and philosophers came to loosely associate themselves as being “decadents”. This movement in nineteenth-century intellectual history developed into a shared cosmopolitan community of like-minded “decadents” who in their shared sense of decadent style and decadent aesthetic taste, in “*l’art pour l’art*” and intellectual disinterest, nominally named or tentatively associated themselves as belonging to this generalized elite and radically subversive bohemian international caste. High decadence emerged primarily with the Parnassian French poets of the mid-nineteenth century and from the writings of Baudelaire. High decadence continued to develop a strong predilection for a distinctly French style and French literary and philosophical tradition even as it spread and changed its forms well into the twentieth-century. High decadence tended to have strong ties to such British movements as British Aestheticism and the Arts and Crafts Movement; to Art Nouveau, French Symbolism and Impressionism; as well as to early protagonists of the twentieth-century modernists rejection of “bourgeois” or traditional popular cultures. High decadence’s predilection for individualism

and art as a religion when combined with a veneration for dying aristocratic orders tended to give to high decadence a distinctly male, elitist, and aesthetically complex and abstruse quality. Such fictional figures as Oscar Wilde's Dorian Gray and Walter Pater's Marius from his novel *Marius the Epicurean* came to become fictional archetypes of the high decadent exemplary personality and the excess and amorality of a singularly high decadent vision of the individual's relation to the mass, and the cultivation of singular aesthetic experience. High decadence had as well variant strains that influenced and articulated specific aspects of the high decadent aesthetic ideology: erotic high decadence and esoteric high decadence. Each of these discursive manifestations of high decadent thought came to organize redistributions of traditional gender relations, and concepts of maleness, femaleness, marriage and sex and in the cultivation of an international erotic brother and sisterhood of exemplary erotic individualism that would surpass and exceed the control systems of strictly geographic, nationalistic, or linguistic ideological discourse and discursive power. Erotic high decadence evinced a distinctive interest in *eros* and the treatment of erotic themes in literature and artworks including transgressive, pornographic and non-standard erotic experience, in erotic liberation, and in non-traditional heterosexual sexual identities. These transgressive methods were a distinct and significant aspect of erotic decadence and a compelling recruiter for those disenfranchised from normative high Victorian gender relations.

Erotic high decadence emerged from and shared in the networks of publication and circulation of heterosexual and homosexual materials.^{vi} By using these manners of circulation high decadence was able to assert its transgressive credentials and was able to evade standard mass-market publication systems.^{vii} High decadence quickly became emphatically associated with homosexuality, sodomy, lesbianism, free-sex, sexual deviancy, masochism, libertine

philosophies, paedophilia, Socratic love, Uranism and sexual hedonism. This became a central aspect of its allure for renegade or maverick intellectuals, writers and art-practioners of the period and is reflected by a significant number of artists, poets, novelists and intellectuals of the British *fin-de-siècle* that would at least for a time associate themselves with decadent publishing organs or with certain edges of the decadent cultural movement. This list included such notable figures as Oscar Wilde, Michael Field, John Gray, Leonard Smithers, Henry James, Ernest Dowson, Arthur Symons, Rosamund Marriot Watton, Lionel Johnson, Aleister Crowley, Walter Pater, Max Beerbohm, Aubrey Beardsley, et al. This list provides only a short introduction to the vast number of decadent, high decadent, or even non-decadents who deployed aspects of erotic high decadence in their artistic and aesthetic productions. Gautier's origination of the male-female hero/heroine of early high decadence and Swinburne's evocation of erotic pleasure, paganism and desire provided an early template for the construction of the erotic high decadent imaginary, a template that would be used and altered in a rich multiplicity of different iterations throughout the years of high decadence's explicit emergence as a dominant idea-system in *fin-de-siècle* intellectual and artistic discourse. This imaginary would be altered and recombined with explicitly colonial and exotic models, explicit homosexual and lesbian content, strong hedonist and libertine elements, as well as the conflation of erotic experience and aesthetic experience as art and sexual experience came to interchange models of representation and the pursuit of sensory aesthetic experience was organized into an explicit interest in individual sensual experience by such theorists of aesthetic experience as epicurean pleasure as Walter Pater.

British decadent poetry emerged in the late decades of the nineteenth century from an aesthetic economy of prodigious ideological warfare and amidst dramatic changes in the nature

and form of the self's relation to society, history and aesthetic experience. In the following section I organize some of the primary strains of decadent poetic style in the *fin-de-siècle*.

IV. A Classificatory Typology of *Fin-de-Siècle* Decadent Poetry

Poetry in the British *fin-de-siècle* was shaped and conditioned by ideas of decadence in the period. Ideas of decadence came to produce a poetic literature that may be understood as functioning within five key stylistic topoi: aesthetic decadent poetry, counter-decadent poetry, melancholic decadent poetry, exotic decadent poetry, and popular decadent poetry. These five models allow us to organize and understand the textual condition of the *fin-de-siècle* poem. These stylistic topoi generated a complex variety of poems in the period. Each style would be used by poets of the period as parts of decadent poetry collections and each poet may be seen as using each of these topoi to lesser or greater degrees. For instance in the works of the counter-decadent poet William Ernest Henley can be found aesthetic poems, exotic poems as well as obviously counter-decadent, melancholic and popular decadent poems. The same can be said of all poets actively writing and publishing in Britain in the 1880s, 1890s and well into the twentieth-century. The reach of decadent aesthetic ideology was so great that it impacted even the most, traditional or seemingly non-decadent poets of the period such as the nationalist and imperialist Rudyard Kipling or the works of Alfred Austin (Tennyson's successor for the Poet Laureate) even if their traditionalism and anti-decadence was severe enough to largely minimize their explicit engagement with, or copying of, obvious strains of decadent aesthetic ideology.

The five stylistic topoi I outline below were each shaped and formed by orthodox decadence as it came to organize and deploy the definitive hieratic model of decadent theory and

praxis in the *fin-de-siècle*. Aesthetic decadence, exotic decadence, counter-decadence, melancholic decadence and popular decadence each formed themselves in relation to orthodox decadence as it became the signature archetypal matrix of meaning, image-production and aesthetic representation. There is no singular poem that can adequately represent orthodox decadence in the *fin-de-siècle* collective consciousness but rather orthodox decadence came to be understood as possessing aspects of each of these five key models of decadent poetic practice. The defining poem of orthodox decadence in the *fin-de-siècle* may be understood as an invisible amalgamation of exoticism and aestheticism, of Egypt, India, Britain and France, of fear and impressionism, of pagan Satanism and Catholic liturgy, of melancholic excess, drugged madness and erotic rapture, and of aesthetic friendship and solitary suicide. The definitive poem of orthodox decadence was thus a precocious and excessive mixture of Oscar Wilde's "Impression du Matin", "The Harlot's House", "The New Remorse", "Symphony in Yellow" and "The Ballad of Reading Gaol"; of Arthur Symons' "Stella Maris", "Javanese Dancers" and "Macquillage"; of William Butler Yeats's "Aedh Tells of the Perfect Beauty", "Michael Robartes Bids His Beloved be at Peace" and "The Secret Rose"; of Ernest Dowson's "Nuns of the Perpetual Adoration" and "Extreme Unction"; of Lionel Johnson's "The Dark Angel" and "Nihilism" and Michael Field's "Saint Sebastien", "The Mummy", "Old Ivories" and "From Baudelaire"—all mixed into a strange and often grotesque stereotypic image of what it meant to be "decadent". All of these poems' ideas, conceits, tropes, modes and impressions became bound up in the orthodox vision of what decadent poetry was and what the *fin-de-siècle* meant.

Aesthetic decadent poetry grew out of ideas of aesthetics and Aestheticism as a cultural movement in mid- to late-nineteenth-century Victorian Britain. Aesthetic decadent poetry drew on the writings of John Ruskin and Walter Pater to invest itself in the cultivation of aesthetic

experience, in the aesthetic decadent poem as functioning as an art object, and in the direct relation between the idea of the hand-crafted poetry book as a distinct aesthetic object unto itself. Aestheticism with its origins in the works of Ruskin and Pater and its interest in ‘sensations’ and in the worship of art helped to place decadent poetry of the *fin-de-siècle* as being directly related to the fine arts and to art appreciation. By intimately linking the condition of the *fin-de-siècle* textual condition within this broader aesthetic condition, Aestheticism came to generate not only the form and style of aesthetic poetry but it led to a distinct manner of reading and writing. The *fin-de-siècle* poet “Michael Field” tied much of their work to a distinctly Aestheticist programme of literary production. Michael Field explicitly advanced in prose and verse this synthesis of aesthetic experience and poetry. Similarly John Gray’s key decadent poetry work *Silverpoints* epitomised this connection between art, fine art, aesthetic book production techniques and Aestheticist decadent ideas of reading and writing. The significance of Gray’s *Silverpoints* as an exemplary orthodox decadent poetic work has been established by a wide number of scholars and as well by cultural critics and decadent ideologues of the period.

In poems such as Lionel Johnson’s “The Dark Angel” and “Nihilism” the articulation of melancholic decadent poetics is acute. In “The Dark Angel” Johnson equates evil with melancholy and desire with a suicidal absolution in the arms of the “dark Paraclete”:

The ardor of red flame is thine,
And thine the steely soul of ice,
Thou poisonest the fair design
Of nature, with unfair device.

Apple of ashes, golden bright;
Waters of bitterness, how sweet!
O banquet of a foul delight,
Prepared by thee, dark Paraclete! (116)^{viii}

Melancholic decadence mutated standardized Romantic and High Victorian conceptions of melancholy, melancholic sadness and pessimism but articulated these themes in new poetic registers. Such seminal works of the Romantic and High Victorian periods as John Keats's "On Melancholy", Samuel Taylor Coleridge's "Dejection: An Ode" and Alfred Lord Tennyson's "The Lotos-Eaters" provided key templates from which the melancholic decadent poem emerged. By embracing this strain of aesthetic and ideologic fatalism, the melancholic decadent poem mutated early nineteenth-century visions of melancholic pain. This fatalism, and the willingness of *fin-de-siècle* poems to embrace said fatalism, gave a particular danger and suicidal excess to decadent poetics—a particular style of decadence that would go on to both horrify and influence modernist poetics and modernist theories of existential angst, ennui, lassitude and boredom. Melancholic decadence would rapidly become one of the hallmarks of the popular conception of decadent literature in the period with decadent art and literature's obsession with death, with mortality, with the *femme fatale*, with radical pessimism and with an enfeebling languor. These motifs became identifiable with the decadent temperament and with the failures of both decadent poetry and decadent subjectivities. Ernest Dowson's sad, haunting, and mournfully incapable verse would be seen as symptomatic of melancholic decadence and with the stylized self-absorption of the melancholic decadent poet. Dowson's plaintive love of an eternally missing young woman epitomized the melancholic decadent lyric in terms of its plaintive disassociation and its evident world weariness. Decadent literature and art's obsessions with evil, with ugliness, with depravity and with excessive sexuality and sensuality was seen as rooted in this melancholic temper. The powerful influence of Baudelaire's *Flowers of Evil* and the early sensational and hedonistic poetry of Swinburne contributed to the generalized conception in the reading public's mind of melancholic decadence as being part and parcel of

decadent poetry's *spiritus mundi*. Melancholic decadent poems would become a staple of many poetry collections published in the waning years of the nineteenth century and while the influence of this mode of poetry was not as significant as the role that aestheticism had upon decadent poetics it remained a potent force throughout the period and contributed to a series of clichéd tropes that have been identified with the decadent poetic tradition.

Symons' "Javanese Dancers" exemplifies several of the key themes and motifs that typify exotic decadence in the British *fin-de-siècle*. In "Javanese Dancers" Symons intertwines a breathless lyric intensity, a lush, vaguely Oriental mystique, and an exotic and erotic counterpoint. Symons' poem exemplifies late nineteenth century obsession with exotic landscapes, with exotic, particularly feminine subjects, and the unmasked desire of the ardent poet's appreciation of this lyric subject. Symons writes:

Still with fixed eyes, monotonously still,
Mysteriously, with smiles inanimate,
With lingering feet that undulate,
With sinuous fingers, spectral hands that thrill,

The little amber-colored dancers move,
Like little painted figures on a screen,
Or phantom-dancers haply seen
Among the shadows of a magic grove.^{ix}

The love of exotic, ancient civilizations with their mystical fascination and promise of other, mysterious, non-Western truths and greater access to hidden lore is implicit in William Ernest Henley's poem "Ballade of a Toyokuni Colour Print". Henley's "Ballade" is at once an aesthetic decadent poem and an exotic decadent poem written as the appreciation of an exotic aesthetic object by one of the most central and influential counter-decadent poet of the period, emphasizing how each of these stylistic topoi influenced and bled into each other. The opening

stanza immediately denotes Henley's love of ancestral traditions, of martial power, and of a dominant and noble image of masculine imperturbability:

Was I a Samurai renowned,
Two-sworded, fierce, immense of bow?
A histrion angular and profound?
A priest? a porter?—Child, although
I have forgotten clean, I know
That in the shade of Fujisan,
What time the cherry-orchards blow,
I loved you once in old Japan. (30)^x

Henley and Symons' poems reflect specific aspects of the exotic decadent poetic machine as it came to generate countless iterations and image-clusters associated with mystical constructions of such non-Western civilizations as those of ancient or feudal Japan, of ancient India, of Arabia or of Egypt. Exotic decadence drew from colonialist fear and fascination with the exoticized other, creating mysterious landscapes in which the erotic and mystical could inter-fuse and produce decadent-aesthetic states of wonder and titillation. Wilde's long poem *The Sphinx* powerfully articulated the exotic decadent poetic formula with its rich vocabulary of exotic jewels, fabrics, gods and lands articulating the fascination that exotic landscapes, objects and belief systems had for the poetic imaginary of the *fin-de-siècle*. Wilde's lyric paean to the ancient east *The Sphinx*, Henley's noble samurai, land of cherry blossoms and beautiful women presented in "Ballade of a Toyokuni Colour Print", and Arthur Symons' exotic imaginary dancer that is transformed via dance into an aesthetic object, are representative of several key strands of the exotic decadent poetic template. Exotic decadence possessed multifarious and pronounced powers for authors and their poems during the period drawing from the popular interest in translations of Eastern Wisdom literature such as *The Koran*, *The Bhagvada Gita*, *The Upanishads* and *The Arabian Tales*. In addition to this obsession with the mystical East, exotic decadence naturally associated the general interest in the mythical East with a distinctly erotic

component, proclaiming at once love for the Orient and the ancient East and the raw titillation that the aesthetic appreciation of the mysterious and unknown female other had for the Modern imperialist imagination.

Poems such as Henley's "Under a stagnant sky" (dedicated to James McNeil Whistler), Michael Field's "From Baudelaire", Lord Alfred Douglas's "In Praise of Shame", Naidu's "The Snake Charmer", Owen Seaman's "Lilith Libifera", and Beardsley's "The Ballad of a Barber", alongside such anonymous parodies from Punch as: "A Maudle-In Ballad" and "More Impressions (La Fuite des Oies)" document how decadent poetry quickly became a fetishized and duplicable style that could be used to comic or saccharine effect. The popular decadent poem epitomized obsessions with popular types of decadent wit and satire, the obsession with clichéd visions of decadent pursuit of evil, of decadent exoticism, or of decadent aestheticism, Baudelairian imitations, and particularly decadent aestheticism as a pale reflexion of French literary style and French Impressionist mannerisms. With the rise of the Wildean mystique by the mid-1880s and with the ubiquitous cartoons of aesthetic dreamers, decadent wastrels and louche, irresponsible or dissolute lifestyles in popular newspapers and literary journals not to mention in popular re-interpretations of decadent themes in novels such as Hitchens' *The Green Carnation*, the decadent aesthetic project quickly became synonymous with these cartoon representations of the decadent aesthetic and ideologic project. This tendency came to effect and profoundly influence decadent poets themselves as the decadent poem reached its apogee as a generalized mode of poetic practice in Britain in the 1890s. This serialized attack on decadent poetics would indelibly alienate modernist poets producing a strict repudiation of the decadent styles and subjects of the *fin-de-siècle*.^{xi} Popular decadent poetry, with the effect of the Wilde trial in 1895 rapidly went into a state of decline as poets and intellectuals such as Arthur Symons attempted to

remodel their aesthetic programme and move it away from associations with decadence into purer and less flagrantly transgressive territories, as Symons would rename his critical study of poetics in the period *The Symbolist Movement in Literature* in 1898, rather than, *The Decadent Movement in Literature*, as it was originally titled in 1892.

Perhaps no poet more than Richerd Le Galliene profited from the rise of popular decadent poetry as a lucrative means to furthering a literary career in London in the 1880s and early 1890s, changing his name with a decorative French flourish to emphasize his worldly and cultural pretensions and writing a plethora of popular decadent poems that roughly imitated the works of Oscar Wilde or John Gray while toning down the excesses of High Decadent style in favour of a more restrained, neutral, and conservative replication of dominant decadent themes and stylistic methods. In “A Ballad of London” Le Galliene neatly captures the popular decadent poetic mode, enlisting a Wildean impressionism, a Baudelairien obsession with sin, depravity and corruption, and a popular literary style in order to write a truly popular decadent depiction of *fin-de-siècle* London:

Like dragonflies, the hansoms hover,
With jewelled eyes, to catch the lover,
The streets are full of lights and loves,
Soft gowns , and flutter of soiled doves.

The human moths about the light
Dash and cling close in dazed delight,
And butt and laugh, the world and wife,
For this is London, this is life!

Upon the petals butterflies,
But at the root, some say, there lies,
A world of weeping trodden things,
Poor worms that have not eyes or wings.

From our corruption of their woe
Springs the bright flower that charms us so,
Men die and rot deep out of sight,

To keep the jungle flower bright. (145)^{xii}

Le Galliene's "A Ballad of London" perfectly pictures the way that the popular decadent imagination used decadent themes such as corruption and the fall of Man, the clichéd usage of 'pretty' decorative language, and the sense of sadness and evil that popular decadence weakly imitated in terms of popular conceptions of decadent aesthetic ideology.

Each of these stylistic topoi was partially constructed by the dominant powers of decadent discourse in the period. Fears of the demise of Western Civilization, fears concerning the devolution of species, fears of cross-cultural pollution from non-Western peoples, fears of depraved lifestyles and deformative language use contributed to the rise of a complex mix of discursive systems that helped organize and produce each of these modes of decadent poetry. Orthodox decadence emerged in direct relation to the forces that shaped decadent poetry and each type of decadent poetry, indeed each decadent poem may be read as an index of discursive registers, a reading I have briefly performed in this analysis.

Chapter Two

Edward Carpenter, the Democratic Decadent

I. Edward Carpenter and Democratic Decadence

In 1902 Edward Carpenter, a British poet, advocate of homosexuality and vegetarianism, and critic of modern civilization and industrialism, published the complete text of his long poem *Towards Democracy*. Edward Carpenter's writing in the late nineteenth century represents a form of democratic decadence: a powerful cultural, aesthetic and ideological movement in the *fin-de siècle* that diagnosed modern civilization and its diseased and decadent conventions in order to propose a radical, health-giving, utopian, egalitarian and revolutionary socialist philosophy. Carpenter began *Towards Democracy* more than twenty years previously in the early 1880s as a young man and the text functions as an initiation journey and prophetic statement of democratic decadent ideals including the construction of a new spiritualized global self, the creation of a new "prose" that generically remakes the author-reader function and a new, spiritualized vision of humanity and of radically egalitarian democratic class and gender relations.

During the twenty years of *Towards Democracy*'s writing Carpenter published a number of prose works critiquing modern British industrial society, prescribed gender relations, and documenting Carpenter's self-awakening as a homosexual, vegetarian, and radical democrat. In works such as *England's Ideal* (1887), *Civilization: Its Cause and Cure* (1889), *From Adam's Peak to Elephanta: Sketches in Ceylon and India* (1892) and *Homogenic Love and Its Place in a Free Society* (1894) Carpenter embraced democratic decadence as a potent world-making critique of decadent civilization. These texts document Carpenter's growth as a critic and as an

advocate of radical democratic values including the significant lessons of his time in India, the development of his philosophical and mystical thought, the value and function of homosexuality and the necessity of abandoning the corrupting and insidious values of a modern degenerate and soul-killing society.

Edith Ellis, (author, socialist and wife of Havelock Ellis, the nineteenth century sexologist) was a close friend of Carpenter and, neatly summarized how Carpenter's mysticism participated in the creation of his radical socialism and liberated vision of class relations: "It is the mystic in him which drives him to the socialist's working ground, where the aim among the true modern workers is to give to every man and every woman on earth an equal opportunity with every other man and every other woman" (*Personal Impressions of Edward Carpenter* 195). Ellis grounded Carpenter's life and thought and character in his mysticism, in his conception of the self and in particular of the human self in a globalized vision of ideological transformation that places the modern self not only in relation to insidious class relations, to a shattering and predatorial capitalist industrialism, but to the deep truths of the world spirit and to a mystique of holistic organic being. Holbrook Jackson annotated the significance of Carpenter's life and work in its critique of decadent artificiality and decadent excess, where artificiality functioned as the enemy of simplicity and Carpenter's work is intimately related to "natural law" and to the "inner necessity" of the Spirit of Man, where Carpenter has recognized that "Artificiality has taken the place of nature; self-consciousness the place of simple, and its greater correlative, cosmic consciousness; and independence the place of fellowship. The main teaching of Carpenter is the cultivation of a life organically related to natural law, and in frank obedience to its own inner necessity" (*All Manner of Folk* 125).

Towards Democracy functioned as a pivotal work of the British *fin-de-siècle*, in its critique of the ravages of modern civilization, its advocacy of a new spiritualized humanism, its program of ideological warfare, and its synthesis of nineteenth century egalitarian democracy. Though *Towards Democracy* had a minimal public following it was a key text for a coterie of like-minded idealists, social thinkers and played a significant role in the development of progressive ideas during the period. Carpenter's prose works of the 1880s and 1890s documented the evolution of Carpenter's engagement with democratic decadence as a potent driver of *fin-de-siècle* discourse in Britain and Europe. As Carpenter became initiated to the revolutionary socialism of Henry Hyndman in the early 1880s, as he abandoned conventional positions as a scholar at Cambridge to join the Extensions learning project that dedicated itself to the education of the working classes, through his spiritual and sexual awakening in India, and through his reading of the American poet Walt Whitman, Carpenter underwent a radical transformation of his individual psyche and of his thought and opinions in the 1880s and 1890s. The text of *Towards Democracy* reverberates with the significance of each of these different movements that are key aspects of the democratic-decadent *fin-de-siècle* aesthetic programme—a programme that advocated a return to simplicity, to naturalness, to primitive class relations, to the establishment of non-hierarchical love, to normalizing same-sex desire and that advocated a spiritualizing and global movement of social change and universal spiritual enlightenment. The text of *Towards Democracy* reflects each of these aspects of the democratic decadent aesthetic programme and the democratic decadent attack on bourgeois Victorian artificiality and what many perceived at the time to be a corrupt and degenerate modern civilization.

In this chapter I explicate how *Towards Democracy* functions as a discursive machine that made and re-made cultural forms through its subversive program of naturalization and de-

naturalization of aesthetic experience. My central argument is that *Towards Democracy* by engaging in an open, honest and un-decadent mode of poetics remodels our common notion of what decadence is and how aesthetics and ideology intertwined in the *fin-de-siècle*. *Towards Democracy* remade and deconstructed *fin-de-siècle* poetry and the role of the *fin-de-siècle* poet through its use of prose, the unfettered long line and the deployment of a poetics based on “prosetry”. Davidson’s development of the prose-poem, following Walt Whitman’s *Leaves of Grass*, permitted Carpenter to access the ideological truths of modern prose and the vatic wisdom of a-historical poetry I discuss the history of democratic decadence in the late nineteenth century and how this aesthetic and ideological movement influenced and moulded Edward Carpenter on his path to self-realization and prophetic revelation. I identify some of the key aspects of the democratic decadent movement, including the key role that radical socialism, Walt Whitman and India had upon the construction of Carpenter’s psyche during the period and on the text of *Towards Democracy*.

My analysis draws principally on the scholarly biographies: Sheila Rowbotham’s *Edward Carpenter: A Life of Liberty and Love* (2009), and Chūshichi Tsuzuki’s *Edward Carpenter 1844-1929: Prophet of Human Fellowship*. In that there is as of yet no single monograph treating Carpenter’s poetry and poetics my analysis exists within a sort of open field of scholarly inquiry, guided of course by the traditional scholarly treatment of Carpenter’s biography and his radical Socialism, Homosexuality, Sexology and mystical idealism. Secondary studies of particular aspects of Carpenter’s democratic decadent ideology including Sheila Rowbotham and Jeremy Weeks’ *Socialism and the New Life: The Personal and Sexual Politics of Edward Carpenter and Havelock Ellis* (1977), A.R.H. Copley’s *A Spiritual Bloomsbury: Hinduism and Homosexuality in the lives and writings of Edward Carpenter, E.M. Forster and Christopher Isherwood* (2006)

and the collection of essays *Edward Carpenter and Late-Victorian Radicalism* (1990), edited by Tony Brown, each provide useful depth to my analysis of Carpenter's spirituality and sexuality as well as helping to locate Carpenter's radicalism within the direct context of the period.

Carpenter's initiation into the democratic decadent movement came partly from Carpenter's antagonism to high Victorian and bourgeois modes of living as they developed from the mid-nineteenth-century. As Carpenter became increasingly alienated from consumerism, mass-market labour practices, and the artificiality of dominant modes of literary practice in the later years of the century, so the writing of *Towards Democracy* took on its central task as a reformatory text that modelled a democratic decadent model of the un-decadent will. *Towards Democracy* is explicitly antagonistic to dominant models of high decadent verse in the British *fin-de-siècle*. High decadent works of art through their embrace of excessive ornamentation, the obscure, the impressionistic and their celebrations of exoticism, obscurantism, esotericism and as art objects of a cultivated elite cosmopolitan intelligentsia and a set of international decadent aesthetic practitioners is seen as antagonistic to the form, style and desired reading public of Carpenter's master work.^{xiii} *Towards Democracy* desired both in form and content to *naturalize* language and return poetry to 'the people' and to an idealized international and global spiritual audience of the enlightened working class—a new and egalitarian vision of the folk. Much as Carpenter turned away from decadent urban modern society in his choice to live and pursue his radical social dreams in Sheffield, so too *Towards Democracy* in its investment in a free and liberated style embarks upon a quest to liberate and to de-mystify the class and hierarchical gender relations that in Carpenter's view, enslaved and subjugated the High Victorian and mass-market nineteenth-century self.

Sarojini Naidu, John Davidson and Edward Carpenter each located the remodelling of modern civilization in the un-decadent will and in a monumental revision of what the modern self should be. Carpenter's new selfhood is imbricated in a global vision of international egalitarian labour and in a radically non-artificial mode of life that serves as a return to a natural, organic and intrinsic state of original material and spiritual being. Carpenter's materiality is infused with an embodied theory of the world spirit, a sense of body and soul that is similar to fellow democratic decadent William Morris. Carpenter locates in art, in labour, in the body and in a new vision of liberated economic forms and liberated societal and sexual relations. By channelling Walt Whitman's *Leaves of Grass* and taking up the visionary and law-giving mantle of Krishna in the *Bhagvada gita* (that Carpenter read in the early 1880s), Carpenter embarked on a monumental and complete overturning of bourgeois convention and normative ideological complexes that trained and modelled the High Victorian, traditional, economic and nationalistic self. Staging *Towards Democracy* as a truly international and global construction Carpenter brought in elements of Whitman's free verse poetic model to eviscerate a decayed, obsolete and overly artificial conception of *fin-de-siècle* poetic practice and civilization. My chapter will analyse how Carpenter models *fin-de-siècle* verse forms and how Carpenter uses a particular conception of liberated verse to advance a democratic decadent aesthetic programme that extends towards a totalizing project of revelatory and universalizing soul-making.

Towards Democracy must be read as a key organizer and declaimer of a particular model of *fin-de-siècle* ideological consciousness. *Towards Democracy* joins key works of nineteenth century poetics such as Charles Baudelaire's *Les fleurs du mal*, Walt Whitman's *Leaves of Grass*, and Friedrich Nietzsche's *Thus Spake Zarathustra*—a movement in nineteenth century poetics that advanced ideas concerning a total vision of the self in relation to the civilizational

upheaval. Carpenter's model of democratic decadent selfhood was infused with a manner of seeing and being in the world and in particular relation to labour as a defining characteristic of modern society and of modern selfhood. As a perfect representative of the democratic decadent aesthetic programme that radically influenced a number of key thinkers and writers of the late nineteenth century *Towards Democracy* represents a useful text for understanding how progressive social causes and idealistic visions of a new humanity intertwined in the *fin-de-siècle* with revolutions in generic and aesthetic forms.

The liberatory message and the remodelling of the *fin-de-siècle* subject that democratic decadence projected as a radical aesthetic and ideological programme is indicated on the first page of *Towards Democracy*:

FREEDOM at last !
Long sought, long prayed for—ages and ages long:
The burden to which I continually return, seated here thick-booted and obvious
yet dead and buried and passed into heaven, unsearchable;
{How know you indeed but what I have passed into you?}
And Joy, beginning but without ending—the journey of journeys—Thought laid
quietly aside:
These things I, writing, translate for you—I wipe a mirror and place it in your
hands.

(*Towards Democracy* 3)

Through its direct speaking, its use of an intimate mode of address and its development of a close relation between a semi-mythical author and reader, the opening lines indicate the complex relation between reader and text that *Towards Democracy* will manipulate as it attempts to model and inculcate consciousness—a model of consciousness that is made to lead the reader toward “FREEDOM” the long lost origin of the soul that has been “long sought, long prayed for” as the true non-artificial book, this book that “you” the *fin-de-siècle* reader are now reading, no matter your intellect or learning, is open to “you”, by an egalitarian and common author, one wearing thick boots of the common man. This “journey of journeys” will lead the un-initiated democratic

decadent reader to a new world of communality, via this “writing” that will be read as a transformative project of self-making and civilizational un-making, and that is designed to “translate for you” so that the “you” of the *fin-de-siècle* reader can participate in a violent remodelling of the author-reader dialectic.

In this opening passage the *fin-de-siècle* reader is given *Towards Democracy* as a “mirror” to see anew who the self is and to provide a means to figure anew the disfigured, artificial and decadent world of its time.

Edward Carpenter’s life may be understood in direct relation to the development of *Towards Democracy*. The text as a whole functions as a spiritual and ideological autobiography of Carpenter’s life and spiritual evolution during the period. The growth of Carpenter’s democratic decadent mission is reflected in the text as Carpenter came to orient both his writing and his practical life within his greater ideological and aesthetic message. In the following sections of this chapter I first develop a brief analysis of Carpenter’s life and the development of his thought, then I outline Carpenter’s poetics in *Towards Democracy*. In the next section I develop a reading of the text of *Towards Democracy* in relation to its espousal of a democratic decadent theory of the self. The final section of this chapter articulates the ends and legacy of Carpenter’s work in *Towards Democracy*.

In total this chapter will develop a concentrated analysis of what democratic decadence was, of how it functioned in relation to poetry and poetics in the late nineteenth century, and how democratic decadence was a key strain of un-decadent thought and culture in the period. My reading of Carpenter allows for a developed reading of poetic modes and style in relation to ideological and generic conventions and points toward the construction of ideas of the great self and its significance for the late nineteenth century, for the *fin-de-siècle* in particular and for a

cumulative reading of poetry's engagement with ideological contents and the advancement of ideas of the great self in modernity. My reading of Carpenter contributes to nineteenth century, *fin-de-siècle* and modernist scholarship concerning poetics, progressive ideological movements and the complex interactions of self and reader and prose and poetry that *Towards Democracy* attempted to establish in its quest to model and re-model modern subjectivity.

II. Edward Carpenter's Path to Democratic Decadence

The history and genealogy of *Towards Democracy* mimics and follows the process of Edward Carpenter's movement into democratic decadence as an aesthetic, ideological and practical movement. In the following section I outline the growth of Carpenter's engagement with democratic decadence and how the writing of *Towards Democracy* mirrored his engagement with key ideological and aesthetic ideas of the period. In this section I outline some of the key moments in Carpenter's development as a thinker and in particular how *Towards Democracy* came to be conceived.

Written from the early 1880s to its final published form in 1902, *Towards Democracy* coexisted with Carpenter's development of democratic decadent ideal systems in a number of Carpenter's prose writings from the period and Carpenter's practical engagement with politics and political systems. The text of *Towards Democracy* may be understood as documenting the development of Carpenter's consciousness, his awakening sexuality, and Carpenter's evolution as a philosopher, moralist, spiritualist and progressive ideologue.

Born in 1841 to a prosperous family, in the 1860s Carpenter attended Cambridge, where he became ordained as an Anglican minister. While at Cambridge Carpenter became interested in the university reform movement. In 1870 Carpenter relinquished his clerical orders and in the

1870s Carpenter began teaching in the northern towns in the university extension scheme. During these years Carpenter visited Paris shortly after the repression of the Paris Commune, he first read the writings of Walt Whitman and the *Bhagvada Vita*, he made seminal visits to Italy to study the arts of the ancient world, he visited Whitman and Emerson in America, and he embraced vegetarianism. In the early 1880s Carpenter moved to the area around Sheffield, a Socialist epicentre of the period, where he would stay for the majority of his life. This move was combined with his interest deepening in politicized socialism and a vision of labour and the aesthetic and spiritual value of work that Carpenter inherited from the thought of John Ruskin. Once Carpenter received his inheritance in 1882 after the death of his father, Carpenter bought a farm near Sheffield, devoted himself to gardening and sandal-making, and became engaged with Socialist and Progressive causes including Hyndman's Democratic Federation and the Fellowship of the New Life, which included many leaders of what would become the Fabian Society. At this time, Carpenter experienced his first long romantic relationships and became an earnest and idealistic advocate of manly love and an advocate of homosexuality. During this period Carpenter met and became friends with a number of key intellectuals including Oscar Wilde, Peter Kropotkin, Roger Fry, the Indian guru Paranjape, William Morris, John Addington Symonds, and Edith and Havelock Ellis.^{xiv} In 1891 Carpenter met George Merrill who grew up in Sheffield. They lived together for the majority of the rest of their lives. Carpenter would ultimately be interred in the same grave as Merrill when he died in 1929, three years after Merrill.

Carpenter's engagement with the ideals of democratic decadence emerged from four principle sources: Democratic Socialism and Cultural Critique of Victorian Morality and Civilizational Decadence; Indian Philosophy, Spirituality and Poetry; Ideas of Sex, Marriage and

Gender Relations; and the writings of the American poet and celebrity, Walt Whitman. Carpenter published a number of works based on each of these interests during the years he composed and began publishing his experimental epic, *Towards Democracy*. Carpenter wrote a number of prose works from in the 1870s to the 1920s. Documenting Carpenter's interest in Socialism, Social Reform, Economics, and civilizational change he wrote *Modern Money Lending* (1887), *England's Ideal* (1887), *Chants of Labour* (1888) and *Civilization: its Cause and Cure* (1889). From a visit to India in 1888-1889 he produced *From Adam's Peak to Elephanta: Sketches in Ceylon and India* (1892) and *A Visit to Gñani: from Adam's Peak to Elephanta* (1892).^{xv} After Carpenter became fully aware of the nature of his sexuality and after having studied the subject in depth he published a number of works in the 1890s on the subject of sex, marriage, and gender relations including *Homogenic Love and Its Place in a Free Society* (1894), *Sex, Love and Its Place in a Free Society* (1894) *Marriage in Free Society* (1894) and *Love's Coming of Age* (1896). These four texts were published together in a complete volume in the early twentieth-century. In the 1900s Carpenter documented his interest in Whitman's thought and ideas in *Days with Walt Whitman: With Some Notes on His Life and Work* (1906) and *Some Friends of Walt Whitman: A Study in Sex-Psychology* (1924). Carpenter continued to write in the years after the final publication of *Towards Democracy* in 1906 and these works demonstrate Carpenter's continual growth and engagement with these ideas and attempts to extend his vision of sexual, social and civilizational change in relation to historical origins and as part of an evolutionary theory of selfhood and spiritual being. These texts include: *The Art of Creation* (1904), *The Intermediate Sex: A Study of Some Transitional Types of Men and Women* (1908), *The Drama of Love and Death: A Study of Human Evolution and Transfiguration* (1912), *Intermediate Types*

Among Primitive Folk: A Study in Social Evolution (1914), and the autobiographical text *My Days and Dreams, Being Autobiographical Notes* (1916).

Carpenter's first published book of poetry was the collection *Narcissus and other Poems* (1873). Between the writing of the collection *Narcissus and other Poems* and the writing of *Towards Democracy* Carpenter suffered the death of his mother, to whom Carpenter had been very close, and he became obsessed with the writings of Whitman and with eastern texts like the *Bhagvada Gita*. These three experiences played a fundamental role in the creation of *Towards Democracy*. Carpenter documents their significance in *My Days and Dreams, Being Autobiographical Notes*. Carpenter explicitly recognizes the massive significance of his mother's death and how it opened him up to spiritual emanations and put him in contact with the spirit of the world:

Her death at this moment exercised perhaps a great etherealizing influence on my mind, exhaling the great mass of feelings, intuitions, conceptions, and views of life and the world which had formed within me, into another sphere. The *Bhagavat Gita* about the same time falling into my hands gave me a keynote. And all at once I found myself in touch with a mood of exaltation and inspiration—a kind of super-consciousness—which passed all that I had experienced before, and which immediately harmonized all these other feelings, giving to them their place, their meaning and their outlet in expression. (*My Days and Dreams* 106)

Carpenter's poetic evolution from his first collection of poems *Narcissus and other Poems* (1873) to the work of writing *Towards Democracy* emphasizes Carpenter's growth and the fundamental mutation in his personality during this period as he abandoned traditional, normative, Christian and Victorian ideals and he became possessed by the democratic decadent aesthetic and ideological programme. In the title poem from *Narcissus and other Poems*, Carpenter celebrates a distinctly platonic and pagan conception of masculinity but in the hushed, allusive and pretty tones of traditional Victorian poetic style. Where the contents of the poem "Narcissus" gesture toward the full embrace of manly love that would occur with the writings

that would eventually comprise *Towards Democracy* as well as the works of early gender theory in the 1890s, “Narcissus: in its antiquated style and traditional language only gestures subtly toward the larger Uranian movement that Carpenter had yet to wholly identify with, or fully discover, at the time of its publication in 1873. Carpenter hints at his interest in male-male systems of poetic friendship in “Narcissus” without aligning the speaker of the poem with any type of greater allegiance to a male comradeship as a significant mode of life. Similarly the short poem “The World Spirit” from *Narcissus and other Poems* in its embrace of a Hegelian and Hellenic vision of pantheistic spirit is typically classical and restrained in its philosophical vision, emphasizing instead of a broad aesthetic and ideological conception of metaphysical *being* the poem emphasizes a highly derivative, normative, and mimetic treatment of a common philosophical and poetic subject.

Carpenter’s discovery of the spiritual emanations linking his mother’s death to the treatment of themes such as God and Being in the *Bhagvada gita* emphasizes how the early writing of *Towards Democracy* became linked with a fundamental reappraisal of how Carpenter as a historical subject would interact with the greater societal and civilizational challenges of his time. Carpenter notated exactly how the writing of *Towards Democracy* began, in particular the material and local nature of its composition:

I soon saw that the whole utterance would take a long time. I decided to give up my lecturing work so as to be quite unhampered. And I did so. What with my savings from Cambridge days, and a small income of fifty or sixty pounds a year springing from them, I knew I could live well enough for a few years—and so I felt supremely happy. It became necessary also to have some place in which to sit many hours a day writing—and so I knocked together a kind of wooden sentinel box, placed in a quiet corner of the garden, overlooking far fields, and thither resorted all through the summer, and into the autumn, and far away through the winter. (*My Days and Dreams* 107)

Much as the American Transcendentalist Henry David Thoreau distanced himself from the ravages of western civilization in the writing of *Walden*, so too Carpenter noted exactly how the

practical arrangement of the writing process of *Towards Democracy* was enacted with its sense of practical knowledge, of distance from decadent culture and its embrace of rural agrarian and traditional life. By locating the compositional process in a garden, in a small shed that Carpenter “knocked together” with his own hands, the separation of the text from the corrosive powers of the *fin-de-siècle* literary market and the ravages of a wasted and decadent civilization could then be properly diagnosed from this vantage point outside of the realms of economic forms where one is in touch with the seasons, with agrarian rhythms and a simple life. In this natural and non-decadent setting Carpenter came to “give birth” to the text as a whole.

Carpenter explicitly stages the writing of *Towards Democracy* as an act of giving birth, as an act of pregnancy, where we may understand the death of his mother, the discovery of Whitman and the spirit of the *Bhagvada gita* as the forces that impregnated Carpenter with the spiritual essence of what would become the text of *Towards Democracy*. This spiritual parentage enabled Carpenter to undertake the birthing process in this pastoral shed, isolated from the mass-market delirium and ideological foment of British *fin-de-siècle* culture and the culture wars concerning the New Woman, Anarchism, homosexuality, Empire, economic scarcity and the threats of degeneration and devolution that came to dominate French and English culture in the *fin-de-siècle*. In *My Days and Dreams* Carpenter outlined the nature of this birthing process, emphasizing the intersectional masculine-feminine nature of his authorial process:

And so it was that *Towards Democracy* came to birth. I was in fact completely taken captive by this new growth within me, and could hardly finish my course of lectures for the preoccupation. Already I was speculating how I could cut myself free. No sooner were the lectures over (about the end of April 1881) than I began writing *Towards Democracy*. It seemed already there. I never hesitated for a moment. Day by day it came along from point to point. I did not hurry; I expressed everything with slow care and to my best; I utilized former material which I had by me; the one illuminating mood remained and everything fell into place under it; and rarely did I find it necessary to remodel or rearrange to any great extent, anything that I had once written. (106-7)

In the years that followed the initial writings that formed the first edition of *Towards Democracy*, Carpenter's engagement with social democracy only deepened and his life in Sheffield became the centre-point of his work both geographically and ideologically. In his growing negative critiques of modern industrialism, of Victorian morality, of western civilization, and of the predatory and evil nature of Victorian gender relations, Carpenter extended the range of ideas that he dealt with idealistically, metaphorically, and via parable and allegory in the writings contained in *Towards Democracy*. As Carpenter's engagement with these aspects of the democratic decadent aesthetic programme grew Carpenter continued to make changes to the text of *Towards Democracy*, adding the most decidedly homosexual portion of the text titled "Who Shall Command the Heart". In this section Carpenter explicitly attires the speaker of *Towards Democracy* in his prophetic mantle of queer desire and manly love. In the poem "O Child of Uranus" that is included in this section of the text Carpenter celebrated and defined this child of Uranus:

O child of Uranus, wanderer down all times,
 Darkling, from farthest ages of the earth the same
 Strange tender figure, full of grace and pity,
 Yet outcast and misunderstood of men—
 Thy Woman-soul within a Man's form dwelling,
 [Was Adam perchance like this, ere Eve from his side was drawn?]
 So gentle, gracious, dignified, complete,
 With man's strength to perform and pride to suffer without sign,
 And feminine sensitiveness to the last fibre of being;
 Strange twice-born, having entrance to both worlds—
 Loved, loved by either sex,
 And free of all their lore!

I see thee where down all of Time thou comest;
 And women break their alabaster caskets, kiss and anoint thy feet, and
 bless the womb that bare thee,
 While in thy bosom with thee, lip to lip,
 The younger comrade lies.

Lord o the love which rules this changing world,

Passing all partial loves, this one complete—the Mother love and sex-
emotion blended—

I see thee where for centuries thou hast walked,
Lonely the world of men,

Saving, redeeming, drawing all to thee,
Yet outcast, slandered, pointed of the mob,
Misjudged and crucified.

Dear Son of heaven—long suffering wanderer through the wildernesses of
civilisation—

The day draws nigh when from these mists of ages
They form in glory clad shall reappear.
(*Towards Democracy*, 410-11)

“O Childe of Uranus” explicitly advocated a particular vision of the “intermediate sex” pushing forward a messianic and divine vision of male-female duality within the body of the male homosexual. By comparing the feminine male homosexuality as a type of Christ who has been crucified by ignorant civilizations and celebrating the figure as a type of salvific Adam, Carpenter united in this figure not only his own life and discovery of his own sexuality but a type of new selfhood that would promote and enshrine a transhistorical ideal that perpetually reappears with each human generation. Carpenter’s evocation of this transhistorical ideal celebrated the Uranian male as a divine and sacred being, giving special powers to a being who could participate in male and female culture equally, and who could lend his dual nature to the failed civilizations of modernity.

Carpenter’s engagement with social democracy, nascent queer activism, and anti-civilizational critique from the 1860s onward was innately tied to aesthetics and to an aesthetic vision of politics where art, labour, sex and lived-being were intertwined with ideological and spiritual engagement. For Carpenter and other political activists of the period the close ties between aesthetics, politics and spirituality was a commonality—where reading Marx and Engels was intertwined with reading Tolstoy on art, spirituality and religion and texts such as the

Bhagvada gita and the Old and New Testaments, as well as recent translations of the *Quran*. Ruth Livesey writes on the reading habits of Utopian Socialists in the 1880s and 1890s: “The diverse intellectual origins of the socialist movement during this period - the fact that local radical groups might shape their beliefs by reading Ruskin and Emerson, Whitman and Tolstoy as much as (if not more than) Marx and Engels - fostered an audience for whom revolution had both aesthetic and political consequences” (“Morris, Carpenter, Wilde, and the Political Aesthetics of Labor” 603). This tendency exactly follows Carpenter’s own engagement with democratic decadence in the *fin-de-siècle* and the close relation that socialism and spiritualism had in the development of his thought and writing and in the nature of the thematic powers that come to dominate *Towards Democracy* as a key *fin-de-siècle* text.^{xvi}

Describing his trip to India and Ceylon and his meeting with the Indian guru Gñani in *My Days and Dreams* Carpenter recognized the connection between Gñani and Whitman and the way that these two figures helped awaken Carpenter to his work and to the purpose he was fulfilling in the writing of *Towards Democracy*:

After seeing Whitman, the amazing representative of the same spirit in all its voluminous modern unfoldment—seven years before—this visit to the Eastern sage was like getting back to the pure lucid intensely transparent source of some mighty and turbulent stream. It was a returning from West to East, and a completing of the circle of the Earth. (144)

Carpenter’s spiritualism came to infuse *Towards Democracy* and its egalitarian belief in the oneness of humankind. Carpenter, via Whitman and Gñani, came to recognize the unity of Eastern and Western traditions which contributed to the vision of universal liberty that animates the form and style of *Towards Democracy* and as well saturated his prose writings and his development of a potent critique of modern industrial society with its attendant ills and dehumanization.

By the 1890s *Towards Democracy* had gone through several different printings and the contents of the text had continue to change and grow as Carpenter enlarged the spheres of action that the text concerned itself with. The growth of the text and its material relation to *fin-de-siècle* culture was evident to Carpenter and came to a head as Carpenter realized the significance of the Wilde trial and the impact it would have upon his spiritual and emancipatory project. In *My Days and Dreams* Carpenter explicitly relates the significance of the Wilde trial and the seismic change this event generated in the cultural landscape of the period:

The book had now grown to 368 pp., and its price had to be raised from 2s.6d. to 3s.6d.; but its sales actually improved, and for two or three years ranged at about two hundred copies a year. I began to think it was just possible that my little bark would navigate itself, that it would float out on deeper waters and into the world-current; when something disastrous happened which left it in the shallow for quite a few years longer. (194)^{xvii}

With the final publication of *Towards Democracy* in the opening years of the twentieth century Carpenter published a work that functioned at once as a spiritual autobiography, an ideological coming-of-age story, and an experimental hyper-modern epic that recalibrated decadent poetics in the *fin-de-siècle*. In the following section I analyse the meaning of Carpenter's poetics and their significance for modernity.

III. The Poetics of Democratic Decadence

Prefacing Carpenter's 1887 collection of Essays on social subjects *England's Ideal*, the following quotations are printed as good advertising copy to solicit the interest for possible readers of other works by Carpenter:

"Truly 'mystic, wonderful'—like nothing so much as a nightmare after too earnest a study of the Koran!"—Graphic.

"Its plan includes a poetical appeal to the different nationalities of the world, a sketch of the characteristic features of England and English towns, and all kinds of Industrial work,

finally a series of dramatic pictures whose vividness and beauty seem magical.”—
Cambridge Review.

These quotations provide an excellent starting place to understand the ideological and philosophical portent of Carpenter’s development of democratic decadence as a poetic and aesthetic programme.

Carpenter began this collection of essays by providing a revealing vision of how he envisioned the state of England in the late 1880s and the role that poetry would play in the making of a better world:

At the bottom, and behind all the elaborations of economic science, theories of social progress, the changing forms of production, and class warfare, lies to-day the fact that the old ideals of society have become corrupt, and that this corruption has resulted in dishonesty of life. It is this dishonesty of personal life which is becoming the occasion of a new class-war, from whose bloody parturition struggle will arise a new ideal—destined to sway human society for many a thousand years, and to give shape to the forms of its industrial, scientific, and artistic life. (*England’s Ideal*, 1)

Carpenter augmented this pronouncement by expressing that “the Democratic Age will be upheld and presented in the great poetry of Democracy” (1) as the grounding quality that underscored the nature of modern civilization, the class-war endemic to this state of civilization, and, notably, as the origin of the great poetry which will show forth the future of this ideal society. In this essay, written early in the development of *Towards Democracy*, Carpenter implicitly tied the failures of nineteenth-century poetry and poetic modes to the practice of dishonesty and, perhaps unintentionally, he tied poetry, the buying and selling of poetry books, and the labour conditions inherent in the publishing, buying, selling, and sharing of poetry books as enmeshed in this struggle.^{xviii}

Carpenter illustrated the root of this economic and civilizational malaise in an originary tale of confession, asking his reader to speak with him, to call forth from the reader’s interiority the will to castigate the excessive materialistic self: “Let us confess it. What we have all been

trying to do is to live at the expense of other people's labour, without giving an equivalent of our own labour in return." (*England's Ideal* 4). Carpenter came to his audience, much as Jesus of Nazareth castigating the money lenders or the rich with a *fin-de-siècle* socialistic vision of democratic decadence that calls on a new God to replace the Gods of the past, creating a radical severation in the ideological mythology of the *fin-de-siècle* British imagination. Carpenter emphasizes the "honest" voice of his "true" "natural" and non-artificial poetry.

Carpenter advanced a poetics of radical salvation and democratic egalitarian emancipation. For Carpenter this model of poetics embraced a political and aesthetic mandate, fusing political thought and aesthetic philosophy as they united in relation to manual labour and the arts and crafts. *Towards Democracy* attempted to organize this dialogical machine of meaning-making, where productive and liberatory labour can be used by the active and curious reader as a means of political, ideological and aesthetic emancipation—a form of emancipation that would emancipate humankind both materially and spiritually.^{xix} Carpenter attempted to fuse the political and the aesthetic via poetry translating raw experience into a synthesis that was enabled by enlarging the category of the spiritual to include an array of diverse human experiences, beyond simply praying, meditating or communing with specific ideas or visions of deity worship.

Carpenter was joined in his construction of a democratic decadent poetics by William Morris and Walt Whitman, each of whom in different manners, staged a purified un-decadent poetic register that was antagonistic to conformity, urban pollution, industrialism, the mass production of goods, the ravages of mass market society, capitalism, and decadent language, civilization and discourse. Carpenter's use of democratic decadence in particular was marshalled as a direct construction of a theological cult of Uranian mystical spiritualism, uniting Pagan,

Classical and Uranian visions of primitive pre-civilized eternal brotherhood and the construction of a Uranian intersexed messiah as a type of salvific figure capable of reuniting the sexes and healing the corrupt nature, soul and body of civilized man.

Discursively, Carpenter wanted to repudiate the power of the word, as it was contained within artificial prose forms. He emphasized poetry and the development of an ideal self capable of influencing others and via this act of influence to establish a new and better selfhood.^{xx} By conflating prose and poetry Carpenter takes aspects of both genres to initiate a new model of truth. Carpenter's attack on language remakes poetic forms, constructing an experimental work of prose in poetry. This prose-poetry hybrid allowed Carpenter to enact both lyrical and philosophical models of meaning making as well as marshalling the developing power of such fact-making discursive engines as the development of the social sciences in the late-nineteenth century.^{xxi} *Towards Democracy* consolidated prose and poetry into a single double-faced text through this union of genres. By doubting the very nature of prose forms and poetic conventions Carpenter enabled the reader to participate in a twofold vision of language use itself, where the phenomenal artificial universe of argumentation and stylized artistic language is repudiated in favour of the graces that inspiration, non-artifice, and naturalness gave to the empowered, individual's relation to innate models of poetic consciousness. By emphasizing the importance of consciousness as the maker of proper work, and proper civilizations, Carpenter emphasized that consciousness itself must be cleaned of dishonesty, and words, occupations, actions, and sensations themselves must be 'cleansed' in order for the proper apprehension of things, in and of themselves.^{xxii}

Carpenter's development of a poetics of democratic decadence was founded upon honesty and right usage of words, upon the indoctrination of the reading subject to the proper

understanding of the self and the world, and to a spiritual critique of decadent materialism and outmoded forms of hierarchical power relations. In the text of *Towards Democracy* Carpenter developed the text as a medium to construct and then to deploy the poetics of democratic decadence. By attending to a constant engagement with author-reader relations and staging this conversation nakedly in the text, Carpenter developed his poetics of ideological content in the nebulous non-space that this “prose-ing” of poetic forms generated. As *Towards Democracy* navigated this inter-medial space between the genres of prose and poetry, the text allowed itself to document and categorize the real, to invoke and establish the ideal, and to be at once, fact, fiction and a work of non-traditional and prophetic wisdom literature.

In the collection of essays *Art and Creation* (1898) Carpenter at length developed the relation between artifice and corruption and the need for simplicity and natural truth. In this text Carpenter outlines his devotion to Art as a shadowing of an ideal future world, the future Eden to come. Published by John Unwin at the Ruskin house, Carpenter’s collection of essays neatly tied Carpenter’s larger, holistic vision of art, democracy and selfhood with his period, while notably distancing his aesthetic conception of art and its relation to labor in relation to high art, effete aesthetics, and decadent practice as they had blossomed during the pivotal years of the British *fin-de-siècle*.

Quoting Whitman at length, Carpenter developed a particular poetics of “simplicity” that, in the formulation of Carpenter, works against excesses of artifice in order to bestow the pure spirit of being, a spirit that, implicit in the very nature of the world, is best seen in the mirror of the true self, rightly apprehended:

The great poet has less a mark’d style, and is more the channel of thoughts and things without increase or diminution, and is the free channel of himself. He swears to his art, I will not be meddlesome, I will not have in my writing any elegance or effect, or originality, to hang in the way between me and the rest like curtains. I will have nothing

hang in the way, not the richest curtains. What I tell I tell for precisely what it is
What I experience or portray shall go from my composition without a shred of my
composition. You shall stand by my side and look in the mirror with me. (*Art of Creation*
4)

Carpenter emphasizes how good poetry is a “free channel” between the ideal author and the reader whereas bad poetry through its use of “rich curtains” obscures, confuses and denies this “free channel” emphasizing instead “composition” and thus, the over-composition of elaborate and false modern verse forms and false modern modes of artificial poetry. Carpenter, via Whitman, incited the poets of the future Eden to look in the mirror with him, asserting that a sense of pure selfhood will be made available by the great poet, whose style, unobscured by the rich curtains of cloying artifice, will be revealed to the looker. By functioning as the “channel” of “himself” Carpenter and Whitman demanded from the reader, the openness of potential ideological meaning. Carpenter proposed that “selfhood” possessed an ineluctable quality unique unto itself—a quality that is demonstrably missing or over-covered in works that dedicate themselves to “elegance or effect”. Here “originality” stands in as a byword for the baroque excesses of false ideologues, or artists whose work does not deal with such, “pure”, “simple” and naïve spirits as those “channelled” by Carpenter. Rather than seeing the diseased soul of Dorian Gray’s reflection, Dr. Jekyll’s ferocious doppelgänger, Conrad’s perverse imperial other self, or Huysman’s sensually bedecked hero in *Au rebours*, Carpenter’s *fin-de-siècle* creator reveals the naturally good, naturally simple, and naturally true universal self that is hidden beneath the obscuring drapery of civilization and implicitly civilized discourse. The Baudelairian dandy walking, cane in hand, by the Seine and admiring the prostitutes, labourers, sinful hordes, and on-going blight of modernity is effectively surpassed by Carpenter’s development of the new democratic decadent self.

Carpenter's desire to "illuminate" lead the aesthetic receiver of this message to a state beyond the claims of aesthetic sensation, sense impressions, false beauty and aesthetic loveliness. We many understand this process of illumination, that the author-reader relation constructs in Carpenter's text, as acting similarly to the teacher-disciple relation that "played an especially important part in the development of Carpenter" (Copley 3), where for Carpenter the "sadhana or spiritual quest" was deeply involved in the teacher-disciple (*guru-sisya*) relationship.^{xxiii}

As he led the reader beyond the limited claims of decorative, elegant, or obscuring art, Carpenter fashioned a poetics of anti-fashion, a poetics of democratic decadence that is realer and truer than the failed poetics of high decadence. For Carpenter high decadent poetics used words as heralds of malformed knowledge and ideological depravity. By developing his work both generically through its development of "prosetry" and thematically via its construction of the honest, open and daily everyman, Carpenter imbricated *Towards Democracy* in a revaluation of language, writing and art's truth-bearing claims. Through an act of generic impurity Carpenter's prosing of poetry accessed purity and a greater, cleaner, and more innocent relation to facts, to fictions and to the nature of ideological reality. Carpenter's blurring of prose and poetry in his poetic method functioned as a corrective reading of the failures of decadent poetry and the failures of *fin-de-siècle* prose, both of which seem to lack, in Carpenter's conception of truth, truth.^{xxiv} Carpenter's play on prose and poetry accentuated the complex ties between poetic "emotion" and prose "facts" as Carpenter tended to annihilate each of these definitions concerning nineteenth-century generic hierarchies of meaning-making as he pursued a pure and innate channel to "Democracy" via non-corrupt author-reader relations.

In Carpenter's teaching the simplicity of the great poet's spiritual being and intuitive absorption in an illuminated natural will that bridges the gap between the spirit and the material world, the word effectively became inundated by the claims of this holistic spiritual vision, and the competing, cloying, shards of material delusion were swept away by the clarity of "simplicity" itself. Here "simplicity" in its "naturalness" required no particular training. Carpenter's model of aesthetic education was formed in diametrical opposition to the stylized rigour of a Paterian aesthetic education, and Art, in Carpenter's formulation, was effectively "democratized" through its implicit oneness—a oneness that is made accessible to the "witness" by the affective and erotic influence of the great poet himself.

A key dynamic that informs the nature of how *Towards Democracy* functioned as a textual work is the whirling centrifuge of intimacy and domination, of desire, subjection, repulsion, and solicitation that the work goes through in its repeated advances toward the self of the reader. From the opening to the final passages of the text the self of the *fin-de-siècle* reader was constantly asked to participate in the text's act of "self" making. This act of ideological poetics allowed the democratic decadent poetic project of late-nineteenth century thought to absorb both the reader and the author in an unclear game of tactical (and erotic) assimilation. In this uneasy relationship the authorial voice moves back and forth in its concerted attempt to ravish and to illuminate the self of the reader.^{.xxv}

This author-reader relation is staged through a variety of dramatic acts in the text of *Towards Democracy*. The authorial voice of the poem calls on the future children of a new society as if the "I" of the poem's voice was a cause, a committee, or a group in and of itself, just as the voice of "god" in the opening passages of Genesis moves back and forth from Yahweh to Elohim, so the voice of Carpenter that is constructed in *Towards Democracy* moves back and

forth from the corporate, immaterial, and non-geographic mythic voice of the “Self”, the Soul, or Democracy itself, to more personal, intimate and familiar modes of address. the voice appears as the voice of a great cause, demanding participation in a movement towards the future: “Young men and Women, I—though not of myself alone—call you: the time is come” (28). Here the voice of *Towards Democracy* repeatedly asserted that its readers are its children, that as children they must learn and be properly counselled as to the proper way forward to abolish and transform the decadent civilization that they are part of as the idealist democratic utopia is enthroned in the imagination of the *fin-de-siècle* reader.

Carpenter elaborated upon this point of equality, developing this moment in the “Great Garden of Time” where: “Equals we, possessors and enjoyers, ask no more than simply to be. This hour, equal of all others that were or shall be, itself perfect“ (98). Here Carpenter meets the reader free from the burdens of temporal fear and shame, as if, somehow, the spirit of the poem had finally reached a transcendent point of absolute a-temporal power, and from this point of power the voice of the poem welcomed the *fin-de-siècle* reader to sit with it beside the stream of time and see “Eternity passing”:

I welcome you, You are my friends as
good as any, I give you equal places with the rest if not
better for what indeed should I understand if you had not
taught me? (98)

Within this bewildering movement of rhetorical agency the poem constantly used rhetorical manipulation of author-reader relations as a means to stun and overpower the audience. The voice of the poem here at once addressed the moods themselves, and the ideologically vulnerable *fin-de-siècle* reader.

By creating this rich ambiguity of “I” and “you” the voice of *Towards Democracy* moved further inward within the realm of possible authorial subjectivities, initiating the possibility of

overshadowing the speaking/listening voice of the *fin-de-siècle* reader. In this attempt the reader's voice, if fully subsumed within the "audible, inaudible" "channeling" of Carpenter's poetics of purity and ministration, then the *fin-de-siècle* reader would be transformed from a speculative imaginary reader to take the place of the authorial fiction itself, the author-reader binary becoming dissolved in the wake of a variety of possible new author-reader subject-object positions. In the text of *Towards Democracy* this author-reader dynamic ceaselessly moves back and forth through a variety of unique registers and levels of aesthetic, utilitarian, or material interpretive matrices.

Democratic decadent ideological content functioned in this manner in Carpenter's text in order to overpower and reassert modes and models of post-civilizational being, critiquing impure and derivative states of being and impure and derivative models of reading and writing. Here the speculative intimacies proposed by the variety of familial subject positions used as tropes in *Towards Democracy* came the text's richest, and most paralyzing, moment. By conflating a multitude of possible "I's" and "you's" within the enlarged, poetically ratified, and monumental, non-rhymed sentence, the possibility of overpowering and re-modelling subjective ideological structures through grappling with a work such as *Towards Democracy* or Whitman's *Leaves of Grass* becomes more and more likely. Via this act of prose-ing poetry the deconstructed *fin-de-siècle* sentence and "poetic" rhythmic line are re-modelled for the sake of clarity and the "channelling" of pure, non-biased, generalization.^{xxvi}

By deconstructing traditional models of poetry and implementing a new, prose-ing of poetry and a new prosefication of poetic tradition, Carpenter's democratic decadent aesthetics enacted a startling reification and revaluation of author-reader relations and a radical deconstruction of decadent lyric aesthetics. As democratic decadence radically re-envisioned

poetic method it short circuited the authorized codes of traditional authorial poetic practice, instituting a new age and denaturalizing history itself as it was constructed via such central texts of historical poesis as those of Homer, Virgil, or Milton, and the construction of regulated local histories of medieval epic and ballad. Carpenter's modelling of 'free'-verse allowed for a cumulative naming and declamatory gathering of the "uni"—verse into the ostensibly open, free, and liberated or liberal prose-verse line. This prose-verse line vibrates with its ability to extend sensual experience and to document sense-impressions in a "natural" manner that addressed itself to the reader and author's native experience of sensual being. Here "prosetry", via its loosening of traditional verse forms and its renewal of language formations and truth-giving functions, vibrated with an un-decadent approach to nature, god and modernity.^{xxvii}

In *Towards Democracy* discrete local histories are unified within the loosely written, loosely constructed, and loosely all-reaching non-metered freedom of the unending prose-poetry line—a poetic line that was punctuated by exclamatory interpellations maximizing the "extension", "reach" and generalized breadth of its monumental categorical nomenclature. The opening of occult market forces helped initiate this linguistic interchange between the economic and the mythic as conjoined twins and dynamic author-reader lovers. With the rise of journalism and the mass publishing of popular neo-scientific works in the nineteenth century the book market had radically increased the sheer usage of language and the cataloguing, defining and analysis of vast arrays of human and non-human life in the nineteenth century. *Towards Democracy*, through its use of the long prose-poetry verse line, combined the imperial powers of prose with the sacred or vatic powers of poetry. Carpenter's poetics of democratic decadence embraced this newly emerging free market of nearly infinite exchange in what would be the dominant economic forms of the period. In its unbridled a-historical modernism, Carpenter and

Whitman's modelling of open poetic forms and unbridled freedom contributed to an assimilative and imperial vision of non-local historical orders—universalizing the local, glossing virtual prosefication upon affective poetic sentimentality and abandoning complex histories of unique, complex and highly artificial verse forms in favour of an honest, natural, and simple poetics of real words, democratic equality and global expansion—one of the central contradictions of the democratic decadent aesthetic project.

Carpenter gestured toward this all-illuminating poetics of interpellation and interpretation in his “A Note”—the brief essay preceding *Towards Democracy*:

The whole of “Towards Democracy is an endeavour to give it utterance; any mere single sentence, or direct definition, would be of no use—rather indeed would tend to obscure by limiting. All I can say is that there seems to be a vision possible to man, as from some more universal standpoint, *free from the obscurity and localism* which especially connect themselves with the passing clouds of desire, fear, and all ordinary thought and emotion; in that sense another and separate faculty; and as vision always means a sense of light, so here is a sense of inward light, unconnected of course with the mortal eye, but bringing to the eye of the mind the impression that it *sees*, and by means of a medium which washes as it were the interior surfaces of all objects and things and persons—how can I express it?—and yet this most defective, for the sense is a sense that one is those objects and things and persons that one perceives, (and even that one is the whole universe,)—a sense in which sight and touch and hearing are all fused in identity. (xxi)

By explicitly constructing a poetics based on an attack of “obscurity and localism” Carpenter conjoined his authorial mandate to the rampant universalism of the democratic decadent cultural mission—a mission that radically instantiated a re-writing and overcoming of local or obscure cultures—where the great voice of democratic decadent will enlisted any and all to its all-consuming poetics of egalitarian openness.

Just as Carpenter's tortured thought fights through a re-spelling of Wordsworth's thoughts from the Preface to *Lyrical Ballads* and a radical re-thinking of Descartes manipulation of discourse concerning the subject-object paradox, he at once surpasses “locality” and ties locality as being inextricably vulgarized by the failure of “obscurity”. Carpenter ‘located’ in the

generative poetics of the making of *Towards Democracy* the immanent will to assert a vast unifying oneness between the “I”, the “you” and the world *in extremis*. Carpenter thus defined and deployed the un-decadent will to consolidate meaning-generation. In this way *Towards Democracy* functioned as an initiation text that detailed Carpenter’s realization of democratic decadent ideals and the means through which democratic decadent ideals could overwrite and author anew composite world systems of economic, racial, and sexual obscurity.

Carpenter united the process of composing or being composed by *Towards Democracy* with the unitive act as the process of composing *Towards Democracy* aligned the word with its naturally aligned material other, the tangible and universally available phenomenal totality. By denying the poetics of obscurity as an outgrowth of artifice and embellished vulgar “worldliness” the spiritual right to name then emanated from the poetic un-decadent will and asserted a global, and universal, unicity of content with history, time, and the occult or hidden forces of the world-spirit. Carpenter’s defining of an exploratory, expansive poetics provides a radical justification for the corporeal and geographic invasions staged in *Towards Democracy* and that Whitman utilized to provide reach and global dynamism in *Leaves of Grass*. This audacious global act in its frenetic desire to reach accord and unison with “all objects and things and persons” “washes them” and thereby transmutes the world, as it were, into not just the self, but into an even stricter liberal economy of selfhood and of shared universal “identity”. By uniting these modes of late-nineteenth-century discourse *Towards Democracy* unified the radical critique of failed material conditions that Engels and Marx (et al) proposed for the European *fin-de-siècle* with the cosmic oneness, oriental mystique, and sacrificial immanence of Krishna’s sermon on the battlefield in the *Bhagvada Gita*.^{xxviii} By “channeling” radical material critique and immanent/transcendent mythologies of the New England Brahmin elect and of the late-nineteenth-century English

orientalist's obsession with the Ancient Indian Sage *Towards Democracy's* shifting erotic field of discourse managed to wound and penetrate the "receiver" of the "teaching"—creating a troubling and fascinating play on the traditional Hindu guru-devotee relationship.^{xxix}

By existing at such a point of dogmatic generalization in its use of words, Carpenter's text synthesized deviation within the complex erotic interpenetrations of the ["I" : "you"] contract. This species of fictive contract that through Carpenter's attack on the "dramatic" is revealed in its non-allegorical "reality". Carpenter in explaining the use of the sign "I" directly attacked any conception of a reading that would substitute Carpenter for a managed "actor" who like one of Browning's fictive personalities is being used by Carpenter as the "speaker" to stage different sets in each section of the poem. In the following passage Carpenter defined the "I" of

Towards Democracy:

That the word is not used in the dramatic sense is all I can say. The "I" is myself as well as I could find words to express myself: but what that Self is, and what its limits may be; and therefore what the self of any other person is and what its limits may be—I cannot tell." (xxii).

By making such a strong attempt to legislate and monopolize the making (and naming) of the real, Carpenter's use of intimacy as a means to obliterate the "staged" nature of most *fin-de-siècle* discourse is notable for the enthronement of personality that occurs to both the reader and the listener/reciter.

The master logic of the authorial voice in *Towards Democracy* was engaged in a subtle combinatory logic where there is always a term missing, the one term is never defined and within this looping prison of reading and writing the reader could become the writer, the text could become the father or the mother and the natural orders of terms, with an insistently present, geographically and historically locatable authorial fiction, is disrupted. In this lush interpenetrative site of enfoldment the spiritualizing influences at work since the first "gestation"

of Carpenter's opus is manifold in its iteration of the author-reader relational logic. By avoiding a manageable allegorical fantasy or a fixed "dramatic" scenario, *Towards Democracy* continually evades the naturalization of realism, of civilized discourse, and of the attendant naturalness that can go into the reading, writing, re-writing, reciting, or performing of the poetic text within the receptive subjective mind. Where Swinburne's *Poems and Ballads* would repel the High Victorian poetry-reading public with its excesses of sensuality, sexuality, and moral chaos and its excessive rhythms, lubricious phrasings and soundscapes, Carpenter's text presented a radical and violent break with the fictive certainties of presentation and author-reader dynamics, providing yet another seismic shock wave to the cultural landscape of the *fin-de-siècle*.

Carpenter's development of *fin-de-siècle* poetics was ultimately built to redefine and educate the *fin-de-siècle* reader. In the next section I will define what the democratic decadent future self was.

IV. *Towards Democracy* and the Future Self

Democratic decadence in the late nineteenth century emerged from a variety of cultural sources to shape and define the form and content of *Towards Democracy*. In the following section I develop a catalogue of the cultural origins that Carpenter drew from in his construction of the text. I then develop several of the key aspects of democratic decadence as these aspects help model and create a particular conceptual model of the future self.

Democratic decadence emerged from its relation to several key social and cultural movements and influences: it emerged from its relation to Uranism and theorization of male-male sexuality in the *fin-de-siècle*; xxx it emerged from its relation to the spirit of Social Democracy and the rise of Anarcho-Communism in the European *fin-de-siècle*, it emerged from

its relation to the writings of Walt Whitman and the ethos of brotherly love, human fellowship and egalitarian idealism and it emerged from the relation to India and Indian theology, philosophy and spiritual traditions. Perhaps most significantly, *Towards Democracy* emerged from the critique of modern industrialization as chronicled by such influential figures of the period as Friedrich Engels and his *Condition of The Working Class in England* (1849) and critiques of modern economics such as John Ruskin's *Unto This Last* (1849). Both of these texts influenced *Toward Democracy* in its critique of capital, value and labour market conditions.

Each of these aesthetic and ideological waves influenced Carpenter in his construction of *Towards Democracy* and each plays a central role in the thematic structures that organize the text. Each of these forces is not treated individually in the text but rather they are twined together as an intricate set of motifs that circle and turn about the central melodic theme, that of the journey of the self from the degenerate and depraved modern civilizational self to a new and liberated self.

For Carpenter the journey towards this liberated self did not concern a single psychological modern ego, individuated and separate from the mass but a revitalization of the mass itself, of the collective as a spiritualized organism distinct from the depraved and decadent urban elites of bourgeois civilization. The journey that Carpenter enacted in *Towards Democracy* was a movement back to a primitive state of equality and aesthetic originality--a state that Carpenter envisioned of primitive natural, and non-artificial man.^{xxxvi} *Towards Democracy* as a text attempted to organize and inscribe upon the mind of the *fin-de-siècle* reader a mode of aesthetic education that would liberate the self from illusionary needs and degrading psychological and societal constructs and awake the soul to its shared experience of universal spirit, a shared sense of immanent well-being that all beings shared with each other in a perpetual

future and that modern civilization had obscured. Carpenter gestured towards the nature of this spirit and how it formed the writing of the text.

The opening passages of *Towards Democracy* may be seen as the ending as well, for the voice that speaks in what would become the finalized version of the text presents a voice and a mission that is fully completed, even in the opening lines. The opening lines of the first section makes this clear: “Freedom at last! / Long sought, long prayed for—ages and ages long;” (3) here we are placed in a parallel moment, the voice speaking announcing the end of ‘our’ journey as if by simply opening the page we have completed our life’s work and that, by the mere act of coming into contact with this book, we have been lead into a new consciousness: a “mirror of the world” that Carpenter cleans and presents to us. Through this act of “writing” Carpenter translates the inner sense of the unfolding world without mediation or tutelage of the gods: “These things I, writing, translate for you—I wipe a mirror and place it in your hands.” (3). As part of this announcement Carpenter brings us beyond the course reality of the everyday and into a prophetic state of reading where “Civilization sinks and swims” and where the “earth-children”: “naked, with mad dance and song, / the earth-children address themselves to love;” (3-4).

In this dreamland of prophecy and self-overcoming the spirit voice of Carpenter (or the soft yet commanding voice of Democracy) revealed itself to the *fin-de-siècle* reader as a being transformed, and transformative: “I arise out of the dewy night and shake my wings, / Tears and lamentations are no more. Life and Death / Lie stretched below me. I breathe the sweet aether blowing out of the breath of God” (4). The voice of the poems here articulates its divinity, sharing the breath of the God, *Towards Democracy* commences its summons to the reader, its invitation, by promising celestial transport and transfiguration of suffering. The voice says

routinely of what it conceives, what, in a play on words, it promises to give birth to for the reader and for the writer, attempting to unify in the place of the divinely inspired prophet/writer the role of the reader, and to unite in itself the suffering of the “earth” universalizing “men and women” for the life of the future.

The voice proclaims its justice, emphasizing that “All is well: to-day and a million years hence, equally. / To you the whole universe is given for a garden of delight / and tho the sound that loves, in the great coherent Whole, the / hardest and most despised lot is even with the best; and there is nothing more certain or more solid than this” (5). Here as the voice of the poem reaches its most theologically portentous, and generally Christian in its rhetoric, the language becomes the least measured, prose overtaking poetry, the language of the poet/messiah fragmenting into a sampling of sermons from the period: the apocryphal dream-vision giving way to a justification of being as it is.

At moments such as this one within the text the voice of the poem capsizes in its own excess, the violence of its universality becoming drowned out by the generality and tacit emptiness of its assertions, just as the journey has already taken place and the poems are essentially “revealed” as being given to “us” as answer to our “enslavement”.

The *fin-de-siècle* poet-reader/socialist revolutionary is being taught by Carpenter and the phantom-voice of Carpenter’s authorial persona how to participate in an ecstatic and joyous transfiguration of the reader’s sexual, sensual, and economic self-hood. The voice of Carpenter calls out “Joy!”, “Freedom!” or “O laughter! laughter! laughter!” (4) implicating the reader in an Althusserian hailing, of the ideological subject, implicating the reader to believe and act as the voice of the poem commands, emphasizing in its excess of pronouncement the frailty of this language, the excessive use of the general and of the flushed vigor of its naïve optimism. The

text betrays its opposite: the negative or shadow-image of the proclamatory voice echoing in the reader's ear, the diminishing structural form of the language in the poem imperilling its own call to universal harmony and absolute, egalitarian *jouissance*.

As the voice moves further along, the introductory passages further hint as to the mask that the voice of *Towards Democracy* wears. Carpenter and the shadow voice of Carpenter's poetic persona moves back and forth in terms of shrillness, generality, geographic specificity and mythological reach. To bind the reader to the summits of its vision the voice of the text attempts to pinpoint the placement of the reader within a sexualized discursive dialectic of intimacy and authority—the monumental landscape undulating between the epic saga of history to the intimate diseases of the mind, the ethos of rendering the world through its use of language and the long line encumbers the opening passages of the poem with the threat of failure, of blindness to the meanings of words, and to the emptiness of rhetoric dismantling the urgency of the call to “Freedom”. To further bind the reader to the making will of the apostolic and evangelic voice, the voice of the text attempts union with the reader, emphasizing the sexual and sensual interrelation that it urges us to partake of in our reading, and, strangely as well, to be mastered by. This struggle mutates between the act of sex and the act of parenthood, placing the reader as the voice's child: “I, Nature, stand and call to you though you heed not: Have courage, come forth, O child of mine, that you may see me.” (7). The voice of the text in this passage entreats the reader to be the victim of the voice's power and thereby to surrender to the feeling of awe, adulation, and supremacy that the vision begets:

O shame! Shame! I fling you away from me (you shall not know that I love you). Unworthy! I strike you across the face; does the blood mount to your cheek now? my glove rings at your feet: I dare you to personal combat.
Will you come forth? Will you do the daring deed? Will you strip yourself naked as you came into the world, and

come before me, and regard unafraid the flashing of my
sword? Will you lose your life, to Me?
O child of mine! (7)

The alternating current of dominance and submission that the dialectical network of the text constructs moves to deliver the reader to a point of bewilderment as the poem alternates between acceptance and exile; the offerings that the soul gives through its invasions of the world where it possesses the “offerings of all pleasures, for- / bidden and unforbidden; from all created things” (9). By offering the antinomian as the ultimate mastery of the soul’s benediction for the self, the poem’s voice elicits unity in the face of dualism; attempting to marshal the ultimate unity that comes in “The Arisen and mighty soul of Man” (12). Here a unifying imperial world spirit unites the world’s peoples through its “audible inaudible voice through all times; the spirit / whose eyes are heavy with gazing out over the immense / world of MAN!” (12). In the overcapitalized and overburdened sign “MAN” the poetic line drowns itself in its sheer excess of signification, Democracy’s tool: “MAN” completed in its own excess of naming.

As the opening passages move into such tenuous and over-simplified, grandiloquent gestures of monumentality the world’s peoples, histories, and mythologies are united together “The nations of the old and of the new worlds!” (13)— as the “germ of Democracy” emerges from “the divine East” out into the world of “Arabia! Peerless in dignity, eternal in manhood of / love and war” and on through Kokan, Kamschatcka, the Arctic Sea, to Norway, Italy, Greece, Belgium, Demark, Ireland, and on to “the wild races of Africa” and the Greenlander, the Malay, the Papuan, and the Australian. by the power of the exclamation to ground reality in the exquisite excess of its own finality “As surely as Niagara has relations to Erie and Ontario” (15). Thus “Freedom!” and “Joy!” through the voices imperial mandate attempts to net together the moral,

sensual, and sexual subjectivity of the reader/co-author with the globalized vision of a humanity articulated by the grossly monumental “MAN!” and the voice of Democracy.

Early in the text Carpenter unites Democracy, erotic masculine desire, brotherly love, the unity of the world’s peoples and erotic exultation into a raw scene of inter-racial coupling as Carpenter sees the new vision of ‘Democracy’ in a short allegorical vision:

O disrespectable Democracy! I love you. No white angelic spirit are you no, but a black and horned Ethiopian—your great grinning lips and teeth and powerful brow and huge limbs please me well.

Where you go about the garden there are great footmarks and an uncanny smell; the borders are trampled and I see where you have lain and rolled in a great bed of lilies, bruising the sweetness from them.

I follow you far afield and into the untrodden woods, and ther remote from man you disclose yourself to me, goat-footed and sitting on a rock—as the the Athenian runner of old.

You fill me with visions and when the night comes I see the forests upon your flanks and your horns among the stars. I climb upon you and fulfill my desire. (19)

In this remarkable scene the voice of the poem pursues its journey to Democracy through an erotic coupling with the black, primitive and savage African soul, in whom the true spirit of “Democracy” now exists. In this scene Carpenter unites his erotic desire for the male, his love of Democracy, his interest in the sharing of culture, and a realization that European modern culture as it has come to exist has shamed and destroyed the original nature of man. So the voice of the text asks England if its illusions and false conventions can protect it from the truth: “England!

For good or evil it is useless to attempt to conceal yourself—I know you too well.”:

I am the very devil. I will tear your veils off, your false shows and pride I will trail in the dust—you shall be utterly naked before me, in your beauty and in your shame.

For who better than I should know your rottenness, your self-deceit, your delusion, your hideous grinning corpse-chattering death-in-life business at top? (and who better than I the wonderful hidden sources of your strength beneath?)

Deceive yourself no longer. (21)

Holbrook Jackson recognized the similarities between Carpenter and Nietzsche in the fervent absoluteness of their spiritual mandates and their lack of concern regarding the common

conventions of modern European society, a central aspect that informed Carpenter's construction of the un-decadent will and a key aspect of the journey that the pre- and then post-decadent self must undertake if it is to rid itself of the decay and drugged languor that modern industrial society has reduced it to. Through the ravages of mass industrialization and depersonalization. Jackson states: "Just as Nietzsche anticipates the passing of man and the coming of some stronger individual force, so Carpenter anticipates the passing of the era of civilisation and the substitution of an era that will combine the tonic wildness of barbaric peoples with the exalted ethics of communal life" (*All Manner of Folk* 124).

Midway through the text of *Towards Democracy* Carpenter announces his vision of a new life arisen from the misery, destitution and falsehood of civilization as it stands in the present. Carpenter sees this new form of life as arising from a multitude of false states of being, each tied, ineluctably, to the madness of the market as it exists in the present state:

Slowly out of the ruins of the past—like a young fern-
Fronde uncurling out of its own brown litter—
Out of the litter of a decaying society, out of the con-
fused mass of broken down creeds, customs, ideals,
Out of distrust and unbelief and dishonesty, and Fear;
meanest of all (the stronger in the panic trampling
the weaker underfoot;
Out of miserable rows of brick tenements with their
Cheapjack interiors, their glances of suspicion, and doors
locked against each other;
Out of the polite residences of congested idleness; out of
the aimless life of wealth;
Out of the dirty workshops of evil work, evilly done;
Out of the wares which are no wares poured out upon
the markets, and in the shop-windows;
The fraudulent food, clothing, drink, literature;
Out of the cant of Commerce—buying cheap and selling
dear—the crocodile sympathy of nation with nation,
The smug merchant posing as a benefactor of his kind,
the parasite parsons and scientists;
The cant of Sex, the impure hush clouding the deepest
Instincts of boy and girl, woman and man:

The despair and unbelief possessing all society—rich and poor, educated and ignorant: the money-lender, the wage-slave, the artist and the washerwoman like;

All feeling the terrible pleasure and tension of the modern problem:

Out of the litter and muck of a decaying world,

Lo! Even so!

I saw a new life arise. (260)

Here, at the centre of *Towards Democracy* in the section entitled “After Civilization” we are given the brunt of Carpenter’s mission in writing *Towards Democracy*, both in terms of style and in the thematic impetus that rages with the usage of the long lines and the usage of the list as a means of organizing and discharging his message. Through the usage of the long line Carpenter is able to invade and organize long passages of thought, passages of thought that are envisioned to continue past the speaking of the line. The list form in its assimilative and factual nature, names and journalistically inscribes the named object as a means of counting and affixing regulated meaning upon disparate source materials, yoking together like and unlike into a singular aesthetic and ideological utterance.

In this passage the complex ties between the market, sex, labour, right living, and falsehood are emphasized as each quality of “modern life” is tied to each. While Carpenter exulted in the universal he also tied the emotionality and sexuality of the individual consciousness to its own lived-experience, existentially, psychologically, and economically, rooting the trading of literatures with these with the making of “false” products and “false” living conditions. Again the text emphasized the importance of “honesty” as the ideal state of “real” and “natural” life, which would, concomitantly allow for the rightful experience of life itself.

Carrying on a Ruskinian tradition of equating shoddy work and shoddy living conditions as the creator of both economic and psychological ugliness, Carpenter attempted to radically tie together, the economic and the poetic, articulating a dream-vision to institutionalize and ratify

his litany of horrors. This passage is initiated by a romantic retreat from the horrors of civilization by Carpenter visiting “great woods” where through the act of “wandering” in the “great silent white woods” and contemplating their “beauty and majesty” he, and his reader, are allowed to participate in the possibility of touching on the poetic transcendent, a distinctly Romantic vision of transcendental inspiration, and a state of consciousness that permitted the reader and author to reach beyond the sordid details of the everyday and discover the occult linkages that tie together the economic, psychological, psycho-sexual, and aesthetic selves of the modern subject..

As “After Civilization” reached its summation in the latter stages of the poem Carpenter presents the image of what this “new life” will be, and how, by repudiating “civilization” the individual and collective will of the diseased *fin-de-siècle* spirit may reach “calmness”, equipoise, and ultimately, the immortality that is bestowed upon the self as it entered into a new “contract” with Nature. Carpenter instituted an arch-Romantic mythological dream of “Plentiful common halls stored with the products of / Art and History and Science” that existed “to supplement the simple household accommodations” where “The sweet and necessary labour of the day” creates a life of “exhilarated radiant life” (262). Here true democratic labour was possible and the sensual body would be thus restored to its naïve, beatific and primitive origins. Via this labour the body of the corporate self partakes of “the daily bath in natural running waters” (262). Carpenter used art as labour to sanctify and redeem the human spirit drawing on the critiques of cultural malaise propagated by *fin-de-siècle* democratic decadent idealists such as Whitman and William Morris in order to organize and notate the democratic decadent mission. In the poems of the section entitled “After Civilization” the self reaches a point of complete sovereignty, equanimity and Edenic gentleness—where all of history may be contained in the

harmoniously balanced universal self that has become enabled by the etherealizing of the material and the return to “Nature”:

Civilisation behind him now—the wonderful stretch of
the past:
Continents, empires, religions, wars, migrations—all gathered up in him;
The immense knowledge; the vast winged powers—to use
or not to use—
He comparatively indifferent,, passing on to other spheres
of interest.
The calm which falls after long strife; the dignity of
rest after toil;
Hercules, his twelve labours done, sitting as a god on the
great slope of Olympus.
Looking out over the Earth, on which he was once a
mortal. (262)

At this overlook of earthly life the future self gathers up all of that which has come before and becomes immortal through the power of the democratic decadent aesthetic will. By naming and re-naming the earth and its contents the hero-savior of the democratic decadent theological condition remakes the world and returns it to its originary condition—a condition where death itself could be imagined as a construct of a decayed and corrosive concept of civilizational being. Carpenter’s unique mutation of this conceit lies in how the text of *Towards Democracy* attempted to bequeath to the reader this imagined state of non-mortal exceptionalism, via an act of logic and self-identification rather than through rapture or other more rarefied or complex aesthetic states.^{xxxii}

Towards Democracy imagined a conceptual vision of the democratic decadent self that is excessive in its metaphorical and logical reach, pushing further and further against the conceptual framework and moral codes of late-Victorian existence as Carpenter understood them. Carpenter’s excessive modeling of democratic decadent ideals leads inevitably to the limited possibility of this vision reaching a wide public, and certainly not the wide, common, and

equal public that *Towards Democracy* envisioned as its ideal reader and authorial subject. As well, the text of this poetry book required such a profound engagement by the reader that it engineered its own ends. Combining this complexity and requirement for readerly engagement with its organization of its ideas around a concept of ‘democracy’ the text delimits the very reach and possible immortality that Carpenter evidently desires for the text and its civilizational message. This discussion naturally leads to the end and legacy of *Towards Democracy* and what the text means today. I will discuss these issues in the following section.

5. The End of Democratic Decadence

Ernest Crosby prefaced his 1901 work *Edward Carpenter: Poet and Prophet* with the following quotation:

He who beholds all beings in the Self, and the Self in all beings, he never turns away from it.

When to a man who understands, the Self has become all things, what sorrow, what trouble can there be to him who once beheld that unity? – *Vagasaneyi-Samhita-Upanishad*, 6-7. (iii)

By prefacing his discussion of Carpenter with a quote from the *Vagasaneyi-Samhita-Upanishad* Crosby notates for the future reader of Carpenter the significance of Carpenter’s thought within an ancient line of wisdom literature that emerges from that most ancient and mysterious of lands, the oriental Victorian ideal of a mystical India. Crosby attempts to guarantee and promote Carpenter’s critique of western civilization by underscoring that Carpenter is unlike the rest of us and has been able to find enlightenment in the pre-industrial, and Edenic Orient. Crosby’s quotation emphasizes the way that eastern mysticism as a cultural movement in Britain and Europe in the *fin-de-siècle* could guarantee ideas of wisdom, truth, the natural, the good, and the simple, as opposed to the decadent, the luxurious, and the artificial.

Crosby follows this quotation with an introduction of Edward Carpenter to his twentieth-century audience as a gentle prophet of the soul who is largely unknown to the *fin-de-siècle* literary marketplace:

One hallmark of the prophet he emphatically has: he is without honor in his own country; for the high measure of fame which he enjoys among a few choice souls, wo would generally be classed as cranks, could hardly be called honor in the acceptance of the bookmongers of the day. (1)

Crosby's explication of Carpenter's path to poetry and prophecy and his character and way of living deserves to be quoted in full:

Carpenter is a lecturer, too, as well as an author and poet, but dukes do not take the chair when he appears on the platform, nor does "society" throng him. He is rather to be found talking in dimly lighted rooms to a score or two of workingmen.

Yet the world had every reason to give Carpenter a good reception. He was a Brahmin of the Brahmins, born in easy circumstances at Brighton, in 1844, educated at Cambridge, a fellow of his college, and for some time curate under Frederick Denison Maurice. But he soon threw up his fellowship and relinquished orders, devoting himself to the duties of a university extension lecturer on science and music. Leaves of Grass made a profound impression upon him, and in 1877, and again in 1884, he made pilgrimages to the home of Walt Whitman, at Camden, New Jersey, finding the poet still greater than his works. Overcome with disgust for the civilization which hedged him in from the mass of his fellowmen, and falling in love with the classes that do the hard work of the world, Carpenter went in 1881 to share a laborer's cottage near Sheffield, and to work with him in the fields. There he lives still, passing a part of the year with a mechanic in the neighboring city, where he has built up a considerable business in the manufacture of sandals, of which I shall have more to say hereafter. Meanwhile he writes poetry and prose and lectures on matters social and economic. In short, Carpenter loves his neighbor in deed as well as in word, and has of necessity ceased to be respectable. His so-called college "fellowship" was reputable, and from that post his writings might have reached polite society (as Ruskin's did), the fellow of Yorkshire farm and factory hands! How could the world be expected to listen to such a man? (2-3)

Crosby's portrayal of Carpenter's love of the common man and his life among them cuts straight to the complex social and cultural divisions that Carpenter organized within the text of *Towards Democracy* and the vision of egalitarian association and post-class, post-caste consciousness that Carpenter's text gestures to, even if it is unable to escape the historically over-determined hierarchies that were a fundamental aspect of the late-Victorian social and psychological totality.

As a righteous and compassionate advocate of the aesthetic ideology of democratic decadence Carpenter's mission, with all of its manifest contradictions, are delightfully hinted at in Crosby's portrait.

The future of *Towards Democracy* would remain, as Crosby portrayed it, as a text that circulated in small circles of “cranks” including artists, intellectuals, free-thinkers, occultists, progressives and spiritualists—from D.H Lawrence to Mahatma Gandhi and Prince Alexandrei Kropotkin the writings of Carpenter made their way and helped organize the thought and consciousness of twentieth-century discourse and aesthetic ideology concerning the evils of modern civilization, the perils of industrialism, the significance of human spirituality, and the possibility of liberated sexual and gender ideas. Carpenter's poetry in *Towards Democracy* proclaimed the naturalness of human being in body and sex, and the right to this natural state of being.^{xxxiii} However this advocacy of naturalness and essential being was also tied to an over-determined usage of ‘democracy’ as the standard-bearer of this health-giving project.

As a text for studying late-Victorian idea-systems *Towards Democracy* provides a key nexus for the comprehension of discursive power, poetics and theories of the self in the *fin-de-siècle*. As a herald of the democratic decadent movement and the un-decadent will *Towards Democracy* instantiates a progressive, overarching, and universal vision of the self that attempts to re-organize not only economic systems but systems of power within gender relations and within idea-systems concerning empire, the orient, and non-nation-state identity. The “prosetry” of the style that *Towards Democracy* used both accentuates the ideological and the evangelical nature of the text. The nature of this prosetry and of its aesthetic affects delimits this type of writing as non-impressionistic and as abandoning many of the key aspects that poetry historically preserved such as associating poetry with meter, rhyme, song, music and formal complexity. The

grandiloquence of Carpenter's work suffers from its near copying of Whitman's style and *Towards Democracy* radiates a close affinity to the Whitmanian project both in its largesse of political ideas and in its rhetorical use of prose as a means to unite ideas and feelings.

The generic and discursive power of this modeling of free verse should not be underestimated, and in particular, the war between verse and prose that had been decidedly won by the early twentieth century in favour of prose for nearly every type of language-use. Where prose had become associated with truth, poetry lagged far behind as it rapidly lost place to the modern novel in terms of its credibility as a medium of imagination as well.

Towards Democracy's model of true and honest conversation with the reader's mind, and in many ways directly with the reader's soul, was a foundational aspect of its ideological and aesthetic pedagogy.^{xxxiv} By staging the text in such a direct and autobiographical manner Carpenter sidestepped the complexity of style and art and insisted that naked, frontal address is the best means to impart knowledge and wisdom. Carpenter's use of wisdom-literature as a guide to composition provided one of the great contradictions of *Towards Democracy* as a literary project. *Towards Democracy* tended to destroy itself through its own honesty. By insisting upon its own honesty and upon the practicality of its vision of radicalized being it undermined the possibility of allusion, of metaphor and of more subtle modes of aesthetic form. Democratic decadence in its political and raw ideological honesty and simplicity has a distinct distrust of more complex emotional states—a distrust of all complex emotional and aesthetic states that do not neatly resolve into utopian visions of pre-industrial man or salvific images of an idealized universal Uranian messiah. The prose of Carpenter's project did not necessarily promote an actually engaged aesthetic experience relying primarily upon itself as a sort of all-knowing philosophical handbook that would inform and educate the *fin-de-siècle* reader as to the proper

use of their lives and how society should be organized rather than devoting itself to art as a mode of contemplation or rapture. In this case democratic decadence abhorred the falsehoods and complex ironies and non-true nature of artificial aesthetic experience in favour of the immediacy that is possible to achieve through affirmation, realization, epiphany and revelation. Here democratic decadence emphasized a poetics of knowledge-making and of ideological ultimacy as opposed to any type of mental or aesthetic state that is centered around the non-political, the purely expressive, or the complex interiorities of the modern, historically varied, and complex ultramodern subject.

Carpenter's text excelled in its ability to condition the reader to accept the claims of the speaker. It is very difficult to have the aesthetic experience of the text without a basic acceptance that Carpenter is at least largely engaging the reader in a natural, honest, and non-artificial mode of simplicity and 'openness'. The speaker of *Towards Democracy* repudiated the false visions of non-transformative aesthetic experience, emphasizing the philosophical and the political as prose's primary aesthetic subjects, but distancing itself from other, sharper, stranger, or more complex psychological or aesthetic states.

By radically chaining the *fin-de-siècle* reader to a programmatic and ideological vision of aesthetic being, democratic decadence emphasized naked, absolute, and all-penetrating spirituality. This vision of human uniformity is opposed to a more subtle, careful, or nuanced vision of poetry as well as creating a type of mono-reading experience that radically delimits what poetry is and how it can be used. Carpenter's use of prose in *Towards Democracy* short circuited a more complex history of poetry, verse and verse forms in favour of a new, bright and ultramodern mysticism of democratic openness, simplicity and absolute human likeness. By galvanizing "democracy" with a spiritual necessity Carpenter's text finally came to serve a de-

natured, abstract, and unreal idea-system that was not innately tied to ethical conduct or to ethical modes of governance. By assigning his life's great poetic work to the idea of democracy, Carpenter limited the rich, potent and strange strains of his own exploration of the human and the human condition to a particular vision of democratic decadence, where "democracy" as the great natural order must come and free the modern subject from its enslaved civilizational condition.

Chapter Three

John Davidson, the Muscular Decadent

I. John Davidson and Muscular Decadence

In 1909 John Davidson, a British poet, intellectual, novelist and critic, committed suicide. John Davidson's writing represents a potent strain in the *fin-de-siècle* that responded to modernity and to discourse surrounding decadent writing. Davidson proposed a viral, violent and radical philosophy via his poetic works. Writing in the opening years of the twentieth century John Davidson began a series of "Testaments" each of which pushed forward different facets of a singular, and singularly violent, attack on spiritual or conventional models of behaviour, ideology, and types of civilizational order. At the time of Davidson's death in 1909 he had completed five of these *Testaments*. The fifth, was given the author's name: *The Testament of John Davidson*. This final *Testament* was published in 1908 and the first four were published in the seven previous years in the following order: *The Testament of a Vivisector* (1901), *The Testament of a Man Forbid* (1901), *The Testament of an Empire-Builder* (1902), and *The Testament of a Prime Minister* (1904). In this chapter I examine the metaphorical structure that underlies the *Testaments* by arranging their ideological and symbolic contents in relation to Davidson's work as an author in the *fin-de-siècle* and I will consider how Davidson's work and thought helps illuminate the complex crisis of values that muscular decadence represents for the period.

A now largely obscure and highly fraught work that epitomizes the conflict-ridden existence of the British *fin-de-siècle* poetry book, John Davidson's *Testament of John Davidson* provides an emblematic portrait of the late-nineteenth century and the turn of the twentieth

century poetic *spiritus mundi* with a fitting, monumental conclusion. In this work is contained a snapshot of muscular decadence in its contradictory nature. This poetry work, that has largely been ignored or denigrated by critics and the larger poetry reading public in the years since its publication, provides a self-portrait of the artist as failure and the complex struggles which the *fin-de-siècle* poet experienced in the production of literary works, and especially of highly mannered, self-conscious poetry books. Davidson's development of English blank verse as the hallmark form for his development of muscular-decadent poetics emphasizes the significance that generic forms had in relation to Davidson's critique of modern civilization and how Davidson's vision of muscular decadence was intended to serve as the antidote for the ills of a weak and degenerate civilization.

In this chapter I examine the following key points: the development of Davidson's thought and his path to muscular decadence; the history of muscular decadent thought in the nineteenth century and in particular the emergence of the great 'I' in relation to Davidson's poetics; the construction of Davidson theory of poetry based on a hierarchy of generic forms and the elaboration of a poetics of strength, power and sovereignty; and the ideological contradictions the manipulations of the author reader contract within the text. To do this work I first develop a history and teleology of muscular decadence in order to situate Davidson and the *Testament of John Davidson* within the broader context. I then embed Davidson's life and work in relation to the cultural and biographical forces that informed his development as a writer and in particular to his relation to muscular decadence and in relation to the market forces that influenced Davidson's poetic development. I finally attend to a close reading of *The Testament of John Davidson* and highlight how the text functions as a symbiotic text fusing muscular decadent aesthetic ideology, biographical content and poetic form.

In this chapter I draw on the three principal works of Davidson scholarship: *John Davidson: Poet of Armageddon* by Benjamin Townsend (1961) *John Davidson* by Carroll V. Peterson (1972), and *John Davidson, First of the Moderns* by John Sloan (1995). Townsend, Peterson and Sloan's studies each function as different types of literary biographies that ground their readings of Davidson's work in discussions of his evolution as a thinker and poet. My reading of Davidson may be understood as a collaboration with and an elaboration upon Townsend, Peterson, and Sloan's works.

Holbrook Jackson, critic and literary historian of the *fin-de-siècle*, writing in the mid-twentieth century recognized how notable Davidson's career as a poet was for the British *fin-de-siècle* and explains how integral Davidson's poetics was as a key representative of muscular decadence. Jackson emphasized Davidson's significance for the period:

The Eighteen Nineties had no more remarkable mind and no more distinctive poet than John Davidson. From the beginning he was both an expression of and a protest against the decadent movement, and in his personality as well as in his tragic end he represented the struggle and defeat of his day in the cause of a bigger sense of life and greater power over personality and destiny. (*The Eighteen Nineties*, 177)

Davidson's final *Testament* prefigured Davidson's suicide and the intellectual and emotional struggles that epitomized Davidson's intellectual and ideological position are emblematic of broader currents within the British and European *fin-de-siècle* in total—currents that materialized in the form of muscular decadence as a widespread style of largely masculine desire which tended to end in failure.

In a key scene from *The Testament of John Davidson* Davidson's prophetic poet effectively rapes the virgin goddess and defeats her ancestral guardian totem, the dragon of spiritually impotent European mythology. In this scene Davidson attempted to disentangle himself from the worship of the old, of the archaic and of the spirit. Davidson's emphasis upon

the individual man, upon a cult of individuality and upon the will to power placed Davidson's literary project as a radical and monumental break with the past and specifically with particular modes of poetics that dominated the lives and minds of the English reading public in the late-nineteenth century. In the following passage Davidson's poetic origins and ultimate end is represented as the hero of his final *Testament* describes his journey's end:

Against her will
To cull the flower of her virginity
Had been my purpose: with the loss
Of maidenhood her deity I knew
Must end at once; and I should then have purged
The Universe of the last exile, last
Inheritress of Other World. But now
Material things or immaterial seemed
The selfsame substance, or it mattered not
Whether they were—betrayal of the truth,
And of my own material being, for which
I suffered torment dire!—while one design
Engulfed as in a vortex all my thoughts:--
In some vertiginous moment of the blood
To win the virgin goddess of the night,
And to possess her with her sweetest will. (120)

In this raw and difficult passage the nihilism, revolutionary materialism, and sheer intensity of the ideological structures that inform Davidson's final *Testament* coalesce into a disfigured portrait of failed authorial ambition and uninhibited will. Davidson's path, to slay the immortal and transform his own materiality into the great will, comes through the rape of the virgin goddess, the last remnant of the belief in spiritual things—one of the cardinal marks of decadent civilization. In the *Testaments* Davidson imported into the staged "I" of the poetic persona the realization of a complete or total man, the total man who could reform decadent discourse and who, for the sake of the great poetic work, would abandon the natural biographical and geographical culture of his birth in favour of an aggrandized universalism that positions the

biographical “John Davidson” in relation to a mythic vision of history and intellectual (or ideological) historical struggle.^{xxxv}

This universalism, by foregrounding titanic struggles and chthonic powers, staged an obliteration of the local, the fragmentary, and the existentially historically bound psyche of the individual self, natively subservient to material historic forces. By obscuring the emotional intimacy that other stylists brought to the poetry book in favour of a prophetic or apocalyptic genius that focused on instructing great men on their earthly power, Davidson in his struggle to craft a fitting “Testament” to his experience in book form, developed a theory of great poetry and of the new, great self. From this position of “greatness” Davidson intended to demonstrate a radical re-valuation of British and European cultural forms. Davidson’s poetic imperialism attempted to annihilate degenerate or decadent softness with a poetics founded in vigour, intellectual effort, and physical and psychological suffering.

In Davidson’s late poetry muscular decadence emerged as a significant, if contradictory and excessive force, a terrifying strain of *fin-de-siècle* and early twentieth century culture. This strain of ideological culture emerged from decadent discourse and anxieties concerning modern civilization and would go on to have far reaching impacts upon modern gender forms, state systems, ideas of culture and national origin, and the historical consciousness of the modern subject. Davidson’s attack on decadent European religious and spiritual traditions emphasized that man must return to the earth to die, giving up the celestial in favour of the raw vitality of native masculine force. The text emerged from a volatile period of ideological and aesthetic crisis. *The Testament of John Davidson*, unfortunately, was a sign of things to come in the twentieth century with its far ranging critique of decadent culture and language systems and its incendiary ideology. The extent of this movement’s continued influence is difficult to fully

appreciate. This study endeavours to dissect Davidson's use of muscular-decadent aesthetics and to analyse its origins and its methods in its massive reformation of high decadent aesthetics in order to help us understand the nature of decadent discourse in the period and to appreciate the powers and dangers of this paradoxical and terrifying line of thought.

II. John Davidson's Path to Muscular Decadence

“The power of the pen has been grossly exaggerated. Napoleon, not Goethe, made the modern world.” (*The Man Forbid* 164)

In this section I outline John Davidson's path to muscular decadence and in particular Davidson's relation to market forces, Davidson's gradual assimilation of muscular decadent poetics and his conversion to muscular decadent theories of the will-to-power and the great self. Between 1889 and Davidson's death in 1909 John Davidson's work as a London poet, novelist, critic and journalist gradually moved away from popular and conventional styles of the period.

Born at Barrhead, East Renfrewshire, Scotland in 1857, Davidson was the son of an Evangelical Union Minister and attended Highlanders' Academy as a young student. Educated for one year at Edinburgh University Davidson took employment as a teacher in a number of schools from 1882-1889. During this period Davidson began his writing career with a number of dramatic plays in verse as well as a novel. During this period he married Margaret MacArthur of Perth and they had two sons. After giving up his post as a teacher in Scotland Davidson and his family moved to London with the intention to make his name and living as an author. During these years Davidson wrote numerous works including collections of ballads and lyric poems, plays, serious and satiric novels, and a great deal of journalism. Davidson's numerous publications during this period began to create a brief upturn in the family fortunes and in

regards to Davidson's notoriety as well. As a writer for numerous London publications including the notorious 1890s decadent journal *The Yellow Book*, Davidson's name was well known in the literary journals of the period. However, Davidson would ultimately abandon popular poetic modes and conventional literary genres and modes of publication in the mid-1890s in favour of a vatic poetics grounded in muscular decadent aesthetics and ideology.

When we compare key lyric poems of Davidson's oeuvre from the 1880s and 1890s such as his evocations of "The Crystal Palace", "Liverpool Street Station", "Ballad of a Nun", the *Fleet Street Eclogues*, or his much anthologized ballad "Thirty Bob a Week", with the *Testaments* and the *Mammon* plays that became the central last works of his career before his suicide, the alteration in speaking voice and poetic mode is evident. As Davidson's work mutated during this period he left behind the conventional modes and styles of poetry, fiction, and literary and cultural criticism that he had practiced in Scotland and London in the 1880s and early-1890s, turning towards a militant, ultra-masculine, imperial vision of literature and the human spirit. Davidson's early writings possessed aspects of this militant individualism but this turn became pronounced in the mid-90s and he would cease all other types of literary endeavour by the 1900s.

Where certain aspects of Davidson's Anti-Christian, vitalist, materialist, and supra-hedonist poetics emerged in the more conventional lyrics, pastorals and ballads of the 1880s and 1890s, the full force of Davidson's late-career epic mode of prophetic diatribe is only fully realized in Davidson's *Testaments* and his tragedies of the 1900s: *The Theatrocrat*, *Mammon*, and *Mammon and His Message*.^{xxxvi} Davidson was not alone in the *fin-de-siècle* in this movement from the lyric, the ballad, and conventional modes of poetic endeavour to his use of the long poem and of a prophetic or visionary stance. Like Edward Carpenter, Walt Whitman and Friedrich Nietzsche, three poets, intellectuals, and ideologues who composed long poems

that attempted to shape cultural life in the latter decades of the nineteenth century, Davidson forsook the open and natively cosmopolitan speaking voice for the expansive “I” that allowed for prophecy, radical cultural critique, and metaphysically inflated rhetoric.^{xxxvii}

The prophetic and epic mode of Davidson’s poetic oeuvre as it entered the 1900s was a key aspect of his espousal of muscular decadent themes and his engagement with the muscular decadent critical tradition. This tradition allowed Davidson a strong platform for the radical themes that come to fruition, both in terms of his own writing and in relation to the broader context of British and European thought. Davidson’s use of heroic epic in the *Testaments* allowed for the construction of a vision of history that would attempt to unify a new collective of supermen to realize their aspirations and revivify a dying historical order. Herbert Tucker states that the epic of the nineteenth century aspired to be the “articulation of a collective identity that links origins to destinies by way of heroic value in imagined action” (*Epic: Britain’s Heroic Muse 1790–1910* 13). Davidson’s usage of epic is consonant with this vision of nineteenth century epic in its reworking of historical materials and its attempt to ground the collective within an aspirational matrix of imagined action, action that would lead to a new sovereign self and a new, revivified vision of British Empire. By choosing heroic epic as the generic model for his *Testaments*, Davidson joined a lineage of nineteenth century authors including William Blake, Alfred Lord Tennyson, James Thomson and William Morris who returned to the epic as a means to combat and critique industrialism, the failures of traditional values in modernity and to construct dream-visions of history re-made.

The violence of the mutation between the gentleness of the melodies used by Davidson in his more commercial lyric works of the 1880s and early 1890s to the dogmatic assertions of his blank verse in the *Testaments* is notable. Turning from conventional neo-decadent modes or

popular modes of poetry, Davidson came to embrace English Blank Verse and the epic as the generic forms that could fulfil muscular decadence's will-to-power. As Davidson became more obsessively "English", less the Renaissance courtier, the neo-classical imitative poet, or the Latinate dabbler in archaic modes, so the structure of his vision became more adamant, inflexible, and unbending. While Milton had bound his utilization of blank verse to a thick Latinate diction and to a cosmologically medieval drama that relied upon a fairly recognizable re-writing of Biblical theology, Davidson harnessed his conception of English Blank Verse to a cumbersome neo-scientific evolutionary materialism and to a lyrically dramatic neo-Romantic enjambment of terms. Davidson's Testaments attempted to reframe mythological contents but unlike Shelley's *Prometheus* or Blake's *Urizen* Davidson denatured the usual presentation of myth as he installed the epic figure of "John Davidson" upon "John Davidson" the historical, biographical, and psychological subject. In the cosmology of the *Testaments* the mythic image of the author became the overriding focus of the mythological narrative.

In this emphasis on the biographical self and the heroic author as the fulfilment of muscular decadent poetics Davidson surpassed Friedrich Nietzsche's mythological treatise *Thus Spake Zarathustra*, a text that influenced Davidson both in terms of style and in terms of theoretical contents, as Nietzsche had employed a moderating mask for the giving of his dogma through the totemic mask of Zarathustra while Davidson chose to employ himself as the speaker of his prophetic works.^{xxxviii} Davidson's movement towards a heroic and monumentalizing blank verse in the *Testaments* and to muscular decadence as the animating aesthetic ideology for his poetry, is illustrative of the cultural torment of poetic forms and ideological struggle in the period as poetry and the *fin-de-siècle* poetry book attempted to come to terms with how to represent prodigious generic, symbolic, cultural and civilizational foment.

In *Testament of a Man Forbid* Davidson outlined the relation between “effete strains of blood” and the need to remodel the self and the new species he dreamt of in his pursuit of a muscular-decadent ideal futurity:

The world is old; and countless strains of blood
Are now effete: these loathsome ruined lives
Are innocent—if life itself be good,
Inebriate, coward, artist, criminal—
The nicknames unintelligence expels
Remorse with when the conscience hints that all
Are guilt of the misery of one.
(*Testament of a Man Forbid*, 97-103)

Georg W.F. Hegel’s philosophy of history and Max Müller, the Sanskrit scholar and philologist’s theories of racial civilization, predated Davidson’s thought and the development of theories of racial religion helped to orchestrate the muscular decadent aesthetic project where the will, power, selfhood, and self-overcoming became explicit in Davidson’s evolutionary cult of self-overcoming and his development of a blank verse poetics that would enable the rise of such a radically excessive rhetoric of intellectual grandiosity, nationalist hysteria and psychological anguish.

In works such as *Testament of a Man Forbid* Davidson proclaimed his new creed. To reach this point of visionary declamation Davidson underwent a profound generic and psychological evolution from the 1880s to the 1900s Davidson’s relation to the literary marketplace and his failure to provide for his family as an author was a primary factor that led to his excessive philosophy and to his choice of mythological epic as the ideal genre for his message. Ways of subverting this position of failure or of coming to terms with the melancholy that this failure initiated helped create a hatred of the “literary”, including distrust of the poetry book itself, and the necessity of writing poetry that would be commercially viable in order to

make “a name” for oneself in the modern economic world of letters, where fame was distinctly linked to commercial profit.

Horrified by the artistic impotence of the professional writer in the British *fin-de-siècle* Davidson in his *Testaments* abjured the aesthetic fantasies and precious rhetoric of high decadence with its painted books and effete, effeminate, graces. The rhetorical language of high decadence, as established by key figures of the period such as Wilde and Pater, became antithetical to Davidson’s literary project. High decadent style became associated by Davidson with a civilizational and cultural malaise, associated with weakness, effeminacy, and impotency. *Fin-de-siècle* aesthetic cults of intimacy, interiority, shared experience, and collegial sympathy were abhorred in Davidson’s muscular decadent aesthetic ideology. Davidson’s use of high decadent tropes in his novel *The Wonderful Mission of Earl Lavender* (1895) was abandoned after his reading of Friedrich Nietzsche and his increasing inability to support himself and his family from his writing.

In Davidson’s comic satire of the publishing industry *Fleet Street Eclogues* (1895) Davidson gestured towards the textual and existential anguish that inspired the *Testaments*. *Fleet Street Eclogues*, published to fair notice and acclaim, staged conversations between the urbane and jaded journalists of London’s Fleet Street, the hub of journalism and mainstream publishing during the era. The work gently mocked and satirized the lives of journalists in the period and the insufficiency of journalism as a truthful genre. By the end of the comedy Davidson represents the world of offal, penury, failure, and inebriation that the embittered poet-prophet cannot overcome—a world that through its manifold oppression of the ‘dream’ of ‘art’, denies the possibility of joy, tenderness, and intimacy. Although the vision of hell in *Epilogue to Fleet Street Eclogues*, is not largely different to the celestial dream-vision of Davidson’s last

Testament, it is staged as an eclogue, in a quasi-pastoral setting that effectively undercuts the story of the failed poet-dreamer as he is foiled by the brute realities of materiality and the treacherous “decoys of doom”:

Votary: What brought you hither?

Artist: Chance, no other power:
My tragedy is common to my kind.—
Once from a mountain-top at dawn I saw
My life pass by, a pageant of the age,
Enchanting many minds with sound and light,
Array and colour, deed, device and spell.
And to myself I said aloud, “When thought
And passion shall be rooted deep, and fleshed
In all experience man may dare, yet front
His own interrogation unabashed:
Winged also, and inspired to cleave with might
Abysses and the loftiest firmament:
When my capacity and art are ranked
Among the powers of nature, and the world
Awaits my message, I will paint a scene
Of life and death, so tender, so humane,
That lust and avarice lulled awhile, shall gaze
With open countenances; broken hearts,
The haunt, the shrine, and wailing-place of woe,
Be comforted with respite unforeseen,
And immortality relieve despair.’
The vision beckoned me: the prophecy,
That smokes and thunders in the blood of youth,
Compelled unending effort, treacherous
Decoys of doom although these tokens were.
Across the wisdom and the wasted love
Of some who barred the way my pageant stepped:
‘Thus are all triumphs paved,’ I said; but soon,
Entangled in the tumult of the times,
Sundered and wrecked, it ceased to pace my thought,
Wherein alone its airy nature strode;
While the smooth world, whose lord I deemed myself,
Unsheathed its claws and blindly struck me down,
Mangled my soul for sport, and cast me out
Alive in Hinnon where human offal rots,
And fires are heaped against the tainted air.

(The Poems of John Davidson 147)

Here the artist is impotent before the world, while in the artist's inflamed imagination the artist remains the "lord" of the "smooth world" while consigned to this place where "human offal rots" and "fires are heaped against the tainted air". This vision of 'lordship' in a ruined world is an arch-muscular decadent vision of the powerful, self-willed man, capable of surmounting all barriers while consigned to an ignorant and decrepit civilization—a romantic, comic, and excessive superhero who saw themselves as the saviour of their society, culture, people and tribe, if not exactly the human race. By placing his newfound "superman" in relation to the jaded journalists of Fleet street, Davidson initiates the severity of his total vision of human impotence, failed civilization and the necessity of complete revolution, a vision that he will frontally proclaim with the *Testaments* of the 1900s.^{xxxix}

Davidson moved from the eclogues gentle pastoral form to the declamatory supremacy of a militant materialism in the *Testaments*. By the point that Davidson wrote the Eclogues in the early 1890s he had come to locate the artist as a figure of misery, ranking the artist among "disillusioned geniuses", "would-bes", "theorists", "failed reformers", "evangelists", "debauchees", "inebriates", "criminals", "cowards", and "virtual slaves"—all of the failed dreamers who "refuse their own experience" desiring to interrogate the nature of being they become the offal that "unintelligence expels":

I see! The disillusioned geniuses
Who fain would make the world sit up, by Heaven!
And dig God in the ribs, and who refuse
Their own experience: would-bes, theorists,
Artistic natures, failed reformers, knaves
And fools incompetent or overbold,
Broken evangelists and debauchees,
Inebriates, criminals, cowards, virtual slaves.

(*The Poems of John Davidson* 147).

Here Davidson embraced the execution of the artist as an authorial position, executing the artistic will and placing it as in direct relation to the fallen will. In this passage Davidson placed,

categorically: inebriates, cowards, debtors, and slaves as the natural devolution of the artist-type at this stage of material and spiritual civilization. This passage typifies Davidson's turn towards muscular decadent aesthetic ideology and the excessive model of poetics the *Testaments* exemplified. This turn toward muscular decadent poetics was spurred on by Davidson's relation to the literary market-place and the systemic falsehood and failure that Davidson came to associate it with. When Davidson moved with his family to London to pursue a life of letters he became engaged as a part-time journalist and would-be novelist. He also attempted to write a number of short collections of poetry. The dream and psycho-drama of muscular decadence in the *fin-de-siècle* emerged directly from this life in the literary marketplace. Davidson's response to the literary marketplace and to the commercial buying and selling of books and knowledge was finally to lead to a profound disillusionment with what books were, what knowledge meant and how language was both constructed and consumed as "printed matter" in the *fin-de-siècle*.

In the introduction to *The Testament of a Man Forbid* Davidson related a parable of the threat that books, book-knowledge and book-reading had for the mind of man. For Davidson had reached a point of self-knowledge so intense that he went 'beyond' the knowledge of books: "I forgot all I had ever learned from books", and from this vantage point Davidson is able to see the philosophical image of Man destroyed by decadent culture:

Then it seemed to me that I stood erect for the first time; and I looked with compassion on the multitude beside me, bent double under toppling libraries. I noted that the heavier the load of libraries, and the more prone the attitude, the happier the porter seemed to be. I saw vast hordes of people engaged in tilling the soil, and in many other occupations, the majority of whom, wherever they could catch an interval of leisure, spent it in grovelling under heavy burdens of printed matter, which if they had none of their own, they would beg, borrow, or steal. 'Good people,' I cried earnestly, 'throw off your burdens and stand erect. Few are they who are helped by books ... Will you die, then, crushed under libraries? The printing press works without ceasing; already your spines are carved by the weight of all the literature of thirty centuries. Throw it all off, stand up; and see the world for yourselves—day and night, and life and death. (*The Poems of John Davidson* 513)

Davidson built the “holy” structure of the Testaments as an attempt to deny the merely literary. Davidson denied the literary in an attempt to transcend, and effectively abolish, the material impermanence and competitive meaninglessness of contemporary literary in-fighting and the ragged work of publishing for money.

Davidson’s relation to the literary marketplace and his flight into august realms of imperially voiced, heroic, English blank verse can be set against Nietzsche’s attack on the marketplace and its power to destroy “Man”. Davidson turned from the cosmopolitan, urban marketplace of ideas with its daily barrage of new publications and its promiscuous print culture toward a rarefied vision of poetic being that would use muscular-decadent aesthetic ideology to catechize and attempt to reform a failed and decadent modernity, just as Nietzsche used his philosophic works and his long poem, *Thus Spake Zarathustra* to execute his critique of false philosophies and religions. Nietzsche’s *Thus Spake Zarathustra* was a key text that influenced Davidson’s conceptualization of muscular-decadence.

Speaking through his mouthpiece, the ultimate bearer of the muscular decadent liturgy, Zarathustra, Nietzsche in no uncertain terms denounced the psychic horror and power of the marketplace: “Where solitude ceases, there the market-place begins; and where the market-place begins, there begins the uproar of the great actors and the buzzing of the poisonous flies” (*Thus Spake Zarathustra* 88). By linking the marketplace as the realm of decadent excess and as the killer of solitude Nietzsche emphatically radicalized the heroic, masculine, and muscular-decadent “I” against the weak, feminine, capitalist, effete and homosexual high-decadent aesthetic movement. By the time that the *fin-de-siècle* had reached its apogee in the 1890s attacks such as Nietzsche’s had become ubiquitous. If Nietzsche’s attack on commerce and the marketplace possessed a unique character and focus, Nietzsche’s attack on the marketplace went

straight to his denunciation of types of life and habits of association that undermine the creative will that can construct new values, values that, for Nietzsche were the gateway to the *übermensch*. The praise, flattery, or attack of the “poisonous flies” of the marketplace, in Nietzsche’s formulation, brought low the great man and the path to greatness and the transvaluation of all values—a transvaluation of values that was directed pointedly at the decline of civilization endemic to *fin-de-siècle* thought and a new, upright, and strong vision of the un-decadent will.

Davidson’s Testaments and his dramas of the 1900s carried through this transvaluation of values in a particular Davidsonian manner.^{xl} By denouncing his previous works Davidson attempted to sever himself from the poisonous flies of the literary and economic marketplace of cosmopolitan *fin-de-siècle* London. In his separation from the world of conventional letters and his Nietzschean solitude, Davidson forsook the popular works that he penned in the 1890s. By renouncing the ballad form, one of the mainstays of Davidson’s poetic output in the 1890s, and turning to heroic blank verse in the *Testaments* Davidson renounced the quest for acceptance, publication, and fame.

Richard le Gallienne, the ubiquitous poet, critic, and man of letters of the British *fin-de-siècle* expressed in satiric form the experience of artists devouring each other—of poets selling books of poetry to be able to write books of poetry—documenting exactly how the marketplace functioned to determine value, and how the aesthetic form of the poem itself (here via the idealized figure of Swinburne) participated in this base economy of submission and domination where a great species (Poetry) cannibalized itself and thence devolved from elite cultural forms to that of barbarism:

the poet searched his shelf
Seeking another poet to feed himself;
Then sadly went, and, full of shame and grief,
Sold his last Swinburne for a plate of beef,

Thus poets too, to fill the hungry maw
Must eat each other—'tis the eternal law.
(*English Poems* 106)

This reality of competitive economic forms and societal institutions that (at least for the would-be prophet/literary-man) effectively mocked the idealized dreams of poetic magnificence and literary immortality that had initially nurtured the adolescent poetic phantasy of 'great' poetry. In this understanding of *fin-de-siècle* poetry, the multiple failures of culture were tantamount to death and submission as the failed would-be poet was annihilated by books, by 'the literary' and by *fin-de-siècle* culture itself—much as Wilde's Dorian Gray as a figure destroyed by "decadent culture" and Matthew Arnold's doomed lovers surveyed the armies of darkness at play in the world atop the cliffs of Dover or as the Edwardian social climber Leonard Bast was crushed under a library of books he would read to acquire tradition, beauty, and individuality, so Davidson's failure as an artist in *fin-de-siècle* London was largely responsible for his movement toward an excessive muscular-decadent theory of self and history.

Davidson wrote, in a pithy journalistic epithet that could rival Wilde in terms of its wit and usage of paradox, that poetry books were themselves victims of market forces: "Books are a luxury, and therefore they compete with everything for which money is paid, with cigars and soap, whisky and Cook's tours, fur coats and kisses."^{xli} Davidson's movement back and forth during his career from journalism to criticism to multiple attempts at the novel, to attempting to write for the theatre, to his myriad different strategies of procuring an audience for his poetry—documents the intensity with which he felt the fears of penury, want, and loss, the material factors that would help determine the material sub-structures underlying the radical revolutionary vitalism of *Testament's* symbology. Davidson's letter to his editor, Edmund Gosse concerning the publishing of the *Testaments* illustrates this point emphatically: "I am a man with a message.

I fought against it, because to deliver it may entail the death by starvation of my family and myself, and it is a question if the highest message is worth that.”^{xlii} Davidson’s letter pinpoints the vicious material and ideological contradictions that gave birth to his use of muscular-decadent themes. Davidson’s dream of an idealized type of verse that is capable of surmounting market forces through the indecency of its naked and vigorous presentation of “truth” goes to the heart of wars in the *fin-de-siècle* concerning the capacity of aesthetic language to administer and represent modes and criterions of knowledge and knowledge making—of ‘realism’, the novel, and why Davidson turned to the *Testaments*, works that Townsend derisively labels as “long polemics in inflated blank verse disguised as dramatic monologues” (336).

Kristen Macleod in *Fictions of British Decadence* anatomizes Davidson’s antagonism to the literary market place and to the generic powers at work in Davidson’s failure to make a living via novel writing:

Never very comfortable with mediating between the claims of high art and the claims of the marketplace, Davidson determined in early 1895 to ‘unsully’ his robes by dropping hack work altogether and focusing entirely on his poetry. For Davidson novel writing was hackwork. The novel was a genre which lent itself most easily to the mediation between high and popular art and Davidson’s novels—*The North Wall* (1885), *Baptist Lake* (1894), *Perfervid* (1890), and *Earl Lavender* (1895)—had demonstrated his willingness to attempt works that were both popular and artistic. Certainly his failure to achieve either popular or critical success figured in the abandonment of the genre. After 1896 Davidson ceased writing fiction altogether.” (154)

Nietzsche directly addressed the complex relation between prose and poetry and the war that prose must undertake to rid itself from the idiotic and facile superstitions of the *fin-de-siècle* poet: “Good prose is written only face to face with poetry. For it is an uninterrupted, well-mannered war with poetry: all of its attractions depend on the way in which poetry is continually avoided and contradicted,”^{xliii} Davidson’s answer to the question of the presentation of knowledge was to create an artificially pure and absolute “medium”: “English Blank Verse”, that

was created as the bearer of what would become his absolute message, a message that in its absoluteness could dominate the aesthetic experience of the *fin-de-siècle* reader and somehow overcome the fear of penury and want that so hideously emanated from the material conditions that produced the text.

Davidson's use of poetry as the ideal genre for his work was in direct relation to the promiscuous amplitude of cosmopolitan print matter available to the daily urbanite in *fin-de-siècle* London. As Davidson became increasingly alienated from conventional society so his interest in more difficult and rarefied genres intensified. By explicitly defining English Blank Verse as the fit medium for his message Davidson established a hierarchy of generic meaning where truth, knowledge and depth of meaning were singularly defined by generic forms and where a decadent, effeminate and bad civilization of artificial and effeminate poetry and opinionated, popular prose were potent negative operators on the strength and vigour of civilization and upon the spirit of man, himself. Much as Wagner desired a particular theatre to house his vision of the *gesamtkunstwerk* Davidson endeavoured to house his thought within a particular generic medium, a medium that would allow the poem and the poem's reader to properly collaborate in the making of meaning and of a militant gospel capable of leading the neophyte muscular-decadent towards a total assimilation of the greater muscular-decadent liturgy of transgressive self-overcoming and world-making.^{xliv} This path of self-making, that Davidson organized in his *Testaments*, may be seen as an attempt to reproduce within the reader's consciousness the steps of societal alienation that Davidson underwent where English Blank Verse would so alienate and elevate the *fin-de-siècle* reader's consciousness that the parasitical generic universe of modernity might be overthrown by the lofty and exalted nature of the generic medium as well as by the message in itself.

In summation, Davidson when he first came to London already had the seeds of moral intolerance and manly sobriety within him from his Calvinist, Scottish background. As Davidson's thought evolved his radical idealism was further sharpened and radicalized by his experience of modern economic conditions in the professional literary world of London. As Davidson became disillusioned with popular forms of poetry, the novel, and journalism Davidson seized upon blank verse as the heroic means to transform both the world and his embittered psyche. This transformation gave birth to a development of a theory of history, empire, poetry and the great Man. As Davidson became exposed to popular *fin-de-siècle* theories of decadent culture and the will to power, he grafted these theories to his pre-existent sense of autonomy, artistic destiny and pride and from this synthesis emerged the totality of Davidson's formulation of muscular decadence as an aesthetic and ideological programme capable of uniting poetry, history and the will to power with his own self-belief and perceived failure in the *fin-de-siècle* literary marketplace.

In the next section of this chapter I outline the principle sources of nineteenth century muscular-decadent thought and trace their contribution to the this final conceptualization of Davidson's ideological poetics.

III. The History of Muscular Decadence

Muscular decadence was an aesthetic ideology that emerged in the late-nineteenth-century. Muscular decadence was composed of three interpenetrating constellations of discourse, thought and ideation: the need to address, reform and rectify the fallen, decadent or degenerate state of culture, history and civilization; the advancement of a theory of the great self that would

be capable of transforming culture, history and civilization; and the advancement of a theory of the spirit or the will that could create the great self and transform weakness to strength, powerlessness to power, decadence to purified transcendence, and imperilled culture to great culture.

The muscular decadent movement was not a coordinated school but rather a constellation of intellectual forces that embodied particular interests, including interests in masculinity and strength, and the struggles of a heroic self against a degenerate or failed modern civilization. In the works of John Davidson and other muscular-decadents, the interest in power, becoming powerful, and the investment in a nobility of the spirit became a fraught dialectic spinning out ever more strange and neurotic visions of beauty, strength, confusion, and power-lust through the latter decades of the nineteenth century and the opening decades of the twentieth. In this section I will outline the history of muscular decadent thought in the period and examine how this intellectual tradition came to fruition in the *fin-de-siècle* by elaborating from the source materials that galvanized these theories of the will, the great self, and the movement to reform a decadent modernity. Working from these source materials I outline some of the key influences on Davidson's thought and how these influences helped set the stage for the writing of Davidson's *Testaments*.

John Davidson's work and thought is deeply resonant with a particular vision of the self in history that permeated nineteenth-century European thought. Davidson's evocation of the self and its relation to power was intimately tied to numerous strains of power-worship in the *fin-de-siècle* and to several key knots of aesthetic anxiety that lurked in the psycho-drama of the *fin-de-siècle*. Muscular decadence in the late-nineteenth century emerged from several different key strains of intellectual history—from high decadence and particular visions of the aristocratic,

nihilistic, and egocentric self in Théophile Gautier and Charles Baudelaire; from aspects of German Idealism, German philosophy and the German intellectual tradition, particularly in the works of Georg W.F. Hegel, Arthur Schopenhauer, Max Stirner and ultimately Richard Wagner and Friedrich Nietzsche; in the criticism of the immensely popular late-nineteenth century psychologist and reformer Max Nordau; and from British discourse concerning decadence, individuality and the relation of the self to history in such figures as Thomas Carlyle, John Ruskin, William Morris, Alfred Lord Tennyson, Walter Pater and Oscar Wilde. John Davidson and William Henley were two of the key personalities at work in the literary production of muscular decadence along with other key figures such as D.H Lawrence, George Bernard Shaw, and Rudyard Kipling.

The author George Moore provides a useful starting point to understand the effects of muscular decadence and its relation to other key intellectual movements that informed the aesthetic and ideological habitat of mid- to late-nineteenth century European Discourse. Moore, in his youth and his apprenticeship as a writer, underwent a series of aesthetic and philosophic conversions that he notated in his intellectual autobiography of the period, *Confessions of a Young Man*. *Confessions of a Young Man* gives an excellent account of the different aesthetic programmes that co-existed in the *fin-de-siècle* and how the individual artist or intellectual could be altered by these different programmes. Moore wrote *Confessions of a Young Man* in the 1880s and he drew on French models such as Gautier and Baudelaire in crafting a particularly radical and vital vision of the will of the artist to appreciate violence and aristocratic disinterestedness as part and parcel of the education of a purposeful young man. In *Confessions of a Young Man* Moore is routinely and radically altered by a series of violent ideological metamorphoses. Moore's experience of these intellectual movements provides a clear representation of how powerful and

overpowering such movements could be over both the individual subject's opinions as well as their conceptions of aesthetic, ideological, and civilizational being. Moore's usage of radical aesthetic decadence (*à la* Joris Karl Huysmans' *Au rebours*) bestows a realization of the end of history comes in direct relation to a fear of the mass, the mob, and the dangerous democratic spirit of nineteenth century progressive British modernization. Just as Davidson's work and thought was radically altered by theories of decadence and the role of the great individual in modernity, Moore not only is shaped by these strong visions of the self in history but himself becomes a progenitor and advocate of these extreme visions of selfhood and historical consciousness. Moore writes:

We are now in a period of decadence growing steadily more and more acute. The old gods are falling about us, there is little left to raise our hearts and minds to, and amid the wreck and ruin of things only a snobbery is left to us, thank heaven, deeply graven in the English heart; the snob is now the ark that floats triumphant over the democratic wave; the faith of the old world reposes in his breast, and he shall proclaim it when the waters have subsided. (92)

Moore in *Confessions of a Young Man* neatly dissects the relation between decadence and rebirth and how this relation came to inspire new ideas of the self. Moore's cult of snobbery enthrones in the "snob" the potentiality of the rebirth of civilization. Moore's "snob" is joined in the late-nineteenth century by a number of key figures that became typological sources of ideal personality. Walter Pater develops a theory of the great self and places as the epitome of the cultured, responsive, deistic self, the great classical emperor in *Marius the Epicurean*. Wilde develops a theory of the self that emphasizes paradox, wit, transgression, secrecy and non-conformity in figures such as Dorian Gray. Pater, Wilde and Moore each notate a complex portrait of the 'new man' and these new selves document the drastic transformations of psychological subjectivity that the *fin-de-siècle* subject experienced in its need to identify and develop a unitary theory of selfhood in a massively changing modernity. Whether the new self

would be a Paterian epicurean, a Wildean hedonist socialist, or a Davidsonian materialist great self, the potent discursive energies of the *fin-de-siècle* were intent on modelling a radical rupture with the past because of the necessity of surmounting the damning tide of a civilization that had gone wrong in its choice of ideals and in its construction of proper modes and models of selfhood. Upon this mutating canvas of collective self-making muscular decadence emerged in the *fin-de-siècle* and came to establish itself as a key template from which *fin-de-siècle* theories of the self, of civilization, and of history would be modelled.

Three key sources that aided in the development of muscular decadence as a key late-nineteenth century movement were Schopenhauer's *The World as Will and Idea* (1844), Stirner's *The Ego and His Own* (1845), and Nordau's *Degeneration* (1892), and the philosophy of Hegel. Each of these texts influenced Davidson's particular model of un-decadence and the broader *fin-de-siècle* intellectual condition. Hegel, Schopenhauer, Stirner and Nordau together helped to create a particular mode of cultural anguish, of belief in individual subjectivity and the nature of the European *fin-de-siècle* civilizational malaise—a model of European pessimism and interest in the unconscious will that heavily influenced the general *fin-de-siècle* intellectual climate concerning the nature of the self in history and the self as a significant envoy that must follow itself into its own interior world of judgment, power, and self-being. Where Schopenhauer and Stirner each advocated for particular models of the dominant masculine self, Nordau inculcated the idea of the “muscular Jew” as opposed to the hedonistic, satanic, civilization-killing degeneracies of decadent art, thought, and culture. Hegel advocated the spirit of the master self and proposed grand unified theories of aesthetic and civilizational history. Stirner and Schopenhauer's work in its aggressive and raw masculinity pinpointed exactly how fearful the late-nineteenth century male intellectual and philosopher was of effeminacy and the rise of

masculine women or effeminate men invading male selfhood. This fear of female rape of the male psyche positioned the advent of the twentieth century and the changing forms and focus of western culture in a fascinating war of masculine self and feminine culture thus associated with the alien oriental feminine other, effeminacy, and ideas of aesthetic culture that not merely are less good than dominant muscular cultures but would poison and invade the ideal muscular and masculine self. Aesthetic-decadent cultures thus insinuated themselves with decorative impressions and esoteric or Catholic occult traditions. The high decadent aesthetic liturgy thus became the negative decadent foil for muscular decadent discursive growth. Reading Davidson, Henley, Rudyard Kipling or D.H. Lawrence it is possible to witness a particular poetic manifestation of this widespread *fin-de-siècle* discursive machine as it moved back and forth between the fallen past and the idealized future, between the various cults surrounding the construction of The Crystal Palace, the Commune of Paris, the anarchist Greenwich bombing, that epitome of “greatness” to come, The Great War, and the origins of twentieth century international communism as the works of anarchists, socialists, and communists dominated histories of power relations in much of global twentieth century discourse.

Schopenhauer annotated the necessity of turning to the ‘Will’ as the guarantor of knowledge as opposed to an aetiology or mere classification of ideas as it presents itself in traditional systems of philosophy, mathematics, and the natural sciences. To manage this anxiety Schopenhauer in *The World as Will and Idea* rooted the ideas of the world in the “individual” and in the individual’s act of knowing: “that is say his knowledge, which is the necessary supporter of the whole world as idea” and for Schopenhauer the “answer to the riddle” of how we know and how we attribute meaning and coherence to the fleeting world of sensual impressions, be they of nature or of the individual’s body itself, is through the “will”: “This and

this alone gives him the key to his own existence, reveals to him the significance, shows him the inner mechanism of his being, of his action, of his movement” (132). Schopenhauer’s development of the post-Romantic will arising from the corporeal experience of pain and pleasure provides a key moment in the intellectual pro-generation of Davidson and Nietzsche’s ideological programmes.

Nordau’s analysis of Nietzsche’s fevered writing was emblematic of the myth of the “I” as a focal point of *fin-de-siècle* discursive practices, and that manifested itself uniquely in the poetics of Davidson and in muscular decadence’s development of ideas of the will. Nordau’s description of sadism as it is the wellspring for Nietzsche’s work deserves to be quoted at length for its wonderful excess and how explicitly Nordau manifests the underlying psycho-social and psycho-sexual discursive violence of the era:

Hence the real source of Nietzsche's doctrine is his Sadism. And I will here make a general remark on which I do not desire to linger, but which I should like to recommend to the particular attention of the reader. In the success of unhealthy tendencies in art and literature, no quality of their authors has so large and determining a share as their sexual psychopathy. All persons of unbalanced minds—the neurasthenic, the hysteric, the degenerate, the insane—have the keenest scent for perversions of a sexual kind, and perceive them under all disguises. As a rule, indeed, they are ignorant of what it is in certain works and artists which pleases them, but investigation always reveals in the object of their predilection a veiled manifestation of some Psychopathia sexualis. The masochism of Wagner and Ibsen, the erotomania (*folie amoureuse chaste*) of the Diabolists, the Decadents, and of Nietzsche, unquestionably obtain for these authors and tendencies a large, and, at all events, the most sincere and fanatical fraction of their partisans. Works of a sexually psychopathic nature excite in abnormal subjects the corresponding perversion (till then slumbering and unconscious, perhaps also undeveloped, although present in the germ), and give them lively feelings of pleasure, which they, usually in good faith, regard as purely aesthetic or intellectual, whereas they are actually sexual. (*Degeneration* 505)

In this passage the language of ‘perversity’ and ‘excess’ models psychological types, artistic schools, and civilizational tropes in an attempt to implement a unique ordering and analytical method for the ‘containment’ and legislation of (morbid) aesthetic experience. Davidson’s

delineation of aesthetic experience in *The Testament of John Davidson* also plays on a containment of aesthetic experience, one which attempts to extend the range of aesthetic experience into a transformational domain grounded on overcoming. Yet rather than being adversaries, in the cases of Nietzsche and Nordau, or Davidson and Nordau, these couples are rather two similar/conjoined actors fulfilling the possibilities of ideological meaning generation and grappling with the central conflict of what the self is in a period of prodigious psychological over-determination.^{xlv}

This mode of discursive power is exemplified by Stirner and his *The Ego and His Own*. Here Stirner provides an originary matrix of the *fin-de-siècle* discursive machine concerning the autonomy and self-making power of the self—the self that opposes all truths greater than itself: “All truths beneath me are to my liking: a truth above me, a truth that I should have to direct myself by, I am not acquainted with. For me there is not truth, for nothing is more than I! Not even my essence, not even the essence of man, is more than I! than I, this “drop in the bucket,” this “insignificant man”!” (355). This passage comes from the chapter entitled “The Owner” of Stirner’s work *The Ego and His Own* in which Stirner intertwined possession and self-possession, the late nineteenth century American monopolist, Brahmin transcendent, or “self-reliant” and the European anarchist-terrorist, may be seen shadowed in the background of Stirner’s evocation of universal selfhood and the trampling of any law higher than that which is made by individual men. The power of Schopenhauer’s individual will to “know” sense-impressions and “ideas” here becomes utilized as a means to “know” the world as existing for the singular purpose of individual man’s acknowledgement.

The theory of the great self that was a key aspect of muscular decadence had one of its principal roots in German Romanticism and German Idealism. Hegel deftly annotated the rise of

the “I” in German Romanticism and the importance of the “I” as the bedrock of aesthetic cognition. Rooting the power of the “I” in Friedrich Schiller’s letters (and in the passage of aesthetic philosophy that Schiller inherited from Johann Winckelmann) Hegel explicated the importance of the “I” as the sovereign form of perception and conceptualization in the emergence of nineteenth century irony and nineteenth century idealism: “In these letters the central point which Schiller starts is that every individual human being has within him the capacity of an ideal humanity.” Hegel emphasized how this thought was altered by Friedrich Schlegel and Johann Fichte to galvanize the power of the “abstract I”, positioning this “abstract I” as the “lord and master of everything, and in no sphere of morality or legality, of things human or divine, profane or sacred, is there anything that would not have to begin by being given position by the I, and that might not, therefore, just as well be in turn annihilated thereby” (70-1). Strains of this aesthetic program were naturally inherited by Schopenhauer and Nietzsche and then made their way into the British intellectual field both from the German, and as a discourse of “ego” and of the “self” as conceptual “master” or “creator” of the world of sensible perceptions.

In Hegel, Stirner, Schopenhauer and Nordau were present several of the originary seeds from which the muscular-decadent aesthetic and theoretical project grew and flourished. This multi-faceted and non-linear literary and philosophical tradition gave birth to the thought of Davidson and to his poetics of imperial subjectivity.

In the next section of this study I develop a narrative of muscular-decadent poetics and how muscular-decadent theories and *fin-de-siècle* culture shaped the work and finally, the end, of John Davidson.

IV. The End of Muscular Decadence

The origins of muscular decadent thought came to a violent and terrifying conclusion in the death of John Davidson in 1909 and in the final works that were an expression of Davidson's thought and life in the late-1890s and 1900s. Muscular decadent aesthetics were a key aspect of this intellectual movement's form. Attacks on convention, on normative models of language and genre, and on weak, feminine or decadent modes of thought or life became standard manifestations of muscular-decadent aesthetic ideology. From its origins in a wide spectrum of philosophy, sociology, linguistics, archaeology and cultural criticism, muscular-decadent ideology would ultimately lead towards a concerted vision of self, history and civilization that becomes totalized, totalitarian, and martial in its naked aggression.

By the 1890s John Davidson had, perhaps accidentally, become converted to the un-decadent aesthetic ideology of muscular decadence. Through a variety of sources in nineteenth-century European literature and culture Davidson knit together a nihilistic and suicidal philosophy that embraced violence, self-overcoming and his own will as the maker of being. The end of this philosophical conversion would naturally lead to his prophetic writings of the 1900s and then to Davidson's suicide in 1909 as the natural end of this process of philosophical conversion, evangelism, and then martyrdom. Having delivered his prophecy in the short *Testaments* and the Mammon plays of the 1900s, Davidson completed his theory of the self and modernity through his own suicide. While Davidson as spokesperson of muscular decadence ceased to exist, the muscular-decadent gospel, in a variety of strange and horrific manners, continued to impact European and world culture in the decades to come.

Davidson in the early 1900s, working through the medium of his *Testaments*, undertook a radical rereading of the meaning of human life and the foundational structures of civilization. To

undertake this pointed critique Davidson remodelled dominant poetic schools of the nineteenth century including those of Tennyson, Swinburne and the PRB, of Romantic Paganism, of Decadent interest in art and shared aesthetic contemplation and of localized archaic modes that favoured ballads, folklore, and the use of dialect.^{xlvi} Davidson writing an imagined dialogue between Carlyle and the journalist and editor Froude neatly elucidates the place of the Tennyson and Browning Schools as they functioned to model bourgeois normativity by the closing years of the nineteenth century:

Tennyson with his confections of passion for use in ladies' seminaries, and Browning with his frantic, terrified optimism, and the restless, overhasty spinning-jenny in his head, are not much to my liking. They both of them represent England of the broadened franchise and repealed corn-law; they are bourgeois to the core, and rose to eminence with the rise of the middle class, the dominant factor in the life of the century. (*The Man Forbid* 169-70)

Davidson continues this dialogue by discussing the horrors of the popular conception of Shakespeare by the English middle class, how English literature should follow the example of Thomson's *City of Dreadful Night* and that the English reader should turn to Nietzsche as a tonic for the normativity of the soul that afflicts the late-Victorian English mind:

F. Would you recommend Englishmen to read Nietzsche?
C. I would indeed. Such a tonic the world of letters has not had for a thousand years. Nietzsche set himself, smiling, to dislodge the old earth from its orbit; and—it is something against such odds—the dint of his shoulder will remain for ever. (180)

In this conversation Davidson attempted to meld together popular interest in the interview-piece that in its brevity and its wit could marry together the incendiary vision of his message, a message that united in material evolution an aesthetic and civilizational conflation in terms of its discursive form. Davidson's use of Nietzsche emphasized the international aspects of his criticism of bourgeois normativity and that the schools of aesthetic and spiritual conduct that he

was combatting, reigned not merely in the British ideological imagination, but in the European *fin-de-siècle* psyche.

By forcibly fusing together modes of prophetic inculcation with popular modes of journalistic discourse Davidson participated in the construction of normative bourgeois aesthetics and at the same time, the fanatical deconstruction of said aesthetics. Davidson's engagement with muscular decadence and his evolution in terms of a thinker was explicitly part of Davidson's engagement with the literary marketplace, ideas of poetry and the poetry book, and in terms of his own poetics. Davidson simultaneously denounced popular modes of reading and writing while participating in the complex entanglements of ideology, vision, and publishing that were possible in the rich discursive habitat of *fin-de-siècle* writing and publishing. Just as Edward Carpenter used the author-reader relation to stage his channelling of good, pure and natural being in *Towards Democracy*, so Davidson used popular literary modes and their pretense of objectivity to stage his ideas within a popular level of truth verification and real verisimilitude. The little magazine, the newspaper, the quarterly, and the daily or weekly paper provided a stage for his rhetoric and his dreams of ideological transformation while reinforcing the pursuit of the better self and the aesthetic self-perfection that was part of a larger trope of *fin-de-siècle* discourse rooted in advertising, the market, and the demands of the new. Davidson staged his formulation of muscular decadence in direct relation to a hierarchy of genres as he developed a theory of genre in relation to decadence and ideas of civilizational failure. Ultimately Davidson would abjure these generic forms in his pursuit of a purely imperial poetics but Davidson's desire to have an audience for his ideas would repeatedly draw him back into more conventional forms of author-reader relations as Davidson moved back and forth between

conventional and unconventional generic structures, always seeking for a means to be heard over the cacophony of late-nineteenth century publishing and marketability.

In the place of such retrogressive and normalizing bourgeois poetic models as those of Tennyson and Browning Davidson inaugurated a poetic theory of “English Blank Verse” as the total voice of an imperial English national spirit and a vital, materialistic, will to power. Davidson placed his hatred of Christianity as the epitome of this break with the past. By instituting a victorious “I” as against a weak, submissive, and effeminate “We”. Davidson’s use of the un-decadent will emphasized his own works as serving as a radical break with the past, all the while Davidson advocated a massive continuance and growth of the British imperial mission.

Davidson epitomized the failed masculinity of the impotent literary artist when besieged by the poisonous flies and cankers of the cosmopolitan, economically progressive, and illegitimate, bourgeois matrix of *fin-de-siècle* personhood. Davidson’s espousal of a heroic, masculine dogma, a radical mode of muscular decadence, that worked contra bourgeois aesthetics and aesthetic dreams of the market place, placed him effectively as functioning within a poetics that radically dis severed Davidson’s dogmatic vision from that of a powerful aesthetic and decadent sensibility that was dominant in the *fin-de-siècle* and originated from a variety of sources. Davidson’s late-career annihilation of aesthetic decadence followed Nietzsche’s own late-career attacks on Wagner and Nietzsche’s attacks on weakness, femininity and the entranced hordes subservient to conventional high decadence’s conceptualization of feminine aesthetic indulgence, aesthetic passivity, languid emotionality and esoteric hedonism. By stressing solitude, individualism, self-mastery, self-sufficiency, the individual prophet, and a robust masculine prophetic tradition, Davidson united muscular decadence with an ancestral tradition of Biblical prophecy.

The egalitarian vision of work, of shared labour, and of aesthetic joy that William Morris articulated in his essays, pamphlets and speeches that moved from England into the New World of North American cults of Morris, John Ruskin, and the dream of bourgeois aesthetics may be understood as a central opposing force to Davidson's uniquely imperialistic cult of masculine greatness and heroic individuality.^{.xlvii} Davidson positioned the *Testaments* as a radical manifestation of the un-decadent will, remodelling aesthetic forms and historical orders in pursuit of a dogmatic muscular decadence. Where Wilde was ultimately martyred by a civilization that he had attempted to mold in his own image, Davidson's attempt to mould modern Britain in his own image did not end in his martyrdom or by opposing forces as much as by a general distaste for Davidson's belletristic warfare. Wilde in "Critic as Artist", "Phrases and Philosophies for the Young" and "Soul of Man under Socialism" attempted to wed aesthetics and doctrine into a palatable negotiation with the dominant late-Victorian modes of capital, accumulation, and charity while Davidson imaged an overturning of the most basic values under the new sovereign kingship of the true superman, a heroic salvation-figure who inculcated the legend of this heroic muscular decadent liturgy—a superman that the *fin-de-siècle* possessed in John Davidson himself.

During the brief period when Bernard Shaw helped fund Davidson's life and the writing of the Mammon Plays, Shaw—who also venerated, for a brief period, a future world enlightened by the rationally driven superman ethos—had no idea of the vengeful, retributive, and violent powers that he would be abetting. Davidson's absorption and continuance of the Nietzschean cult of power and of a great, final, or last man, lead Davidson to advocate a radicalized ideology of masculine excess and suicidal ideation that was willing to sacrifice the mass or the herd for the sake of the ideal individual. Davidson's message prophesied a future which would include the

beauties that will arise from the future great war—including all of the great future artists that the great war between the “White and Yellow Races” would produce.^{xlvi}

John Davidson, with such muscular decadents of the *fin-de-siècle* as William Henley, came to espouse an intensely nationalist poetics that for Davidson were rooted in blank verse as the medium whereby English culture might conquer other discursive machines and establish itself as an immortal cultural civilization—a “great poetry” that through its “transcendent mirth” enshrined the “will to power” in “empire”:

And thus if we must have a single phrase to denote the nature of great poetry, let us assay that its inmost being is a ‘transcendent mirth,’ maternity that sings a song in the pangs of travail, life that will be life, and a radiant fighting welcome to the stoke of doom. Poetry is the will to live and the will to power: poetry is the empire. Poetry is life and force: and England, being most amply replenished with the will to live and the will to power, possesses in her blank verse the greatest poetry in the world.^{xlix}

Davidson, in his flight to suburban Nietzschean solitude, effectively created the stage where the speaker of *Testament of John Davidson* could come to exist. But while Davidson was effectively a solitary in terms of London society by the early 1900s, by distancing himself, psychologically, and geographically, from meetings of the Rhymer’s Club, meetings with journalists, painters, and intellectuals, and the hubbub of commercial literary practice on Grub street or around Leonard Smithers’ bookshop and Lane and Matthew’s The Bodley Head on Vigo street, Davidson in his flight to the suburbs, the isle of Penzance, and embittered solitude risked ultimately, his poetic identity and the possibility of a shared, or communal, context for his poetic vision. Where Davidson’s transgressive poem “Ballad of a Nun ” was widely circulated and admired in the 1890s, the reception of Davidsons’ declamatory *Testaments* met with confusion, antagonism, and derision.

The influence on Davidson’s evolution as a theorist was significantly influenced by Nietzsche and Nietzschean theories of the will and the superman as well as Nietzsche’s critiques

of modern decadent culture. While Davidson's poetic manner and ideological vision was certainly coloured by that of Nietzsche it is perhaps more correct to consider them as having been "fellow-travellers" rather than "master and student". Davidson's reading of Nietzsche was scattered, random, and haphazard as publication of Nietzsche's key works only slowly and sporadically emerged into the intellectual ecology of British *fin-de-siècle* letters and ideology. In the *Testaments* and the Mammon Plays Davidson's unique intellectual marriage of late-nineteenth century cultural evolutionary theory¹ (migrating through Darwin and Spenser) his interest in the Great Man (as a holdover of Romantic adoration of such figures as Napoleon, Satan, or Prometheus) and his anti-Christian, anti-spiritual, and/or anti-deistic, vision of personal sovereignty created a grotesque vision of the will to power and the philosophy of "might makes right".

Davidson's fear and incipient madness, or at least radical excess during the period, came ultimately with the failure of the phantasmic, poetically imagined reality, as the reality of debt, capital, mercenary journalistic struggle, and suburban bourgeois normativity was to deny the fulfilment of the dream as it were. Just as Nietzsche's Zarathustra presented a radically miniaturized representation of woman and of the feminine will in *Thus Spake Zarathustra*, so too Davidson's autobiographical hero-saviour fiction used the female, and the feminine as a staging ground for his message, placing "woman" as an important variable in the algebra of muscular decadent self-making where man, via the celebration of the un-decadent will, may become the great man, and where future generations of strength, nobility and valour will be made if "woman" performs her august and immortal task of bearing the ideal progeny of the future. Davidson's attack on this figure of female will and native "virginity" is deeply tied to an attack on the "Woman Question" as he articulates it in the Dedication to *The Testament of John*

Davidson. Davidson's rape or deflowering of the virgin goddess as the focal moment of Davidson's last *Testament* is symbolically tied to *fin-de-siècle* discursive and ideological wars as to the nature of "naturalness", as to the negative powers of decadent culture to subvert the powers of "instinctual", natural, femininity and ties to book writing and "natural" forms of societal growth. Nietzsche represented these fears and the sheer excess of his radicalized denigration of modern society as it perverts the great and immortal power of women to create strong babies and trans-generational continuity.

In *Beyond Good and Evil* Nietzsche underlined how "culture" perverted women from their "natural" roles: "to let oneself go before men, perhaps even 'to the point of writing a book'" (168). Nietzsche placed women as performing a role in society that is similar to those of serfs, slaves, and pretty domestic animals and that nineteenth century women's rights movements were denying Women their natural place in a proper hierarchy of needs and powers. These misguided ideas about women "work to talk men emphatically and loquaciously out of their notion that woman must be maintained, taken care of, protected, and indulged like a more delicate, strangely wild, and often pleasant domestic animal" (168-9). Between Davidson and Nietzsche the fear or anxiety associated with 'Woman' manifested itself by superimposing mythologies of excess around the ideological figure and using debate as to 'womanhood' as a means to correct the growth of decayed and weak masculine modes of being and of civilization making.

Here we can see in the background of Davidson's idea of the will such arch-decadent figures as the New Woman with her pretensions to masculine culture and the effeminate aesthete with his interest in fashion, self-decoration, interior decoration, and 'art for art's sake' idealization. This muscular decadent attack on conventional modes of aesthetic decadence is indicative of how Davidson's poetics organize discourse and in particular, organized decadent

discursive registers in relation to such dominant models of the period as the transgressive New Woman and the elitist and precocious decadent aesthete.

Nietzsche, and Davidson, in their construction of muscular decadence, placed the will as the necessary imprimatur for the creation of able institutions and the great will as the creator of “strong” institutions that would be the ideal manifestation of the “self” transforming the “world” through the power of its natural instinctual power:

I have already, in *Human, All Too Human*, characterized modern democracy, together with its imperfect manifestations such as the ‘German Reich’, as the decaying form of the state. For institutions to exist there must exist the kind of will, instinct, imperative which is anti-liberal to the point of malice; the will to tradition, to authority, to centuries-long responsibility, to solidarity between succeeding generations backwards and forwards in infinitum. If this will is present, there is established something such as the *Imperium Romanum*: or such as Russia, the only power today which has durability in it, which can wait, which can still promise something. (*Twilight of the Idols* 93)

For Nietzsche institutions must grow naturally out of the will to power and when this will is squashed, perverted, or made decadent then “false”, “democratic”, weak, or sentimental institutions such as charitable Christianity or modern marriage become the popular manifestation of this weak creative will as opposed to “timeless”, trans-generational, historical unities that are capable of being a fit repository of the innate will.

Davidson placed the will, and its usage by the great “I” as functioning uniquely in relation to death and dying. Where Schopenhauer promoted the finding of the true self and of true sense of the world through the experience of pleasure or pain, Davidson returned again and again to death, and to suicide, as the natural end of the will. A particularly lurid version of the desire to attain knowledge through the knowledge of corporeal pain is documented in Davidson’s *A Testament of a Vivisector*. Townsend forcefully anatomizes how the violence of vivisection unites the vivisector and the object of scientific inquiry as each share in the need to attain knowledge: “The vivisector regards both himself and his tormented victim as necessary,

involuntary instruments in the service of raw, unconscious matter. The driving impulse of matter is toward consciousness and self-consciousness at any cost.”¹¹

To understand this end of the will that Davidson advocated we can understand the “will to knowledge” as being expressed in the desire to comprehend the incomprehensible. The excess of Davidson’s poetic project (and that of Nietzsche and Carpenter) can be helpfully interpreted by considering Blanchot’s analysis of Valéry’s quest to attain ‘truth’ in poetry. Blanchot writes of the poet’s search for truth in the work as an elusive and impossible goal:

Poetry is not granted the poet as a truth and a certainty against which he could measure himself. He does not know whether he is a poet, but neither does he know what poetry is, or even whether it is. It depends on him, on his search. And this dependence does not make him master of what he seeks; rather, it makes him uncertain of himself and as if nonexistent. (87)

Davidson’s quest to hammer out the nature of true poetry and his quest in the *Testaments* to construct a greater muscular decadent theory of becoming may helpfully be understood as a war with the non-existent, where the threat of the non-existent, of the emptiness of the categories, of the words themselves, and of the nature of the ‘work’, pushed Davidson on, over and over again, to acts of violation and of epic rhetorical grandiosity; as if by filling the retreating absence of the work with the presence of the blank verse voice, the “English” voice, the illimitable presence of an absolute, and absolutely dogmatic, performance of “the true” and the “true poet” in its holy essence. In that Davidson felt so potently the threat of the non-existent and that therefore he placed the self as the necessary sacrifice to justify the existence of his vision. Through this act of sacrificial justification the suicidal mania and merciless overcoming of the *Testaments* hoped to negate the non-existent and in its place to institute an a-temporal field of civilizational renewal—the phantasmal armies of the blank verse poet’s English racialized voice inscribed existence in the shadowed withdrawing of the non-existent.

Davidson and those of his generation may be seen to inherit a particular struggle with the will to power and the desire to attain to a state of self requisite with the demands of material suffering and bourgeois normativity. Reginia Gagnier emphasizes two modes of being that were operative in the *fin-de-siècle* in terms of the will and its need to find purchase on *fin-de-siècle* reality: Gagnier (through Mann) usefully adumbrates the Nietzschean Will and the “two faces of Nietzsche” thus:

For Mann, those born around 1870 were compelled into a decadence that could be describe by the two faces of Nietzsche: Nietzsche *militans* and Nietzsche *triumphans*. Nietzsche *militans* was critical, psychological, post-Christian, but those who were then young would transcend the introspective moment and adopt Nietzsche *triumphans*’ anti-Christian and anti-spiritual—in fact, traditionally aristocratic—notions of nobility, health, and beauty. They would have the “emancipatory will” to reject decadence and nihilism. (*Individualism, Decadence and Globalism* 89)

Davidson announced that “the final triumph of the will to live” is the final triumph of the will to die. Davidson’s movement toward the glorification of death and the death drive, rooted in sexual will, starvation, penury, and despair, exposed the negative image of the *fin-de-siècle*’s dream of connection and the difficult lives of poetry books within the era. Unable to contain the stylistic, ideologic, and aesthetic power of their makers, the poetry book of the period endlessly fought for the possibility of the shared exchange of meaning, meaning that was endless diverted away from the dangers of sentimental newspaper, propagandist advertising or novelistic rhetoric.

The discourse of democratic multitudes fighting with the cadences of verse as the forms of poetry suffered a rupture in terms of both style and meaning; here both form and content ruptured under the weight of historical meaning—and material, textual, and symbolic critical ecologies engaged in a desperate struggle for intimacy, the expression of desire, and the continuance of life. Just as Benjamin recognized Baudelaire as functioning as a lightning rod for the material shocks of mid-nineteenth century ideological turmoil so Davidson (in his movement

toward a demagogic theory of all-consuming will and self-transformation via power and domination) may be recognized as a potent bearer of cultural anxieties in London during the *fin-de-siècle*. These anxieties came to produce the theory of Davidson's great self and its attendant interests in racialized power structures and semiotic codes of nationalized violence.

These codes would help produce such key poems for the era as Henley's "The Song of the Sword" as the *fin-de-siècle* will to power manifested itself in poetry works that actively represented the strained cultural matrix of the shining historical moment. Buckley significantly glosses Henley's "Song of the Sword" and the meaning of the Sword: "The Sword is the nusus of the evolutionary process, the great natural selector, the Will of God":

Sifting the nations,
The slag from the metal,
The waste and the weak
From the fit and the strong;
Fighting the brute,
The abysmal Fecundity; . . .
Clear singing, clean slicing;
Sweet spoken, soft finishing;
Making death beautiful. . . .
Arch-anarch, chief builder,
Prince and evangelist,
I am the Will of God:
I am the Sword.

(*Poems* 55)

Buckley continues his analysis by recognizing how Henley used the image of the sword as a means to combat the fear of weakness, of Henley's disabled condition, and of "purposeless passivity" (138). Henley, like Davidson, advanced a radical programme of excessive nationalism that was constructed to forge a self capable of overpowering the world. The naked aggression and violent sexuality of this *fin-de-siècle* discursive machine fed itself upon a rhetoric of excess and of overcoming as if by the act of proclamation the world would submit to the great poetic line in its sheer magnitude of scale and focus.

Here universalism became a means to liquidate individual psychologies in pursuit of a static, collective, and totalizing mythic “I”. Through this poetics of domination and of radical excess the *fin-de-siècle* cultural critic and formulator of ideal civilizations attempted to marshal armies of willing subjects to their ultimate and unequivocal cause.

Unable to provide a living for himself and his family through the practice of literature Davidson subverted the studied rhythms and mannered ballads that were fashionable in the 1890s. Outraged that the world as he knew it could not understand his message Davidson’s tone becomes ever more excessive—the excess of the individual desperately trying to tame the “mass”.

Davidson, in this period of anguish meditated on the meaning of death, on the “will to live” and through a strange algebra of antagonistic forces, how the ‘will to live’ could lead, when necessary, to suicide as the proper and indeed absolute transformation of the will to live:

You are in the presence of the final triumph of the will to live, which ever same suicide must be; despair—really the highest power and sublimation of hope—choosing death rather than resignation: the will to live, the pride of life that *cannot* renounce, the beautiful, the transcendent passion whereby the world survives, destroying itself rather than want its will.ⁱⁱⁱ

As part of the larger ideological *programme* that Davidson coded into the *Testaments* was the will to create a race of future beings capable of this mighty will, a will which would be capable of commanding man and leading towards a vision of transcendent evolution into a higher species. To reach this higher species Davidson practiced a poetics that merged with *fin-de-siècle* eugenics, evolutionary racial philosophy, theories of social (or civilizational) degeneration, and the doctrine of the imperial or noble great man.ⁱⁱⁱⁱ Sally Ledger usefully implicates the New Woman herself as utilizing Imperialist, Race-oriented theories in the creation of literary works during the *fin-de-siècle*. Ledger emphasizes that so deeply “assimilative” was the “imperialist

ideology” that it was able to “override ideological distinctions and oppositions based on class or gender” (*Cultural Politics at the Fin De Siècle* 71). This cult of overpowering will that functioned via self-transformation was emblematic of a long term drift in nineteenth century intellectual history, one documented by Armstrong as she traces this interest back to Hegel’s analysis of the Master-Slave dialectic—a dialectic that was a formative building block in the construction of muscular decadence as an antidote to modern democracy.

Isobel Armstrong describes the importance of the master-slave dialectic as it came through Hegel to inform a widespread poetic movement in the latter stages of Victorian poetics: “concern with power results in an almost obsessive interest in the master-slave dialectic in the last part of the nineteenth century. The poets tended to write in terms of paradigms of power and explored despotic structure through analogy with ancient or mythic societies rather than writing directly of the political abuse of class oppression and colonialism. But both are a disguised or incipient presence” (*Victorian Poetry* 398). Armstrong importantly describes the subtlety of this cultural effect “There is no simple cause-and-effect relation among Darwin, Humpty Dumpty, Muller and Swinburne. But what one can say is that mastery and its cognate terms were unsettled and unsettling questions” (399). With the writing of Davidson’s *Testaments* the subtle linking of mastery to English poetics was certainly no longer subtle.

The awful end that muscular decadence found in its growth as an idea system in the nineteenth century was finally the end of John Davidson himself. No matter the excess of his philosophy or the excess of his rhetorical style, there is something both awful and terribly saddening about the movement of Davidson’s unique literary genius from the 1880s to the 1900s. The movement into the cult of masculine decadence galvanized Davidson’s thought and permitted the growth of a vaguely rational or at least orderly mode of working, uniting in English

Black Verse an ethos of supremacy, of racial and national absolutism, and a sense of heroic supra-human majesty, where the mythological John Davidson would replace the biographical John Davidson, and the true muscular decadent was thus born. The terrible excess of racial, evolutionary, nationalistic, and imperial phantasmic orders moulded the psyche of John Davidson into something brutal, fallen and rapacious, a singular omen of the perils of totalizing philosophical and scientific models would have upon the collective psyche of the twentieth century. Davidson's *Testament of John Davidson* in this case becomes a significant image of the power existent in decadent discourse during the British and European *fin-de-siècle* —a discursive flux of fatal and overpowering orders.

In the final sections of this chapter I develop, in two parts, an analysis of *The Last Testament of John Davidson*: a) in terms of the contradictions that informed Davidson's writing and Davidson's advancement of muscular-decadent theories, and, b) in terms of how *fin-de-siècle* author-reader relations functioned within the text.

V. *The Testament of John Davidson* and Ideological Contradiction

John Davidson's final *Testament*, *The Testament of John Davidson* is instructive in terms of how clear an image it provides of the contradictions inherent to the muscular-decadent movement. While muscular decadence emerged principally in relation to the complex discourse of decadent thought in the *fin-de-siècle* it is as well deeply informed by long-term issues in nineteenth century European philosophy and in attempts to construct a coherent historical narrative in modernity. Davidson's particular usage of racial eugenics, of anti-Christian materialism, of popular evolutionary theory, of voracious imperialism and of anti-decadent themes highlights the extremity of Davidson's inculcation of the muscular-decadent position, a

position that Davidson rendered in mythological form in his last poetic opus, *The Testament of John Davidson*.

The Testament of John Davidson follows its hero, John Davidson, through a philosophical quest where the pure or final man, John Davidson himself, descends to earth and to the mortal world from his “celestial palace in the Milky Way” (43) to die by his own hand. The poem begins spatially upon a mountaintop where the poet proclaims the sanctity of his suicide and the importance of his self for the universe. Ultimately the poet chooses to continue living to fulfil the will of the world and it is at this point, after the first passage of the poem that the actual struggle begins.

The hero of the poem soon beholds the goddess Diana nearing him on his mountaintop in her chariot which is pulled by her obedient dragon. The goddess comes to lure the hero from his recognition of power and his supremacy over the gods. But the hero then pursues the goddess with his supernal power, into a thick, odorous glen in which, in a grotesque scene of twined violence and eroticism, the poet-saviour kills the goddess’s dragon. At this point the atheistic hero converses at length with the goddess and he narrates to her tales of his greatness and power. The hero narrates the tales of other demigods who tried to gaze upon the virgin goddess. He briefly narrates the tales of Orion, Actaeon, and Endymion. The tale of Endymion is too much for the goddess and she faints and nearly dies upon hearing the story. Seeking to revive her the hero feeds her with ambrosia and nectar which he also partakes of. Blasphemously taking of the ambrosia the hero goes against the dictates of his high material nature by mingling his material nature with that of the spirit in this ancient rite of spiritual benediction. Having revived the goddess the hero leads her to a secret grotto where he can seduce her. To convince the goddess who is unwilling to lie with him, the hero relates to her his history and that he is her destined

lover. In a sustained scene the hero relates to the goddess how he slayed Apollo, Adioneus and Thor. This scene reaches its apotheosis as Davidson narrates the singing contest that he had with Apollo, how he defeated the master singer, and the terrifying death of Apollo after Davidson's victory. Thence the hero despoils the virgin goddess and by taking her to bed they are each, together, condemned. Davidson is condemned to die for partaking of the spirit and the virgin huntress is condemned to die for having been despoiled by the material antichrist.

The next and final scene of the poem takes place in Hell where Diana is impaled and the poet is crucified four times over. But this hell is soon annihilated by the poetic voice of John Davidson who destroys this hell as he destroys the very nature of Godhead in order that the greatness of men might prevail through the power of his assumption of the true will of the poetic and the will to power inscribed by his actions. The final note of the poem proclaims the greatness of the self as Davidson's voice gains union with the Universe, a world that through him may live and through his works may attain to self-knowledge and the overcoming of the spirit.

Davidson placed before this narrative a dedication that is a short prose work and a smaller lyric poem, "Honeymoon". The dedication is a short prose work that immediately draws the reader into the complex attack on modern civilization that is contained in the *Testament* as a whole. For all of the coldness, pomposity, and at times Olympian disregard of the Dedication, the speaker of the prose paragraphs is at once a materialist prophet intent upon the reformation of the world's, and specifically Britain's, metaphysical and national project, and, at the same time, the highly personalized utterance of a singular and unique psychological subject. This author, labourer, or speaker, is not only the speaker or author of the piece, but is named in the very title of the piece itself. Davidson goes on to emphasize at the end of the dedication, just after having announced the new age what his work may accomplish as it reforms the minds of the lords of

England, that this work is “the meaning of me” and “as my most original presentation of the thing I have to tell”: “And that is the meaning of me, and of my Testaments and Tragedies, and of this Testament, which I have placed between a poem of the dawn of life and a poem of its close, and which I commend to your lordships’ notice, as my most original presentation of the thing I have to tell” (31-2). By beginning the reader’s experience of this work through the dedication, Davidson announced some of the strange, difficult, and complex contradictions that form the mercurial thematic underworld of *The Testament of John Davidson*. The world of this poem emerged as a key part of Davidson’s development of a muscular-decadent critique of contemporary society, a muscular-decadent aesthetics emphasizing the will, manliness, and self-supremacy, and, as well, the vision of an idealized future society. The blending of the universal and the individual, the call-to-arms and the denunciation of women and minorities, the embrace of the lordly mind as being the prerequisite of fully understanding his work, and the note of personal ultimacy, where the very nature and motive of what is “John Davidson”—is contained within this work. In *The Testament of John Davidson* Davidson’s poetic voice becomes a strident call echoing through the anguished wish fulfilment of late-nineteenth century masculine dreams of synthesis with the spiritual dream-book that will somehow contain the seed of immortality—an immortality that would wish to shape, seduce, and overthrow various “diseases” of the nature of “man”.^{liv} In the *Testament* Davidson employed a poetics of biographical erasure through which he supplanted the presence of the routine, natural, and culturally conditioned normative ‘I’ of bourgeois Victorian society. By attempting to dis sever what is “John Davidson” from this network of biographical forms and historical obligations and determinations the *fin-de-siècle* radicalized poet-prophet asserted that the birth of the new, free, self-governing ‘self’ is possible, if we are willing to overthrow the way we imagine history itself. By promising the radical

transformation of history Davidson promised for their reader a share in the radical or monumental transformation of the self and its sovereign powers. Davidson emphasized his unique model of muscular decadent aesthetic ideology by submitting his poetic voice to a specific, all-consuming, cause.

“Honeymoon”, the lyric poem that Davidson inserted as the prologue to the central poem of *The Testament of John Davidson*, is rich in thematic contradiction and ambiguity. The hallmark of this poem lies in this ‘contradiction’, the contradiction lies in having “Honeymoon” directly following the dedication and its belligerent materialist politicking. The poem, staged as a type of introspective, late-Romantic soliloquy, is intensely wistful, nostalgic, and elegiac in tone. It announces itself as a tribute to the speaker’s wife, and immediately focused *The Testament* as the product of a biographical person, whom for all intents and purposes, appears to be the biographical, historically available subject, John Davidson, that is speaking. But the note of love, adoration, and blissful relations between the bride and groom present in the poem is placed, unambiguously, in a fraught relation with the memory of the past, where the memory of the past, of the couple’s honeymoon, takes on a feeling of loss, of the end of innocence, and a feeling of wasted or destitute lives. The poem’s marriage of nostalgia and the sense of fatality denies the present world and ultimately forces the speaker to create a symbolic escape route from the perilous materialistic forces that undermine the present, and reduce the ‘subject in the world’s’ ability to exist.^{lv}

The poem begins with the regressive lines:

I waken at dawn and your head
On the pillow beside me lies;
And I wonder although we were wed
Such an infinite fortnight ago
“Have the Planets stood still in the skies
Since my sweetheart and I were wed,

Since first I awoke, and lo,
On the pillow beside me her head
(35)

The poem announces itself as a question although the final line of the opening stanza ends with the dramatic line “lo, / On the pillow beside me her head”. The vehemence of the final line in no way softens the opening question that asks if the cosmological system of eternity has remained in place in the intervening years since the marriage of the hypothetical bride and groom. By placing the poem in an immediate point of stasis the speaker of the poem and his unnamed audience foregrounds the state of menace and fragility that ultimately is recognized by the speaker himself. This state of menace, of love, of love vanquished, and of subjugation is found similarly in Arnold’s “Dover Beach”, and this sense of fatality immediately distances Carpenter’s poetic mandate from that of Carpenter, Nietzsche or Whitman. In Nietzsche’s stance as teacher, philosopher, prophet and *fin-de-siècle* critic there is unendingly the voice that prevails against fatality, that notes in weakness and in subservience to “fate” the failure, not only of the individual, but of the race. Davidson, by prefacing his work of dynamic over-reaching with a swan-song that forcibly chronicles the powers that are out to overpower the individual self in a menacing and dark world, notates the struggles of the *fin-de-siècle* psychological and psychosexual subject to attain “mastery”, particularly when this state of mastery or lordship is largely an imaginary one with no obvious material correlation. Davidson wraps his beloved wife into an image in the culminating passage of “Honeymoon” that attempts to obscure the dangers of materiality through the powers of dream, sleep, and immaterial union:

In our boat on the swell of the tide
We steer for the heart of morn,
And I say to you, “Sweet and my bride,
Should hope be for ever undone,
Should destiny leave us forlorn,
Thus, thus shall we journey, my bride,
Right into the heart of the sun

On the morning or evening tide.
(37)

Davidson promises, that via his prophetic and ritual gifts as soothsayer and arch-poet, that the two of them will be promised an incredibly abstract eternity as they go in their boat “Right into the heart of the sun” where, like Yeats’s “Sailing to Byzantium”, the horrors of modernity will not touch them and they will be safe from their lives as “outcasts” who suffer from “penury” and want in a vicious, and viciously unforgiving, world. Davidson’s attack on high Victorian ideals and the values of Christianity may be seen not primarily as a struggle with the actual tenets of the faith but with the civilization that British Christianity has constructed and imposed upon its historical subjects. Davidson’s plea to the Lords to fix this plight is a plea to a greater self that will right the evils and chaos of man in his current weakened condition, a condition that helped produce the terrible ambiguity of “Honeymoon” and that presaged the violence to come as Davidson undertook the destruction of the weak Christian and Greek poetries that had led him to this condition, a condition that Davidson marks in the eighth stanza of Honeymoon in an “as if” moment, trying to distance him and his wife from the actual material conditions of his poetic work:

Could we harbour with sorrow and care,
And friendless, in penury lost,
Remain at the beck of despair
Like prisoners or impotent folk?
Could we chaffer and reckon the cost,
And measure out love till despair
Subdued us, bereft, to a yoke
In harness with sorrow and care?
(38)

Davidson cannot face an actual reckoning with the ambiguities that underlie “Honeymoon” and with the strange alterations that construct the body of the physical text. The stateliness of the preface addressed to the Lords with its quasi-scientific rhetoric is now drowned out by the

nostalgic grasping after blissful marital union as a reprieve from the material burdens of the seemingly all-consuming powers of “penury”, “prisons” and “loss”. Despairing of a means to counteract this weakness, the poem succumbs to flight into the unearthly, to Byzantium, to “the heart of the sun”, and to worlds that are constructed via “faith”—worlds that Davidson promises his wife, are created by “beauty” although the emptiness of this phrase, the emptiness of the word itself by the opening years of the twentieth century, must have been evident to such a richly textured and potent lightning rod of cultural life as the psyche of Davidson.

John Davidson imagines he and his beloved sailing into a “kingdom our faith can create” where “in a present of beauty untold” they may live in “the ultimate haven of Fate” on their endless voyage. Davidson, struggling with the non-abstract, material spectres of failure, penury, want, and loss, remedies this situation through the insertion of immense rhetorical forms, forms such as ‘Fate’ or ‘Beauty’ emphasizing the invisible and predatory powers of the suicidal imagination:

The dawn and the dusk are crowned
With chaplets of roses and gold ;
We two are invincibly bound
For a kingdom our faith can create
In a present of beauty untold ;
O love, we are certainly bound
For the ultimate haven of Fate
On a voyage with happiness crowned !
(40)

But before Davidson can finish the poem he is not content with this vision of eternity crowned by the abstract guardian of “Fate”, a figure that in its abstract symbolic form is largely a product of necessity, of karmic influences, and of measured predestination in opposition to the life of prisoners, pensioners, and those bound to the wheel of commerce and oppression. Davidson

romantically and morbidly emphasizes that his union with his wife is sealed and immortalized by death itself, death acting as the means through which their failure vanquishes time and fear:

In our boat when the day is done,
On the lift of the evening tide
I should steer for the heart of the sun,
And sigh with my ebbing breath,
“Be resolute, sweet and my bride ;
We shall sink with the setting sun,
And shelter our love in death
Since our beautiful day is done.
(38)

The beautiful day of subjugation, penury, fear, and failure is here closed in mellifluous rhyme as the sun that they entered the heart of is “done”, and that, even then, at the very end, Davidson presages want, famine and fear, as he emphasizes for his wife to be “resolute” and as well to remain “my bride” as if he fears that subjugation, penury and want may possibly undermine the bonds of fidelity that tie bridegroom and bride in this eternity of beauty made by faith alone.

“Honeymoon” portrays the all-conquering Davidson of the 1900s at his most contradictory. That his final *Testament* is presaged by a poem that is as commercially viable and wilfully stylized as “Honeymoon” renders all of the deep contradictions and fears that underlie the materialist revolution that Davidson will come to as the book enters its next stage. That Davidson abandons his chosen meter, the meter that is capable of bestowing immortality on the English people, in favour of the over-worked lines of “Honeymoon” is not merely an accident. Davidson writing on the powers of Blank Verse deified the verse form as being the chosen vehicle for the great English soul:

Poetry is therefore as little understood as it ever was, rhyme – as necessary to the general verse-reader as brandy to the brandy-drinker – being only an ornament. A sense of shame, indeed, struggles vainly towards a blush in the cheeks of the many-headed when it turns its galaxy of eyes on a page of blank verse; its subconscious feeling is of something indecorous, if not indecent. He feeling is just. Blank verse is nude poetry, barbarous and beautiful, or athletic and refined, but always naked and unashamed. Civilization, which in

all countries is in great part a development and a sanction of every kind of stupidity and misconception, could perhaps be helped out of its utter artistic perdition in England by a great thing, native here – blank verse, namely; and by another great thing, which we should have to import – sculpture. But that could only be brought about as a result of some great national movement, when the minds and imaginations of all men are fused into one mood of aspiration, and so uplifted into unwonted power.^{lvi}

“Honeymoon” bears in its liquid cadences a distinct memory of Swinburne and the final lines could have easily been engendered by Keats. The raw English, masculine, masterly power of blank verse is here left behind in favour of the sweet, gentle, ornate and feminine flowery music that Davidson evokes for his beloved wife and for the artificial paradise that somehow, no matter how great the voice assures us, we know is not within the poet-maker’s will to provide.

“Honeymoon” in its affected emotional sentimentalism and its effacement of the ‘great personality’ so marked in the Testaments, demonstrates the complex powers at work in the reading, writing, and publishing of poetry books during the period and the status of prose and poetry as consumable objects, objects that in the forms of books could be at war with each other and with themselves in terms of their ideal nature. Davidson’s poetics, utilized as part of the muscular-decadent aesthetic ideology, used poetic genre as a place of law-giving, emphasizing the mythic and theological qualities that poetry possessed as a means of founding ideas of culture and ideas of national or imperial origin.

In “Honeymoon” Davidson counteracts the vehemence of the Dedication with a bit of sugary, escapist, twilight Eighteen-Nineties melancholic verse. Of course the themes are unmistakably Davidson’s but the stylistic forms that give the poem shape and accentuate the substance are much closer to those of Yeats, Rossetti, Morris, or even dreamy melancholy Romantics such as Shelley or Keats. This is perhaps the real doom of “Honeymoon”, not the fear of penury and want, or the power of fate, but the overmastering masculine *fin-de-siècle* will when placed up against the truly over-mastering powers of worldly circumstance. .

VI. *The Testament of John Davidson* and the Author-Reader Contract

The Testament of John Davidson may be understood as a pedagogic text that through manipulation of the author-reader contract, via the medium of myth and generically empowered by the usage of English Blank Verse, desires to impress upon the reader's imagination the power and capacity of muscular decadent aesthetic ideology. Davidson used this *Testament* as a means to organize and attempt to remodel the author-reader contract. In the text, Davidson is intent to impress on the virgin goddess (who we may understand as the *fin-de-siècle* reader) his authorial powers—powers that have been bequeathed to him as part of the muscular decadent aesthetic project. Davidson uses these powers to ideologically impale the reader, to send the reader to hell, and then to transfigure and remake the reader's consciousness. Davidson will then go on to destroy this vision as simply one stage in the path in the overcoming of the will. Davidson promises his reader/disciple the powers of the great man and of self-overcoming if the reader is willing to adhere to Davidson's message and the futurity that this message promises.^{lviii}

Davidson's poem in this sense acts, or desires to act, as a means of instruction and mythological conversion, converting the mythic substructure of European myth to the muscular decadent materialist theology of ultimate men. By coupling with the virgin goddess, who in Davidson's manipulation of author-reader relations may be understood as the reader, Davidson demonstrates the possibility of union between the ideal poet and the ideal reader, but only if the ideal reader is willing to forgo the outward signs and symbols that the poets of the age commonly use to adorn their works.

Davidson's development of the readerly contract in the aesthetic space of *The Testament of John Davidson* attempted to guarantee an absolutism of meaning production via a discursive

excess of semiotic forms, channelling linguistic and sexual excess in a combative ritualization that through its rigour can guarantee models of personhood and of subjectivity formed through the triumph of aesthetic expression, both in terms of representations of Davidson's triumph over ancient forms of spiritualized power and in terms of the reader's triumphant penetration of the thick symbolic and linguistic codes that create the aesthetic ecology of the poem.

The hero-prophet of the last *Testament* uses the model of the great poet as a means to construct the muscular-decadent saviour of fallen culture. Via the immaculate, material will the muscular-decadent saviour of fallen culture is constructed via the erotic assimilation of godhead. This process is represented through the act of poetic making, singing, and declaiming to forge this new testament to mankind. No single scene in the central movements of the poem singularly demonstrates the cumulative effect of the multiple slayings and assimilations of godhead that are performed in the text. The text portrays this process of destroying godhead and the power of spirit through a number of key scenes: the defeat of the dragon of primitive European mythology in combat, the defeat of Apollo in a contest of singing and by ravishing the reluctant immortal virgin goddess. In this narrative Davidson demonstrated the erotic fertility of his doctrine in rhapsodic style and borrowed a Wagnerian mode of mythic allegory as a means to inculcate his greater vision of the great man overcoming deity and the false mythologies of the past.

Where in Davidson's earlier *Testaments* the representation of the hero-prophets drew more closely on biblical models of prophecy and of the prophet from the wilderness or of biblical models of parable and dream-visions, the movement in the final *Testament* is towards a high European mythic rhapsody that attempts to meld classical myth to the doctrine of the will to power and of rampant materiality. The earlier *Testaments* routinely utilize conceits similar to those of the prophets Ezekiel, Isaiah, and Jeremiah, while *The Testament of John Davidson* turns

toward a thickly woven, classically rich, Spenserian mock-epic, that is atmospherically pagan and Keatsian in its lush imagery. This turn may be understood as an attempt to seduce the Wagner-loving aesthetes, impressionists, decadents and *les symbolistes* of the British and European *fin-de-siècle* to the glories of Davidson's materialist message. As the hero destroys the virgin goddess's primitive dragon and protector, a being of chthonic urges and medieval darkness, the prophet-saviour enacts a horrific mating with this beast of mythology in a strange linguistic union of violent sexuality and searing morbidity as the dragon holds Davidson in his claws and Davidson plunges the goddess's stolen lance into his accursed brother and antagonist, mating with his spiritual oppressor and "begetting death":

No room had I, so close held, to strike;
But upward through his furrowed brisket, rough
With stumps of wiry hair, I dug and wrought,
Begetting death devoutly as a groom
Begets a son, until his wings relaxed,
Affording ample liberty to drive
The weapon home—and through and out
Among his upper ribs, an ell beyond the chin!
(61-2)

Davidson, in his delirious warfare with different emanations or emblems of divinity attempts to bring into himself both the hated "spiritual" and the emblems of high European culture embodied by such revered poetic figures as those of Aidoneus, Endymion, and Apollo. In Davidson's mating with the chthonic dragon and his deflowering of the virgin goddess the victimized failure endlessly stresses his capability, his 'greatness', and that this greatness is based upon his legendary exploits as a 'singer of songs', where the act of poesis (the act of writing) functions as a mode of spiritual and historical warfare. Here the desperate modern author sought to justify the power of modern song, and of English Blank Verse, against the threat of historical extinction and evolutionary erasure, as the English race's great man, embodied in the Shakespearian, Miltonic,

or Davidsonian poet, wars against such dominant species as those of the Classical World, of Christian Apologetics and, of medieval paganism. To prove his powers the poet-saviour demonstrates that he can recite the death of Endymion in such a manner as to give the goddess the expression of absolute verisimilitude, the act of poetic-making capable, in itself, of conquering the aesthetic defences of the defensive reader. In this sense, the virgin huntress stands in for the late-Victorian, late-nineteenth-century reader. Davidson demonstrated that through the medium of English Blank Verse, he, the great English poet, the natural inheritor of the throne procured from barbarity by Shakespeare and Milton, could vanquish Apollo himself, thereby assuming the trans-historical importance of English poetry in the competitive historical field of great tongues and great poetic modes, a history and futurity that was dominated by competition between competing literary, artistic and cultural canons, where languages themselves may become erased and the intimate ties of the great poet and his faithful reader/audience are lost in the extinction of racial movements, evolutionary shifts and the lessons of material powers that massively overshadow the importance of human struggle, and certainly, the products of *fin-de-siècle* English culture.

Armstrong delineates the importance that theories of evolutionary linguistic change had upon British poetics and culture in the latter stages of the nineteenth century: “By maintaining that languages can be classified according to a Darwinian unity of descent and genealogy, springing from definable ‘families’ whose morphological structure is distinct, such as the Aryan and Semitic group (Muller was the first writer to describe ‘the original common Aryan type’ and to use the name ‘Aryan’), Muller both reinforces and loosens what the category of race and the family can stand for” (*Victorian Poetry* 395). These interests in late-Victorian thought helped forge the possibility of Davidson’s radicalized and racialized nationalist enterprise informing

both his sense of “Englishness” and the idea of “English Blank Verse” as a salvific medium whereby national and world culture could find both its original stamp and its ideal futurity.

By positioning the virgin reader as the lover of Endymion and the poet-hero as the killer of Adonais, Davidson performs both the ennobling immortality of Keats and the death of the Shelley/Keats hybrid figure of Adonais. Davidson’s usage of the superman and his atomized materialism produces a poetry redolent of Shelley’s but taken to a much more incensed point of mystical rapture and of haggard declamation, where Shelley’s earlier usage of this type of radical materialism and metaphor was much gentler:

The leprous corpse touched by this spirit tender
Exhales itself in flowers of gentle breath;
Like incarnations of the stars, whose splendor
Is changed to fragrance, they illumine death
And mock the merry worm that wakes beneath:
Nought we know dies. Shall that alone which knows
Be as a sword consumed before the sheath
By sightless lightning?—the intense atom glows
A moment, then is quenched in a most cold repose.
(Shelley, *Adonais*: 172-81)

Where Shelley’s mode of construction emphasized similar metaphorical terms as that which Davidson uses in his final *Testament*, Shelley’s emotional coloration and intensely self-aware sentimentalism exalted the “spirit tender” where Davidson emphatically denied the capacity of the “leprous corpse” to such a soft and will-less immortality. By using such key Romantic figures as Adonais and Endymion as among the cast of mythological actors that the poet defeats, Davidson implicitly pointed to the failure of the Romantic project and to the type of Romantic Anarchism, or Atheism that was such a key point of Shelley’s idealistic high Romantic poetics. The sweetness and light of the Keatsian or Shelleyan poetic mode is violently usurped by the self-made prophet in Davidson’s account of overreaching and self-overcoming. Death for Davidson did not involve a melancholy self-absorption as practiced in much of Keats’s

Endymion but the vanquishing of melancholy and melancholic torpor via the willingness to do the right thing, to take upon oneself the future of the world and annihilate the individual and thereby protest the unfitness of the world for the Stirnerian ego's subjective domination. For Davidson the messianic quest that the final *Testament* narrates represents the replacement of the previous myths; where for such Romantic powers as those of Keats or Shelley the myths of the past would be used to ratify the natural graces of the poet's own senses, not to be overturned as the poet's sensorium replaces the natural laws with its own cosmology and convulsive teleology of the future.

Davidson's language of materiality in the final *Testament* was also inspired by that of James Thomson and the apocalyptic imagination as Thomson used it in his melancholy visions of world's end. Thomson's usage of the language of atomistic materiality and evolutionary physics may be seen as one of Davidson's inheritances from the militant atheism and apocalyptic imagination, particularly in the model of discourse typified in Thomson's 'A Lady of Sorrow':

The law flames before your eyes in material analogies, the doom stamps itself into your consciousness in material symbols. Behold how the nebulous continuity of your sun-system has parted and congealed into separate calcined orbs hollow and centrally candent; and all are dwindling in the millennial cycles, and shall dwindle until the last fire-sustaining atom is exhausted, and remnant there is none of the worlds opaque in the infinite unadulterated empyrean. (50)

Here the language of the "infinite unadulterated empyrean" may be seen as the progenitor of Davidson's "lightning". Davidson consciously recognized the centrality of Thomson's work and the *Testaments* may obviously be seen as growing out of the type of Atheism modelled by Thomson and Shelley. Yet Davidson's interest in the cult of the will, in a global imperial reach for the great Self, and his abandonment of the biographical 'John Davidson' in favour of the mythic and totemic poetic image of "John Davidson", shows how altered the poetics of rebellion, atheism, and apocalypse were via the ideological torment of *fin-de-siècle* intellectual warfare.

When combined with Davidson's usage of the reader-author contract and the attempt to actively remodel the theological and metaphysical narrative of the reader's consciousness, nineteenth century materialism was 'evolved' towards new and strange frontiers of the will, the great man and the ideal future racialized empire.

This is a key focus if we are to understand Davidson's late rejection of his other works, works that were intimately tied to the market itself, and his interest in reclaiming only the seemingly unmarketable *Testaments* and tragedies of the late period. Davidson's anti-commercial stance was itself a hallmark of the muscular-decadent ideology, equating the market with its luxury goods, fashions, and self-advertising with a nauseating betrayal of the original and ultimate man. But where earlier poets used the long poem as a means of justifying and proclaiming the unique role of the poet, and themselves as great poets *par excellence* (such as Wordsworth's *Prelude* or Elizabeth Barrett Browning's *Aurora Leigh*) Davidson's convulsive take on this tradition is as much a poem of death as it is a poem of self-becoming, as if Davidson as would-be 'deliverer' founded his poetics of imperial historical struggle upon the (noble or vigorous) act of death and in the act of sexual or poetic overcoming of the goddess/*fin-de-siècle* reader.^{lviii} Davidson's attempt to remodel author-reader relations was structured around a historical allegory of ideological warfare. By constructing the text of the *Testaments* as an attempt to educate and re-organize the reader's psyche Davidson violates the norms of *fin-de-siècle* poetic reception, where the reader was allowed to experience ballads, impressionistic symbolist exercises, landscape paintings, or studies of moods or colours, at a calm and refined distance or within a closed aesthetic circuit of shared semblance, meaning and language choices. By opting for a pan-historical and monumental poetics of historical revision Davidson attempted

to force the reader to join him in his quest for self-making and, in a sense, to join him in his path to self-annihilation.

To consummate this poetic mission Davidson brings the virgin goddess (the virgin-reader of Davidson's textual/sexual struggle) into his secret abode where the seeds of his adolescent immortal poetic and masturbatory self was most fertile and lush, in order to root the poem in the poet's earliest experience of rapture and to ground the poem in the emotionally intimate psycho-sexual space that helps to lower the reader/goddess's defences by exposing the poet-saviour's frail, adolescent selfhood.^{lix}

Such an attempt to court the transgressive or satanic is of course redolent of the Faustian myths of Marlowe or Goethe, while the neo-pagan, neo-classical, post-romantic phantasia of the last *Testament* pulsates with the erotic frisson of Swinburne's *Poems and Ballads* or Baudelaire's visionary orientalist nightmare "Cythera" from *Les fleurs du mal*. Davidson imbricates the sexual act (and the act of coercive seduction) as an attempt to consummate erotic relations with the virgin-reader and to discipline the potential muscular-decadent disciple thereby creating a chain of maternities, a chain of maternities whereby the text might give birth to a new consciousness via the erotic consummation of John Davidson with the virgin goddess/reader. This path of ideological imprinting became a recognizable theme in most of the later work of Davidson, a strain of thought that is remarkably potent in the shared poetic missions of Davidson, Nietzsche, Carpenter and Whitman. Indeed one can see each of the un-decadences proposed by Edward Carpenter, Sarojini Naidu and John Davidson as functioning in terms of the will to coerce and construct a new, modern self, a self that would be founded upon ancient histories but pregnant with the 'new'. *The Testament of John Davidson* performed this mating with the reading subject and the "begetting of death" not simply with the totemic dragon of

spiritual ignorance but with the mythic imagination of the corporate *fin-de-siècle* reader—the stilted, exoticized, eroticized, linguistic excess of the final *Testament* attempting to meld together muscular-decadent themes and high decadent style and via this synthesis to overthrow the naturalness and commercial viability of fashionable poetic discourse—placing the newly made, muscular-decadent subject in its rightful place at the forefront of modern civilization.

Chapter Four

Sarojini Naidu, the Poly-Decadent

I. Sarojini Naidu and Poly-Decadence

Prefaced “The Last Darshan” the title page of *The India Express* on March 3rd, 1949, described the public viewing of Sarojini Naidu’s body after her death in 1849:

The body of Mrs. Naidu, wrapped in gold-bordered crimson shawl and covered with floral wreaths, was brought down to the ground floor at about 12 randah of Government House to enable the jostling crowd, which had swelled to over 10,000 to have their popular Governor’s last darshan. Pandits sat around the body reciting mantras as men and women passed in single file, conducted by Pandit Nehru and Lady Mountbatten. (1)

Devoting the entirety of its front page to a summation of Naidu’s life and influence *The Indian Express* provides a complex reading of Naidu’s political career and her significance. Many of the central tropes and themes of the Sarojini Naidu narrative are presented on this page of highly-defined thematic description. Naidu is celebrated for her work “during our long struggle for freedom” and that she “represented in her person the grim determination and the heavy sacrifices of Indian womanhood. She strode the stage like a heroine and never wavered in her faith in India’s destiny and in the ultimate success of that miraculous weapon which was the Bapu’s gift to India...”. The paper narrates Naidu’s achievements as a leader of Indian freedom: “with the attainment of Indian Independence in 1947 she was elevated to the governorship of the United Provinces—the only woman governor in the whole world”, her work as a political organiser, her continued advocacy for Hindu-Muslim cooperation and her work on behalf of India’s women “a lifelong champion of the cause of women”.

The front-page narrative of the Naidu narrative includes a direct reference to the complex positionality of Naidu’s cultural poly-valence, hinting at the fusing of Indian and English cultural

lineages that informed Naidu's thought and poetry. *The India Express* quotes Dr. R.M. Jayakar who recalls Gopal Krishna Gokhale, the former leader of the Indian National Congress and mentor of Mahatma Gandhi, and his "prophecy" concerning Sarojini Naidu's role as a poet and as a prophet of the future:

The news of Mrs. Sarojini Naidu's death came to me with a severe shock. My mind went back to the day, years ago, when I first heard of her from Gokhale who had met her when she was a brilliant student at a British University. Gokhale's description of her was in most glowing terms, unusual with Gokhale, and he ended by calling her a second Toru Dutt. His prophecy was literally fulfilled that Mrs. Naidu would prove in later years a true interpreter of thought between the East and the West. In the days of India's newly acquired freedom, when India's sense of national elation is unrestricted, the danger is ever present of India's drifting away from England and the deep reverence for human liberty which English literature enshrines. At such a time Mrs. Naidu's passing away is a great loss. In my brief talk with her in Calcutta two months ago, I could realise that all that she had learnt from Ruskin and Tennyson had remained undiminished despite political upheavals of sentiment and ideas.

Naidu, who would be christened "The Nightingale of India" for her work central to the birth of modern Indian is modelled in this passage as "a true interpreter of thought between the East and the West". In its narrative force, description of events, and organization of biographical details *The Indian Express's* deploys power, myth, knowledge and history to represent the complexity of the Sarojini Naidu historical figure and the variety of cultural powers at work in the shaping of the Naidu myth and her political and poetic works.

Born in 1879 in Hyderabad, India, Sarojini Naidu (Chattophadyay) was the first of nine children born to Aghorenath Chattophadyay and Barada Sundari Devi Chattophadyay. Naidu's family, a Bengali-Brahmin family, were a prominent and influential force in the cultural life of Hyderabad. Naidu's father, a physician who had studied at Edinburgh University, was the director of Hyderabad University and her mother was a poet who wrote in Bengali. Termed a child prodigy, "Naidu began writing poetry at she passed her Matriculation in her twelfth year and at the age of thirteen she wrote a long poem in imitation of "The Lady of the Lake" and then

a fullfledged drama of 2,000 lines” (*India Express* 1). In 1895, at the age of sixteen, Naidu came to England where she attended Kings College London and Girton College. During this period, she met the writers Arthur Symons and Edmund Gosse, who played key roles in Naidu’s poetic development and literary career. Naidu returned to India when she was nineteen in 1898 and she married the physician Govindarajulu Naidu shortly after her return. Naidu and her husband would go on to have five children.

At the urging of her mentor Edmund Gosse and her family and friends she published her first collection of poetry, *The Golden Threshold*, in 1905. This was followed by the collections *The Bird of Time* in 1912 and *The Broken Wing* in 1917. In the 1910s Naidu became engaged in political work and this would be the central preoccupation for the rest of her life until her death in 1949. Naidu’s political work included serving on multiple committees for causes linked with women in India, Hindu-Muslim relations and extensive work with Mahatma Gandhi and the non-cooperation movement. In addition to her political work in India Naidu went on a speaking tour of the United States, made multiple visits to England as part of various committees and issues, visited South Africa for a political congress and was imprisoned for short durations as part of her political activities. Naidu’s writing after *The Broken Wing* in 1917 was largely that of essays, speeches and letters. The themes of her post-poetry writing were largely related to her various political endeavours. A last collection of her un-published poems was edited by her daughter and published posthumously in 1971.

Having married, had four children in the early years of the century, and become increasingly involved in political activities including going to jail for her views, Naidu largely ceased the writing of poetry and she ceased altogether the publication of poetry while remaining engaged in literary activities and literary salons. Throughout these years Naidu, a believer in

noblesse oblige, championed women's causes, the Indian woman, the de-colonial state and the emergence of a free India that was not singularly Hindi but that would openly embrace the varied spiritual traditions and religions of modern India. Naidu would eventually become the first female provincial governor in India after Independence. Naidu became a celebrated figure of political liberation and the birth of the new nation.

In this chapter I treat Naidu's poetry in relation to English and Indian poetic and aesthetic traditions. I posit that her poetic works are an outcome of decadent discourse during the period and that Naidu's poetry advanced a poly-decadent poetics that fused together disparate cultural lineages, both decadent and un-decadent, to advance a multiform poetry of poly-decadent utopianism. I argue that Naidu came to construct an un-decadent salvific hero-figure that would be able to re-make, embody and "interpret" the poly-decadent poetic imagination of the British, European and International *fin-de-siècle*. I have chosen to exclude a broader reading of Naidu as political ideologue and activist, founder of Modern India, colleague of Gandhi and her other works as ideologue and politician, from the central line of my analysis.^{ix} Naidu is of course significant to the nature and history of Indian modern literature and the modern Indian canon but the particular nature of this study is not primarily engaged with this larger political and biographical project as it has been treated elsewhere, particularly in relation to Naidu's relationship with Gandhi. In this study I am principally engaged with a deep reading of the decadent and un-decadent characteristics of her poetry rather than with her larger political meaning or with the defining the nature of Modern India and the colonial or post-colonial historical compact.

Naidu's relation to the *fin-de-siècle*, to decadence, aestheticism, and the dominant movements of late-nineteenth century culture has not been widely pursued. This chapter

endeavours to begin an analysis of Naidu's relation to *fin-de-siècle* decadent discourse and to analyzing the ways that Naidu's poetry both emphasized a decidedly normative high decadent conception of literary style as well as a decidedly poly-decadent and esoteric obsession with spiritual and cultural lineages and the transgressive combining of complex cultural subject matters within consistently traditional and/or archaic verse forms.

Naidu, writing a short essay published in "The India Women's Magazine" in 1902, detailed a young woman whose "lyric soul" cloaked in "indescribable languor" seemed to possess the very essence of high-decadent style, of aesthetic will and aesthetic fascination. Naidu organized this passage's description in lyric, high-decadent prose, and the link between aesthetics and the experience of truth is made evident via her aesthetic representation of beauty and artistic potentiality. In this essay Naidu represents a mysterious young woman who possesses a nearly oracular or prophetic gift of aesthetic cognition:

A strangely attractive figure, delicate as the stem of a lotus, with an indescribable languor pervading like a dim fragrance, the grace of her flower-like youth. Two unfathomably beautiful eyes flashed from the sensitive oval of a face, not in itself of an extraordinary beauty, but singularly expressive, a subtle revelation, as it were, of the lyric soul within. The heavy hair enfolding in its coils a faint odour of incense-fumes was wound about her head, and wreathed with sprays of newly opened passion-flowers. The dusky fire of amethysts about her throat and arms, the sombre flame of her purpled draperies embroidered in threads of many-coloured silk and silver, brought out in their perfection, the golden tones, so luminously pale, of her warm, brown flesh. A clinging vapour of dreams hung about her like a veil, investing her with a glamour, as of something remote and mystic, and touched with immemorial passion. (*Speeches and Writings* 2)

In this evocation of her unique gifts, her "lyric soul" and how she imagined her subjectivity being experienced by others, Naidu's close alignment with Walter Pater's aesthetics as well as Romantic British poetry is manifest.

In this chapter my analysis upon K.R. Srinivasa's "Sarojini Naidu" (1982), Meena Alexander's "Sarojini Naidu: Romanticism and Resistance" (1999), and Shoshana Reddy's "The

Cosmopolitan Nationalism of Sarojini Naidu” (2011) as well as the engaged book-length study of Naidu’s poetry *The Lyric Spring* (1977) by P.V. Rajyalakshmi. *Sarojini Naidu: A Biography* (1966) by Padmini Sengupta and the key study of transnational writing during the period, Mary Ellis Gibson’s *Indian Angles: English Verse in Colonial India from Jones to Tagore* and the history of Indian poetry in English Rosinka Chaudhuri’s *A History of Indian Poetry in English* (2016) provide important contextual details for my analysis. To my knowledge, there has been no single critical study of Naidu’s work published that treats Naidu’s work with a greater theoretical complexity that is inclusive of Naidu’s intensive use of decadent and counter-decadent thought. I believe that my study will help pave the way towards a more complex conversation concerning the theoretical, poetic and cultural complexities inherent in Naidu’s poetry and poetics.

In terms of Naidu’s significance, I contend that Naidu’s poetry deconstructed, re-interpreted, and then reshaped the modern hybrid, poly-centric subject. Rather than creating a poetics grounded in a standardized authorial myth of Romantic “originality” or of high decadent artificiality, Naidu, perhaps unconsciously, constructed a poetics of radical “derivation”. I contend that Naidu’s inculcation of high-decadent aesthetics during the period of her youthful aesthetic education in Hyderabad and then in England served as the organizing model that she used to advance a poly-decadent poetics and that she used this aesthetic methodology to construct a post-decadent vision of the will and a post-decadent vision of the self as citizen and mother.

We can trace Naidu’s movement towards poly-decadence in relation to three central animating strains of thought within her writings: Naidu’s relation to the conventions and ideas of high decadent aestheticism particularly in terms of style and in terms of the importance of

aesthetics in art and life; Naidu's relation to cultural and historical multiplicity; and Naidu's relation to religious devotion and spiritual mysticism. Naidu's path to poly-decadence lead her to represent in her poetry a manifestation of the poly-decadent heroic saviour figure.

Naidu's engagement with poetry in terms of book publication ended abruptly with the publication of her third and final poetry book *The Broken Wing* in 1917, at which point her literary energies would be reserved almost solely for prose. Naidu's use of prose became imbricated in its usefulness and to a clarifying spirit of non- or post-decadent thought. As her public prose-writing became linked to the rhetorical strategies of declarative generic categories—including the speech and the argumentative political essay—so Naidu's use of decadent tropes, decadent language and the poly-decadent aesthetic programme diminished. The “prosetics” of Naidu's post-poetry writing manifested an intensive narrowing of meaning/language use where highly normalized systems of discursive “communication” organized and came to produce Naidu's aesthetic practice.

With the late poem “The Secret”, a piece of Naidu's long poetic sequence “The Temple: A Pilgrimage of Love” Naidu executed a fatalistic lyric poem that combined decadent exoticism, decadent eroticism and decadent melancholy in a potent evocation of divine inebriation and mystic desire, all through a poly-decadent aesthetic prism:

They come, sweet maids and men with shining tribute,
Garlands and gifts, cymbals and songs of praise...
How can they know I have been dead, Beloved,
These many mournful days?

Or that my delicate dreaming soul lies trampled
Like crushed ripe fruit, chance trodden of your feet,
And how you flung the throbbing heart that loved you
To serve wild dogs for meat?

They bring me saffron veils and silver sandals
Rich crowns of honour to adorn my head—

For none save you may know the tragic secret,
O love, that I am dead!
(*The Broken Wing* 96)

The Temple poetry sequence was the culminating work of Naidu's last collection. In this stylized lyric poem of morbid ecstasy and dramatic revelation Naidu's authorial voice entered its most mature and established construction of mystic desire, of poly-decadent esotericism, and the final summation of her poetic mission. The Temple poetry sequence served as a notable epitaph for the brief, complex, and volatile writing and publishing career of Naidu as a poet. The complex ideological, aesthetic and political forces that informed and shaped Naidu's poetic works and Naidu's maturing psychology reached their fever pitch in the Temple sequence's melding of sex, desire, failure, oppressive neo-orientalism, failed colonial liberation, romanticized self-destructive fatalism and Eastern and Western devotional mysticism.

In the Temple sequence the stark, ashamed, liberated and culturally fabricated artificiality of Naidu's poly-decadent aesthetic project reached its final construction of the poly-decadent martyr figure. This poly-decadent poetic hero is represented in the Temple sequence's series of rapturous lyric poems. The Temple sequence is redolent of medieval Bhakti, St. John of the Cross's mysticism, Solomon's Song of Songs, Krishna-Radha worship and Sufic exaltation of God as a lover. Naidu's use of these devotional motifs and devotional systems of spiritual desire emphasized Naidu's allegiance to a non-unitary spiritual lineage and perhaps, on account of this excess of derivation, the Temple sequence's ritualized sacral drama attained a stylized annihilation of Naidu's poetic life, her poetic will and her poetically grounded individuated subjectivity.^{1xi} The Temple sequence provides a potent representation of the poly-decadent poetic hero and the excessive aesthetic powers that poly-decadence courted in its multi-polar and poly-linguistic organization of cultural truths, literary canons and spiritual traditions.

In a particular sense, Naidu's authorial psychology as poet exhausts itself with the lyric excess of the Temple sequence leading to the author's self-execution of the native poetic self. The complex poetics of artificiality and aesthetic impersonality in the Temple Sequence clashed, perhaps fatally, with the needs of the political moment. When Naidu gave up the poetic for the prosaic in her engagement with politics so the formal nature of her writing changed, with declarative, non-ambiguous language forms prevailing. Naidu's prose writing emphasises a total retreat from decadent symbolism. Naidu's abandonment of poetry as a useful tool of ideological formation, is a significant episode in the history of genre and through an analysis of Naidu's aesthetics and her aesthetic development we may see how prose and poetry functioned as a staging ground for modern interiority and for the complex poly-decadent aesthetic-positionality that is manifest in Naidu's poetic works.

The path to this state of self-annihilation and the final failure of decadent and poly-decadent being is one of the central themes in Naidu's poetry and the cultural and historical forces that lead from Naidu's initial youthful poems of *The Golden Threshold* to the rhapsodic annihilatory interiority of the Temple sequence. The movement between these two poles, of innocence and experience as it were, provided the scaffolding for Naidu's engagement with poly-decadent aesthetics.

With the end of the Temple sequence and Naidu's final poetry publication *The Bird of Time*, the possibility of a greater, historically relevant, ethically powerful and engaged poly-decadent poetic project was lost. Naidu, having finished this work, turned away from poetry and came to associate poetry as esoteric, and aesthetic poetry as particularly non-utilitarian, in comparison to the utilitarian political and liberatory needs of India and democratic modernity. In a sense, the poly-decadent aesthetic tradition, by failing to provide for its subsequent works, gave

way to its own generic assimilation. Here speeches, letters and didactic ideological prose-fiction economies of meaning-construction rendered the poly-decadent excess of Naidu's late poetry as a useful badge of cultural honour but as an unfit servant for twentieth-century ideological and aesthetic cultural combat. Instead of continuing her poetic explorations of poly-decadent aesthetic states and investigating new models of aesthetic devotion, Naidu turned to prose in the generic form of speeches, essays and letters to convey her thought. In Naidu her thought and writing became enmeshed in declarative political codification and universalizing declamatory rhetoric. Political prose works became the ideal medium for revolutionary meaning- production and ideological construction rather than the stylized antiquarianism, retrograde traditionalism, multi-polar excess and artificial exotic mysticism of the poly-decadent poetic-aesthetic mission. In the next section of this study I will outline Naidu's path to poly-decadence and how her aesthetic education informed the growth of her poetic mission.

2 Sarojini Naidu's Path to Poly-Decadence

Naidu's aesthetic education began with her gradual assimilation of high decadent and then poly-decadent ideas. Naidu, after travelling and studying in England, continued her poetic initiation through intensive readings of Romantic and popular decadent writers of the period which she supplemented with readings of French writers such as Verlaine, Baudelaire and Gautier. Naidu's development was greatly influenced by her mentor and advisor, Edmund Gosse and her literary friendship with Arthur Symonds. Gosse, whose lectures she attended and whose family she visited while in London, was a central influence on Naidu's development as a poet during the early development of her poetic style. Gosse's influence was pivotal during the period

and Naidu's description of his early influence upon her budding poetic vocation is extravagant in its praise:

Well in January I first saw you! The magical legend had become a reality—and I was not disappointed—indeed I shall never forget that day—because with one great bound I seemed to wake into a new, large life—the life I had always longed for and so long in vain. From that day I seemed an altered being. I seemed to have put off childish things and put on the garments of a new and beautiful hope and ambition, and I have gone on growing and growing. I feel it—seeing more clearly, feeling more intensely, thinking more deeply—and loving more passionately, more unselfishly, that beautiful Spirit of Art that has now become dearer than my life's blood to me—and all this I owe to you. I know I have not expressed myself at all well, but you will understand me I think, and you will not mind my telling you all this. (*Selected Letters* 29)

Naidu's letters to Symons and Gosse from the period are uniformly passionate, curious and full of exact reminiscences of her intellectual growth during the early stages of her poetic development. The letters betray a constant obsession with the demands of her calling as well as Naidu's insecurities concerning her fitness to achieve the potentiality of her artistic vocation. Via Gosse and Symons, Naidu's wide and spontaneous reading of the Romantics (particularly Shelley and Keats), her reading of prominent 19th-century poets (including John Davidson, W.B. Yeats, A.E. and Alfred Austin) and a varied reading of philosophy, art history and western history, Naidu began to articulate her own conception of poetry and poetic style.

Naidu's early aesthetic education took place largely through passionate, sensitive and aesthetic, reading. Through voracious reading, aesthetic conversations and highly confessional and spiritualized literary correspondence she became initiated into high decadent aesthetics, poetics and idea-systems. Her poetic evolution gradually led to her assimilation of a greater and more unified vision of poly-decadent aesthetics as her thought and art became more refined. Gradually Naidu developed a more robust analysis and synthesis of both Indian and European aesthetic traditions. This development was imbricated in her aesthetic friendship with Symons and the significance that Naidu attributed to emotional knowledge and to intimate, aesthetic

states of poetic reverie. Writing to Symons Naidu explicitly tied his personal, intimate confessions of despair, loss and melancholy with aesthetic rapture and beauty. Naidu's letters to Symons articulate in sweeping language the intimate nature of her early aesthetic education and the ardent emotional domain that this education existed within. Writing to Symons in 1896 Naidu notes the deep ties that aesthetic friendship had to the development of her poetics as well as her early alignment of sorrow and pain with mystical states of being:

You have taken me into your confidence, you have shown me the most sacred and beautiful suffering of your life, and you shall never regret it. I never betray a trust; it shall be sacred to me also. I cannot tell you how much sympathy I feel for you in your awful loss but I also feel with you that your life will be all the richer for that memory, deeper and stronger and truer for that pain. You must not brood over it; you must not let it make your life sad and lonely: no, but rather let it help you onwards and be a sort of talisman to keep you pure and strong. Dear Friend, it is worthwhile to have felt the holy mystic impulse of love that could change the face of the world for you, even though that love has brought you a never-ending pain. And your mother too—I was clinging to a hope that your mother might be living, whose influence you would allow yourself to feel—but—I must not dwell any longer, however reverently, on your pain—thank you for trusting me so much as to let me have a glimpse of it. To me Pain and Sorrow have always been very holy and sacred things, so you will not regret trusting me. (*Selected Letters* 21)

Gosse and Symons each played a pivotal role in Naidu's aesthetic education and in orienting her poetic sensibility. Gosse pushed Naidu to embrace an ideal middle ground of poly-decadent aesthetics where the powers of both English and Indian aesthetic lineages could mix and become something new. Srinivasa Iyengar noted the nature of Gosse's influence:

She had some pertinent counsel, too, from her friend Mr. Gosse. After reading her first poetical effusions, he felt that while she had no doubt a true poet's sensibility, she had been exercising it in a barren unprofitable way: "I implored her to consider that from an Indian of extreme sensibility, who had mastered not merely the language but the prosody of the West, what we wished to receive was, not a reshuffle of Anglo-Saxon sentiment in an Anglo-Saxon setting, but some revelation of the heart of India, some sincere penetrating analysis of native passion, of the principles of antique religion and of such mysterious intimations as stirred the soul of the East long before the West had begun to dream that it had a soul." (*Speeches and Writings* xii)

Early in her development Naidu recognized that she belonged to no single ethnic group and that her concerns should reflect a polyvalent mixture of histories and models of identity: “I was born in Bengal. I belong to the Madras Presidency. In a Mahomedan city I was brought up and married and there I lived; still I am neither a Bengalee, nor Madrassese, nor Hyderabaddee but I am an Indian, (cheers) not a Hindu, not a Brahmin, but an Indian to whom my Mahomedan brother is as dear and as precious as my Hindu brother” (*Speeches and Writings* 9). This realization, was coupled with a recognition that modern Europe had fallen from its state of ancient splendour and that the spiritual life of modernity lacked the innocence and beauty of its original “spirit”: “I say that all the glories of Greece and all the grandeur that was of Rome have perished because of want of this light of the spirit” (*Speeches and Writings* 9). Naidu’s experimentation with cultural hybridity, her fervent cosmopolitanism and her sense of modernity as being a fall from the glories of an ancient, purer past, were ideas expressive of Naidu’s increasingly poly-decadent frame of reference. In many ways poly-decadence served as an ideal set of aesthetic forms and idea systems for Naidu’s unique psychology because of the cosmopolitan upbringing in Hyderabad and the complexities of her cultural origins in terms of language, tradition, culture and religion.

As Naidu became increasingly “cosmopolitan” and not “provincial” as Naidu termed it, so Naidu’s conception of culture and civilization embraced multiplicity, hybridity and plurality. Naidu associated this cultural hybridity as originating from two sources: her father’s democratic and egalitarian influence and from her experience of travel. Soon after her return to India from England, during the early stages of her poetic development when she was beginning to organise and refine the poems that would make up her first collection of poems, Naidu gave a lecture to

the students of Pachaiyappa's College in 1903 that explicitly advanced the importance of cultural multiplicity:

You know that you are provincial—and you are more limited than that—because your horizon is bounded by your city, your own community, your own sub-caste, your own college, your own homes, your own relations, your own self. (Loud cheers.) I know I am speaking rightly, because I also in my earlier youth was afflicted with the same sort of short-sightedness of love. Having travelled, having conceived, having hoped, having enlarged my love, having widened my sympathies, having come in contact with different races, different communities, different religions, different civilisations, friends, my vision is clear. I have no prejudice of race, creed, caste or colour. Though, as is supposed, every Brahmin is an aristocrat by instinct, I am a real democrat, because to me there is no difference between a king on his throne and a beggar in the street. (*Speeches and Writings* 7-8)

Naidu's upbringing as part of a Brahmin family with an enlightened, culturally complex, historical consciousness, made her particularly open to the poly-decadent aesthetic programme and then to 'democracy' and to a democratic vision of utopian cosmopolitanism. This lecture, given a decade before Naidu became seriously engrossed in political struggle, points toward the earnest, universal, utopian, and multi-faith post-decadent language position that Naidu's ideological aesthetics would eventually become.

Naidu's openness to outside cultural forces was evident early in her poetic development, an openness and an ambiguity of origins that would eventually become the hallmark of her mature poly-decadent poetics. The influence of late-nineteenth century cosmopolitanism on Naidu was manifest in terms of her desire to be universal and in a type of enlightened aristocracy of the spirit that her works navigate. Naidu's self-discovery of her poetic vocation and her relationship to English literature and culture and Indian spirituality and culture is narrated via her letters to Gosse during the early 1900s, the period that Naidu fully came to develop both her own ego as being capable of overcoming the demands of her provincial selfhood as well as

transforming the demands of cultural traditions into a new hybrid, poly-decadent instrument of poetic and aesthetic will.

Naidu's first collection of poems, *The Golden Threshold*, provides an impressionistic portrait of Naidu's early poetic development and her assimilation of high decadent, and then, poly-decadent aesthetics. In the poem "In the Forest" Naidu clearly positioned herself in relation to a normative decadent practice. With "In the Forest" Naidu builds a pyre of beautiful flowers and dead dreams in order to "rise" and "conquer the sorrow of life with the / sorrow of song" (*The Golden Threshold* 64). "In the Forest" explores a common decadent theme of world-weariness and the idea of artistic practice as the means to salvage aesthetic value against "the throng" and the dangers of mass-market and mass-produced modernity:

Here, O my heart, let us burn the dear dreams
that are dead,
Here in this wood let us fashion a funeral pyre
Of fallen white petals and leaves that are
mellow and red,
Here let us burn them in noon's flaming torches of fire.
We are weary my heart, we are weary, so
long we have borne
The heavy loved burden of dreams that are
dead, let us rest,
Let us scatter their ashes away, for a while let
us mourn;
We will rest, O my heart, till the shadows are
gray in the west.

But soon we must rise, O my heart, we must
wander again
Into the war of the world and the strife of the
throng;
Let us rise, O my heart, let us gather the
dreams that remain,
We will conquer the sorrow of life with the
sorrow of song.
(*The Golden Threshold* 64)

In this passage the movement from world-weariness to a martial spirit of war against a spiritually barren and perilous world is manifest in the visceral change of manner in the final stanza. Where British *fin-de-siècle* decadent poets such as Ernest Dowson, Arthur Symons or Lionel Johnson might have finished the poem in a common high decadent manner consigning the *fin-de-siècle* subject to a state of oblivion, nausea, saintly martyrdom and esoteric paralysis, Naidu points towards a potential overturning of established orders via a spiritual/aesthetic transgression of normative high-decadent melancholic practice.

Naidu began to mobilize her ultimate poetic intentions early in her poetic development. In a letter to Edmund Gosse, Naidu emphasizes her desire to: “recreate with all the golden bricks and mortar of verse the dead dramas and legends and passionate historic beauties of the Nizam’s dominions. Poets have ‘built Ninevehs with their sighing and Babel itself in their mirth’ and my lyric love desires to rebuild the antique glory of Hyderabad, Aurangabad, Gulbarga, and Warangal” (*Selected Letters* 42).

Naidu’s re-organisation and re-deployment of decadent exoticism, decadent erotics and decadent spirituality were notable aspects of her development. Naidu’s movement from high decadence to poly-decadence took place within three central thematic schemas: within ideas of the exotic and in relation to exotic-decadence; in relation to eroticism, ideas of eroticism and the use of erotic subjects within her poetry; and within her devotional works as her poetry engaged with mystical subject matters and varied models of engagement with ideas of divinity and divine experience. In terms of style, Naidu’s initial poems followed a largely traditional mode of late-nineteenth-century British poetics with their mild impressionism, romanticized naturalism, gentle rhymes and limpid, mildly transgressive, ambience.

Naidu comments in a letter to Gosse on the influence of Gautier and of the unique place Gautier's work had in the formulation of her aesthetic and in the development of her poetics:

Like Gautier, I am one for whom the visible world exists . . . this definite, dramatic world of so varied and fiery beauty: colour, music, perfume, and vivid human faces. It is this deeply inherent instinct for a concrete and tangible world that effectually corrects and balances my Eastern birth-right of mysticism. (*Selected Letters* 39)

Implicit in the rhetorical style of Naidu's books is a manifest "decadent style" that bears all of the hallmarks of high decadence as it became recognized in the mid to late-nineteenth century.^{lxii} Naidu's writing in the period, as she develops her knowledge of nineteenth-century culture and art movements, gradually becomes part of a larger canon of poly-decadent writing that actively inter-married *fin-de-siècle* decadent poetics, aesthetic devotion, and poetic styles with polytheistic modes of spiritual aestheticism in order to forge a unique un-decadent will. By engaging in the "inter"-space between European and Indian poetic and mythological traditions Naidu's works demonstrated an "intra"-cultural and syncretic synthesis of tropes, textual conditions, and thematic concerns. By uniting British and French literary styles and poetic forms with traditional Indian mythology, representations of the folk, and ritualized traditions, Naidu slowly began to create poetic works that existed at a rupture between Decadent cultural styles and the outgrowth of a new modes of art in the post-WWI era.

Decadent discursive forms and decadent aesthetics of the *fin-de-siècle* were a particularly good starting point for Naidu's development as a poet in that *fin-de-siècle* decadents were deeply engaged in pan-European networks of book reading and sharing of mutual ideas. The promiscuity of decadent intellectuals in terms of interest in different, strange or "exotic" literatures and cultures made Naidu's immersion in the literary economy of the time particularly simple and the intensely cosmopolitan nature of European decadence allowed Naidu to intermarry Indian culture, philosophy and spirituality into cosmopolitan decadent aesthetics.

As Naidu's work progressed into her second and third collections of poetry her work took on stranger and less common types of subject matter and more drastic variations of high decadent, and then poly-decadent, themes and styles. The poems of *The Golden Threshold* are largely initiatory works—first attempts to represent Indian life in Western rhythms. The poems routinely used vaguely Indian or *orientalesque* terms, place-names, plants and subject matters in highly traditional English verse. The works plainly emulate W.B. Yeats' attempts to poetically represent an ancient Celtic folk tradition and Naidu's choice of subject matters in *The Golden Threshold* tend to be lyrical treatments of folk subjects or lyrical treatments of cities, the landscape or the seasons. Poems such as "Palanquin-Bearers," "Corn Grinders," "The Snake Charmer," "Wandering Singers," and "Indian Dancers" each exemplify this tendency.

Naidu's usage of devotional motifs, and religious symbolism increased exponentially as her work matured.

Naidu's engagement in the poly-decadent aesthetic programme altered and evolved as her poetic individuation took place. These changes are particularly recognizable in Naidu's usage of decadent mystical elements and her incorporation of explicit mystical themes. As Naidu pushed these mystical elements to further, stranger and more impassioned realms of un-decadent belief where the voice of the poems ceased to merely represent local Eastern phenomena but to articulate a highly emotional and psychically charged personal cosmology of poetry and aestheticized divine experience. Slowly Naidu's poly-decadent mysticism, by championing itself as a faithful representation of aesthetic mystical states, pushed against common high-decadent attraction or interest in the religious or in terms of the exotic ancient world as Naidu passionately devoted herself in non-ironic poetic modes—towards not just a high-decadent representation of enchanting religious or spiritual phenomena but towards a vision of poly-decadent selfhood

remade by aesthetic rapture. In poems such as “To the God of Pain” and “To a Buddha seated on a Lotus” from *The Golden Threshold*, “Song of Radha the Milkmaid”, “Hymn to Indra, Lord of Rain”, and “The Call to Evening Prayer” from *The Bird of Time*, and the poems “The Imam Bara” and “Kali the Mother” from *The Broken Wing*, Naidu progressively developed her earnest treatment of devotional themes and of explicit poly-decadent spiritual rapture.

Naidu’s poetry as it matured began to transgress common styles of melancholic decadence, exotic decadence and aesthetic decadence. Instead of emphasising world weariness, nihilism, pessimism or antagonism to nature and the natural progressions of the seasons, Naidu’s works came to emphasise a quasi-Romantic love and devotion to everyday beauties as well as those of the forbidden, the exotic, the melancholic, and the fatalistic. This poly-decadent hybridity came to deny many of the basic elements of decadent verse in the *fin-de-siècle*, while still, emphatically, using elements of decadent style and definite models of decadent aesthetic practice.

Naidu’s poly-decadent development came to an abrupt end with the publication of *The Bird of Time*. After this work Naidu abandoned poetry as a fit medium for her aesthetic and ideological project. Prose essays and speeches became her primary works and Naidu wrote poetry, but it would remain unpublished until after her death. This generic metamorphosis from poetry to prose reflected her increasing engagement in the political field as she became an orator, political leader and embroiled in the exterior political theatre of her time, rather than in a poetic and aesthetic theatre of interiority. The manifold complexity, confusion and contradictions of her poems in her three collections of poetry quickly became assimilated into a singular message and a singular aesthetic tradition—that of emancipatory politics and the needs of the collective.^{lxiii} This would ultimately be the end of Naidu’s poly-decadent poetics as Naidu’s literary career

became embedded into radicalised political action and a highly-defined, punitively absolutist, non-relative, and non-symbolic field of dogma, declamation, and programmatic and/or idealistic, ideological codification.

Attacks on aesthetic thought, aestheticism, and nineteenth-century schools of decadent aesthetic practice, which would become *de rigueur* in the twentieth century, can be rooted in this flight to political un-decadence. In the case of Naidu, she exemplified a model of un-decadence that came to deny the transgressive excess of its medium in favour of ideological over-definition and the symbolic stabilisation of key, united terms such as the “Mother” or “India”. Naidu’s movement from poly-decadence and the destabilizing effects of extreme cultural fluidity to a point of poetic universalism, politics as poetics, and an un-decadent strain of post-decadent futurity, lead Naidu away from the central core of high-decadent aesthetic practice as she attempted to mainstream and stabilize aesthetic individuation into the collective.

As part of this pursuit of ideologically driven post-decadent practice Naidu embraced specific terms of universal dynamism. This usage of universal terms, combined with her prosing of poetic concepts, lead her to abandon the complexity, moral ambivalence, and aesthetic excesses of decadent poetry and to embrace an un-decadent conception of the world and an un-decadent prosaic theoretical programme that used universal, spiritual or poetic concepts as a means to spiritualize, enlighten and organize the ideological, ethical and spiritual life of the collective. This process constructed prosified poetic terms—terms that, in their raw, over-determination desired to dominate ideological and symbolic phenomena. This generic choice may be understood as a deliberate choice to abandon decadent individualism in favour of the new, modern collective whole and of new, modern and ideologically rigorous prose.

Naidu's initiation into high decadent, and then poly-decadent, poetics, and the greater poly-decadent aesthetic programme, would ultimately lead her from high decadence, through poly-decadence and then to a distinctly non- or anti-decadent vision of the post-decadent historical subject. This idealised subjectivity Naidu would come to represent as the culturally, religiously, and politically liberated "Indian Woman". In 1917 when Naidu essentially ceased writing poetry, or at least public poetry, the rest of her adulthood was spent engaged in the political liberation of India and in the development of what would become the modern Indian state. This dramatic turn is presaged in her poems and is prophesied in several of her poetic works but the three collections of poetry that Naidu published do not exactly narrate a faithful representation of this post-decadent subject. The collections of poetry read as a spiritual and aesthetic non-sequential journey both forwards and backwards as Naidu embraced high decadence style, turned away to embrace realism, the folk, and the natural, and then turns toward a radical sexuality and an enflamed vision of poly-decadent desire, only to go back from this state of poly-decadent rapture towards naturalism, realism and a naïve, romantic and representational poetry.

The Golden Threshold, *The Bird of time* and *The Broken Wing* each participate in this internal war of high decadent, poly-decadent and post-decadent aesthetics, as Naidu's work stood in for the changing nature of style, thought and aesthetic and ideological movements as the apogee of high-decadent culture in the 1890s gave way to the voracious forces of mass warfare and enforced ideological normalization as mass-market nation-systems came to override the ability of the high decadent aesthetic practice to perform its seemingly immoral or amoral aesthetic research in the British and European *fin-de-siècle*. The dangerous nature of Naidu's enflamed exoticism, erotic annihilation in godhead and her espousal of high decadent and then

extreme poly-decadent thought was ultimately rejected by Naidu herself in her turn toward political rhetoric, slogans, and nakedly simple, if necessary, ideological warfare. The complexity of poly-decadent aesthetic mysticism was, in this case, replaced by ideological universalism, democratic liberation aesthetics and the denial of aesthetic complexity in favour of ideological unity.

Naidu's aesthetic education brought her into intimate contact with several key sources of nineteenth-century decadent and then poly-decadent discourse as well as several key strains of Indian philosophy and religious adoration. In the next section of this study I outline these sources of poly-decadence and how Naidu used these materials to fabricate a mythic, poly-decadent salvific figure.

3 Sources of Poly-Decadence and the Poly-Decadent Great Self

Poly-decadence was an aesthetic and ideological movement that emerged from a variety of sources in nineteenth-century British and European culture. Not a singular movement of philosophy, ideology or art, poly-decadent aesthetics emerged from the same concerns as decadent thought in the late nineteenth century but galvanized these issues in particular relation to understanding, and trying to solve, the emerging issue of complex entanglements of diverse cultures and peoples from increasingly multiple, hybrid and multiform historical manifestations of language, tradition and religious systems.

Poly-decadence emerged upon an increasingly migratory and trans-national map of interlocking intellectual, spiritual and cultural geographies set upon the greater spatial and temporal order of empire and within an increasingly urbanized and migratory ecosystem of bodies, minds and socio-political identities. Poly-decadence emerged directly from the new psychological,

cultural and theoretical worlds that imperialism, modern tourism and the emergence of increasingly unified information dissemination systems and systems of knowledge production produced. As Regina Gagnier has noted, decadent systems of aesthetics and discourse tend to arise when certain cultural stressors threaten conservative traditional civilizations and civilizational orders.^{lxiv} As information dissemination systems and knowledge production systems interacted, clashed, and fused in the late nineteenth century profound mutations and hybrid forms and concepts of the self, the citizen, the worker, and ideas of the state, culture, the spirit and national or civilizational bodies were generated.

This widespread climate of globalized flux and of imperial knowledge systems interacting with a variety of locales, historical concepts and theories of civilization. This historical moment is typified by Max Muller's work on *The Sacred Books of the East*. In October of 1876 at Oxford, Max Müller, a philologist, linguist and translator of the Rig Veda, outlined the reasons, methods and organizational framework for the publication of "The Sacred Books of the East, Translated, with Introductions and Notes, by various Oriental Scholars, and Edited by F. Max Müller.":

Apart from the interest which the Sacred Books of all religions possess in the eyes of the theologian, and, more particularly, of the missionary, to whom an accurate knowledge of them is as indispensable as a knowledge of the enemy's country is to a general, these works have of late assumed a new importance, as viewed in the character of ancient historical documents. In every country where Sacred Books have been preserved, whether by oral tradition or by writing, they are the oldest records, and mark the beginning of what may be called documentary, in opposition to purely traditional, history. (xi-xii)

Müller's introduction to the first volume of a fifty-volume set of English translations of key "Oriental" religious texts published between 1879 and 1910 by Oxford University Press exemplifies the poly-cultural moment in its desire to organize new horizons and new models of knowledge into a vaguely coherent "translation". Müller's plan for the series emphasizes the

series' usefulness as a means of acquiring knowledge, of preserving knowledge and for knowledge of "the enemy" in the case of missionary work. *The Sacred Books of the East* series is emblematic of the entangled nature of European, Asian and increasingly globalized systems of economic, knowledge, and aesthetic forces. Decadent and poly-decadent discourse arose from this contested site of newly opening global exchanges and the resultant unsettling condition of globally re-aligned spiritual, cultural and philosophical knowledge systems.

Decadence and decadent discourse emerged in this climate with fears concerning the loss of original, "innate" or "pure" traditions and the emergence of complex and unsettling new strains of cultural lineage. In a climate of civilizational change aspects of the foreign other and of foreign lands, belief systems and art or aesthetic experience came to be rarefied, fictionalized, exoticized and fetishized. Poly-decadence emerged from this interest in non-original cultures and the emergence of hybrid, split, or bi-cultural works of art and systems of philosophy and spiritual experience.

Sarojini Naidu's poetry and her political thought was born of this mixture of self and other, of India and Europe, of orient and occident and of the idea of travel as bestowing the possibility of poetic intoxication as the traveller enters into more sacred, true or original states of native being. In her letters to Arthur Symons she notes exactly this possibility for Symons when he visits the isle of Aran: "Tell me of your adventurous visit to the Isle of Aran, and did you see visions there? Do the gods speak unto the children of men in that sacred spot, and do beautiful demons lure mad poets to their destruction in that magical haunt?" (*Selected Letters* 24). Naidu's enflamed poly-decadent imagination recognized the potent possibilities of poetic when the *fin-de-siècle* subject entered into sacred sites of wild romance and mystic power. This poetic exoticism of alien or non-modern sites of pilgrimage or aesthetic rapture was a key source

material informing poly-decadent poetics in the period. Poly-decadence presented the *fin-de-siècle* artist with a lush and complex tapestry of historical origins, of centers of spiritual and civilizational power and of transgressive ties between civilizations. *The Sphinx* (1894) Wilde's most poly-decadent work evinces this poly-decadent use of exotic objects, histories and ancient enchanted gods. Published in a limited edition in 1894 with illustrations by Charles Ricketts *The Sphinx* organized high decadent themes and style with a decidedly poly-decadent thematic engagement with a stylized Egypt and ancient Near East:

Who were your lovers? Who were they who wrestled for you in the dust!
Which was the vessel for your lust? What Lemman had you, every day?

Did Giant Lizards come and crouch before you on the reedy banks?
Did Gryphons with great metal flanks leap on you in your trampled couch?

Did monstrous hippopotami come sidling toward you in the mist?
Did gillscaled dragons writhe and twist with passion as you passed them by?

And from the brick built Lycian tomb what horrible chimaera came
With fearful heads and fearful flame to breed new wonders from your womb?

Or had you shameful secret quests and did you hurry to your home
Some Nereid coiled in amber foam with curious rock crystal breasts?

Or did you treading through the froth call to the brown Sidonian
For tidings of Leviathan, Leviathan or Behemoth?

Or did you when the sun was set climb up the cactus covered slope
To meet your swarthy Ethiop whose body was of polished jet? (14)

The imagined character of the Sphinx with its monstrous reproductive capacities and predatory sexuality gifts Wilde with a means to travel to an erotically charged ancient near east and to indulge in a steamy, monstrous, grotesque and sensually ripe poly-decadent exoticism redolent of hidden histories and a world of pagan sin and sensual beauty that preceded the birth of the Christian West. Texts like *The Sphinx* emerged from the movement towards poly-decadent experimentation in the. This movement arose with attacks on modern industrial civilization, mass

culture, mass advertising and the clean, hierarchical, bourgeois norms of gender-codified sexual, sensual and aesthetic being. The Sphinx, via its excessive style, themes and material presentation exemplified poly-decadent exoticism's aestheticized cosmopolitanism and demonstrated poly-decadence's radical antagonism to safe, monotheistic, and sensually austere rational ideologies.

Critics of decadence, decadent thought and decadent culture such as Max Nordau built their critiques on fears of diseased, non-singular, multi-formed cultures that were perceived to act as agents of pollution, miscegenation and degeneration such as Wilde's own works. In this context, pure, native or "natural" spirits of place, nation or people were seen to be under attack by the movements of ideas and the mixing of ideas. Partially in reaction to these nativist or innate critiques of decadence, of decadent thought and of possible degenerate strains infecting the native or pure parental tradition(s), poly-decadent literature emerged as an attempt to harness hybridity, poly-cultural mutations and multiform historical lineages.^{lxv} Poly-decadence as a literary movement in the British *fin-de-siècle* explored aspects of cosmopolitan high decadence, devotional decadence and exotic decadence and radicalized and complicated each of these tendencies of the *fin-de-siècle* decadent spectrum.

Poly-decadent exoticism arose as an outcome of nineteenth-century orientalism and specifically the relation between pre-decadent poetics and ideas of travel, of a romanticized orient and the poetic powers that were available to the poet when visiting foreign, other worlds where the poetic practitioner might access more real, strong and sensual emotions, ideas and sensations. Aspects of ideas of pilgrimage both in terms of traditions of spiritual pilgrimage and ideas of the "tour" and of aesthetic pilgrimage were historical catalysts for the development of poly-decadent exoticism and the poetics that it came to advocate. Poly-decadent exoticism drew on sources of the erotic and the eroticized nature of foreignness, of the erotic other and of free or

emancipated desire that travellers could experience in purer, sensually attuned and/or “free” pre-civilizations—civilizations that were seemingly not infected by the sense of impending civilizational decay, cultural decadence and societal degeneration that permeated the European *fin-de-siècle*.

Poly-decadent exoticism became a situational tool for the production of poetic, scientific, and philosophic truth-claims in modernity and this process appreciably accelerated by the mid-nineteenth century. Whether the voyages were real or imagined poly-decadent exoticism, much like the growth of orientalism, charted knowledge claims through real or imaginary landscapes of elaborated narrativization. As new climes became the sites of free, clear and unprocessed or undistorted sensual experience this enabled real or armchair travellers to experience poetic, erotic and scientific theories of experience in newer, truer and more unrestricted manners, thus allowing for the growth of narratives of “discovery” and “re-discovery” of the ancient past and of universal or eternal spiritual, poetic or scientific laws. Whether this site of discovery was Ireland, Scotland, Scandinavia, Bretagne, Italy, India, Africa, Egypt or Arabia, explorations of ancient traditions and the roots of modern civilization included a wide gamut of central High Victorian nineteenth-century historical figures including John Ruskin’s analysis of civilizational orders and fallen civilizations in Venice, W.B. Yeats exploration of Ireland as the site of primitive Celtic traditions of poetic truth, Charles Darwin’s development of truth claims in relation to sea voyaging and the analysis of animal life undistorted by the civilizational shadow of modern Europe, the collecting of ancient tribes folk tales, folk music and ballads by a wide number of gentlemen-scholars and amateurs, Mahatma Gandhi’s exploration of new models of civil subjectivity and enlightened knowledge in London, Oxford, and South Africa, or Sarojini

Naidu's own poetic journey to the England, the exotic land of the mythical Rose and Arch-Romantic English poesy.

Poly-decadence emerged from *fin-de-siècle* exoticism and the late nineteenth century obsessions with "The East". Poly-Decadence had close ties to the literature of exotic-decadence and to late-Victorian interests and obsessions with the occult, the uncanny, the unconscious, the pagan, the ritualistic, and the 'spiritual'. In W.B. Yeats, John Gray, Aleister Crowley, Michael Field, Sigmund Freud, Lionel Johnson, John Carpenter, Paul Gauguin, Vincent van Gogh, Arthur Rimbaud, Stéphane Mallarmé, Gustave Moreau, William Morris, Walt Whitman, Ralph Waldo Emerson and a host of late-Victorian Symbolist aesthetic practitioners—the obsessive interest in the spiritual, in matters of the spirit, and in an aesthetic relation to the art-work as possessing aspects of ideal, universal, or that catch-all: "the ancient" or "The East" is nearly universal. Under these conditions the interest in "ancient mythologies", "Egyptology", and "oriental religions" including Edwin Arnold's *The Light of Asia* (1879) Richard Francis Burton's *The Book of a Thousand Nights and the Night* (1885-1888) and the numerous translations of such works as the *Bhagavat Gita* or the *Quran* is all part of a widespread focus on poetry and art's ties to the numinous and the legends of eastern knowledge, wisdom, spirituality and oriental eroticism.

The welter of complex, poly-valent cultural traditions and "ancient" empires that poly-decadence emerged from presented a highly sellable aesthetic constructions to the curious Western *fin-de-siècle* reader. Naidu both adapted to and transgressed this stereotypical vision of exotic sexuality and wisdom in her poetry. Sheshalatha Reddy elaborates upon the complexities of Sarojini's feminine poetics and politics and its distinct orientalist complexity thus:

Naidu's exoticization of India, and by extension her exoticization of herself as a representative of India, brought her the fame she so greatly desired but which she

believed she should, as a woman, rhetorically deny. Indeed, her necessarily gendered engagement with the gendered discourse of Orientalism reveals the cost of womanhood in a world of British imperialism and Indian masculine nationalism. Naidu's strategic co-optation of the relatively non-threatening, because feminized, language of Orientalism allowed her to circulate the world – both through her poetry and through her corporeal body – as a gendered subject speaking of the duties and rights of Indian women. (572)

As Reddy states, Naidu's work was bound up in the context of empire and the oppressive complexities of gender dynamics concerning her work and its reception.^{lxvi} I argue that Naidu modelled modes of orientalist subjugation and colonialist voyeurism while documenting an authentic aspect of the large scale intra-cultural zeitgeist that moved during the period towards the ornate, the mythic, the ritualistic, and an aesthetic formation of spiritual and aesthetic encounters with divine experience and with the production of new genders and gender models of masculinity and femininity such as those advanced by the *fin-de-siècle* New Woman and Uranian and aestheticist programmes. The poly-decadent movement as it manipulated gender, identity, sexual identity and devotional spirituality was a key source of Naidu's poetic method. The forbidden aspects of decadence that poly-decadence hybridized and extended had a discernible effect upon the totality of Naidu's poetic production.^{lxvii}

Naidu's interest in antique cultural traditions, in pomp, regalia and the forbidden was stated clearly in a letter from Naidu to Gosse in 1904. In the letter Naidu describes the court of Mir Mahbab Ali Khan (1866-1911) and imagined herself: "going forth unveiled" to visit this august personage "in the midst of five hundred belted courtiers to the Nizam's court—it would be the scandal of India." Naidu then articulated the nature of her forbidden poetry: "it is something quite novel in the annals of Indian tradition for a woman to present a poem to a sovereign in full durbar. It savours almost of the forbidden." She described the court of the Nizam as "the only true eastern court left in India. It still retains all the barbaric splendour that recalls the stories of the Arabian Nights, and, I think among all the princes of India, you cannot

find a figure more picturesque, more brilliant, and also more pathetic than the Nizam of Hyderabad” (*Selected Letters* 41). The theme of forbidden sexuality and use of exotic sexual politics is a recurring trope in Naidu’s collections.

Naidu in her poem “Ode to H.H. The Nizam of Hyderabad” unites in this forbidden act of female nakedness before the fabled Nizam an act of sacrilegious ecstasy. Naidu imagines her face unmasked as she celebrates the Nizam as a syncretic host that will shelter both the line of “the Prophet’s faith”, those “who bear on Vedic brows / The Mystic symbols of Belief” and “they who worshipping the sun, / Fled o’er the old Iranian sea” (*The Golden Threshold* 9).

In this ode Naidu provides an exemplary reading of poly-decadent historical syncretism with its compelling mixture of cultures, histories and literatures:

Sweet, sumptuous fables of Baghdad
The splendours of your court recall,
The torches of a Thousand Nights
Blaze through a single festival;
And Saki singers down the streets,
Pour for us, in a stream divine,
From goblets of your love ghazals
The rapture of your Sufi wine.
(*The Golden Threshold* 69)

By placing this host of contemporary and world cultures in the cultured hands of the Nizam, Naidu advanced a concrete vision of romanticized poly-decadence, where the poly-decadent will is capable of forging, through a forbidden act, not only a new self, but the possibility of a new incorporation of godhead. Naidu’s use of the forbidden is a central trope of her poetry and she returns to it at numerous points within each collection as a recurring trope that is associated with her femininity, her mysticism and her use of excessive high decadent style. The origins of Naidu’s poly-decadent style emerge from both the East and the West and she used

the language, history and places of her native land and pushes these themes, cultural emblems and contents through a late-Romantic, generally British, lyricism.

In her letters Naidu called herself the “foster-child” of Gosse and she effectively used an inflated version of Gosse as an emissary of Western tradition and a type of guru figure or enlightened teacher. Naidu uses this relationship as a means to anoint herself with the powers of *fin-de-siècle* English culture while firmly heralding a vision of Indian cultural syncretism. Naidu, unlike Edward Carpenter and John Davidson, embraced orthodox decadent styles, diction and poetic forms and she employed these high decadent poetic forms and styles as a means to construct a vision of the poly-decadent self. Naidu’s works are highly conventional in their use of meter, rhyme, word-choice and antiquated manners. Naidu organized this conformity to archaic British traditions with the transgressive poly-decadence of her themes and conclusions—conclusions that would use the poly-decadent will to implement a new vision of selfhood. This poly-decadent will to construct both a new selfhood and a new futurity is unmistakable in the development of Naidu’s poetics. The poly-decadent great self that Naidu envisioned was to be a potent new form of feminine selfhood.

Naidu’s use of high decadent style, motifs and exoticized oriental traditions would ultimately not lead her on a beautiful oriental tour of exotic climes, strange foods and drugs, and strange new religions, but to the creation of a new nation and a new vision of female being—a vision of nationhood and of being that Naidu constructed via her own assimilation of the exotic other, in this case, the Anglophone, British, English and Continental Romantic and decadent poetic and intellectual tradition.

In Britain and Europe poly-decadence emerged in direct relation to ideas of the exotic as an outlet from the perceived failures of modern western civilization. Naidu pointedly embraced

aspects of this tradition including the magical orientalism of Wilde's *The Sphinx*, the lavish devotion to aesthetic forms of John Gray's *Silverpoints*, Michael Field's aesthetic Catholicism and Algernon Charles Swinburne's effusive orientalism but she tended to bypass the sense of imminent failure, of spiritual damnation, and inhibiting weakness that tended to characterize key decadent authors such as Charles Baudelaire, Lionel Johnson, Ernest Dowson, John Gray, or John Davidson.

Where common *fin-de-siècle* European decadents such as Baudelaire imagined a pagan voyage to a mythological orient, that compounded a multitude of gods, a place of death, of nausea, of ritualistic excess, and of sacrificial moods—Naidu, the native inhabitant of Cythera/Byzantium (or Hyderabad), helped provide the decadent imagination with its natural colonial friend—freeing the Western decadent mind to experience the naturalness of specific modes of religious ardor, of ties of mysticism to secular art, and of the theological importance of European pagan traditions as presented in a particularly glamorized, aesthetically stylized, and sumptuous vision of Catholicism and Catholic ritual. The decorative camouflage of Catholic ceremonial forms and of complex Catholic iconographical and saint traditions allowing for the marriage of traditional pagan religious figures to emerge within the *fin-de-siècle*'s poetic economy of symbolic forms. Similarly, Naidu's own use of high decadent rhetorical styles and of high decadent iconography allowed her to incorporate multiple lineages of Hindu and Islamic devotional wisdom; and to incorporate multiple significant gods, holy figures and sites of mystical expression into an intercultural appreciation and reverence for these aesthetic devotional traditions.

In order to establish this strategic poetic domain Naidu bent high decadent aesthetics to her greater purpose. Naidu used such themes as the worship of varied religious figures, moments

of intense aesthetic experience, the worship of political or mystical power, and self-annihilation on behalf of the gods as a means to ratify the new poly-decadent feminine great self.

In the poem “Indian dancers” Naidu explored the erotic as a means to both seduce and coerce the reader to join her in her discovery of aesthetic power and in order to highlight her own native erotic powers: “Their jewel-girt arms and warm, wavering, lily-/long fingers enchant through melodious hours, / Eyes ravished with rapture, celestially panting, what passionate bosoms aflaming with fire!” (*The Golden Threshold* 71). In this passage Naidu enticed the high decadent *fin-de-siècle* reader to journey into the rare orient of sexual desire. Naidu manipulated the generic conventions in poems such as “Indian Dancers” of exotic decadence while pushing the *fin-de-siècle* reader to fully engage, erotically and emotionally, with the promised aesthetic domains full of ravishment and desire. she promises may be experienced. Naidu used the long lineage of Bhakti (passionate devotion to the divine) and mobilized this tradition of spiritual experience in the conventional styles of high decadent poetry to seduce the reader. By chaining together high decadent style and conventional late-nineteenth century poetic forms with religious devotion and erotic/high decadent content—Naidu emphasized her aesthetic ideology’s conventional *and* transgressive character. By drawing on ideas found in the practice of Bhakti and integrating these ideas with the conventions of sacred love poetry in the West Naidu emphasized the integrative nature of her poly-decadent poetics.

Naidu’s integrative mode of poly-decadent poetics found in cultural synthesis new roads of experience and largely celebratory models of aesthetic and devotional selfhood. She united devotional mysticism, the abject self, and a poly-decadent construction of depraved esotericism in her *crie-de-coeur*, “To the God of Pain”. In “To the God of Pain” Naidu constructed a dark temple and a state of hopeless devotion to an ultimate figuration of absolute godhead. “To the

God of Pain” directly referenced the mode of poetic enslavement previously iterated by the late-Medieval Indian poetess Mirabai, one of the key sources of Naidu’s poly-decadent poetics.

Naidu, by exalting this strain of devotional mysticism and tying it to a dark erotics of sublimation and self-abasement, consecrated herself and her poetic mission to an intense state of poly-decadent enchantment that is unsparing in its esoteric abasement. In “To the God of Pain” Naidu represents herself as the “Unwilling priestess in thy cruel fane” as she begins the poem, presenting the poet’s speaker as a long-suffering mystic or debauched nocturnal supplicant come to the dark altars of a god’s cruel fane where she will submit her subjectivity to this unnamed mystical force of suffering and potential rapture:

Long have I borne thy service, through the stress
Of rigorous years, sad days and slumberless nights,
Performing thine inexorable rites.

For thy dark altars, balm nor milk nor rice,
But mine own soul thou’st ta’en for sacrifice:
All the rich honey of my youth’s desire,
And all the sweet oils from my crushed life drawn,
And all my flower-like dreams and gem-like fire
Of hopes up-leaping like the light of dawn.

(The Golden Threshold, 68)

The poem represents, in no uncertain terms, the ultimate abasement of the self, as the soul, youth, and a crushed life are the penance necessary for the god of pain. In this poem the modern psychological self is deconstructed as the precious figments of late-adolescent will are reformed into a new and direct mode of poetic excess. This text devotes itself to a dark, occult, and orgiastic state of self-annihilation in order to construct the possibility of a new and heretical modern subject. This merciless representation of godhead evinces Naidu’s willingness to abject herself and her poetry for a complex variety of routes and modes of devotion, a complexity that belied any singular heredity or singular safe path of poetic engagement. Naidu’s willingness to

lead the self to these dark altars and to this unnamed nocturnal god of pain promised the soul in this poem, not a blessed afterlife or a fulfillment of song's promise or youthful dreams, but the annihilation of the soul that this unnamed god of pain required:

I have no more to give, all that was mine
Is laid, a wrested tribute at thy shrine,
Let me depart, for my whole song is wrong,
And all my cheerless orisons are sung;
Let me depart, with faint limbs let me creep
To some dim shade and sink me down to sleep.

By refusing to give the dark god a known name such as Shiva or Hades, Naidu modernized and synthesized the varied traditions that her poetics emerged from. As the “Unwilling priestess of a cruel fane” Naidu clearly defined the poly-decadent poet’s initiatory journey, for as a “priestess”, indoctrinated to this merciless god’s nocturnal rites, the poly-decadent priestess must recognize not only the wrongness of the soul’s contents but the ultimate annihilation of the habitual offerings to gods—as this dark god will not take “balm nor milk nor rice” but asked for even more subtle offerings such as “the rich honey” of “youth’s desire” and “the sweet oils” of her “crushed life”. In this late-Romantic annihilation of sweetness and light, of flowers and sunlight, the nocturnal fane of poly-decadent erotic annihilation feeds on “orisons”, “sunlight” and all these “flower-like dreams”. Here all the Romantic templates of poetic paganism are brought into a fervent key of falsity and annihilatory “service” where the soul itself was “wrung” until the body in its state of annihilatory evanescence would be led to its final sleep.

Naidu’s “To the God of Pain” is set in a scene redolent of Swinburne’s early Decadent work “The Gardens of Proserpine” as well as Baudelaire’s “Voyage to Cythera”. Naidu explicitly inhabited this normative decadent landscape but imparted to it the sense of the raw *fin-de-siècle* ego exposed to the terrors of self-annihilation. Naidu used this erotic garden of self-debasement as a shrine in which the poetic initiate could endow itself with unknown powers. By

incorporating Swinburne and Baudelaire's pagan temple with a sense of initiatory journey and of ritualized prophecy, Naidu transformed the decadent darkness as a means of self-annihilation that would lead to spiritual transformation, as the explicitly usage of cultic and ritualistic elements in the poem indicates.

Notably, the poem may be read not exactly as a late-Romantic hymn to death or to dying as Keats or Shelley routinely modelled in poems such as Shelley's "Adonais" or "On Melancholy", instead Naidu used this lyrical dedication and representation of self-annihilation as an act of penitential poly-decadent absorption into a priestly reconstruction of the self. In a greater sense Naidu's poetry collections may be read as an initiatory journey of the poly-decadent priestly self that would, through its initiation into the vatic world, emerge back into the real, ideologically driven, prose of daily life in modernity capable of leading the way out of the wilderness and into a new construction of statehood, of egalitarian democracy and of empowered femininity and cosmopolitan, globally enlightened, womanhood. Here the modern self is led through its abasement to a divine leave-taking with the deluded dreams of youth and into a depraved dissolution of daylight, warmth, and youthful idealism. By stressing corporeal suffering as well as the psychological ego's subservience to poly-decadent abasement in poems like "The God of Pain" Naidu elicited the medieval Tantric tradition and specifically, the female medieval Indian poet and mystic, Mirabai. By gesturing towards Mirabai's use of themes that included the annihilation of the body Naidu placed this model of poetic initiation in the construction of a decidedly poly-decadent shrine of darkness and negative occult power. In this poem Naidu constructed and deconstructed the possibility of the poet-as-hero and the construction of a poly-decadent post-colonial messianic self.^{lxviii}

Naidu continued to galvanize and organize this state of abjection in order to construct a speaking voice and a political and aesthetic self that can be both law-giver that joined her historical contemporaries such as Nietzsche's elaboration of Zarathustra, Carpenter's democratic and egalitarian post-gender prophet or Davidson's radicalized proto-fascist prophet of self-overcoming and suicide. In the development of this poly-decadent great self Naidu engaged in the complex struggles and wars of *fin-de-siècle* and modernist aesthetic ideology. Consciously or unconsciously her collections of lyric poems became a complex and contradictory celebration of herself as a new model of the high decadent priestess as the poems re-imagined the potentiality of decadence as an aesthetic ideology. The final form of this new self would be a poly-decadent self that would attempt to transform a newly globalized and culturally recombinant modernity.

Naidu's construction of poly-decadent womanhood combined traditional models of Indian femininity with poly-decadent thematic source materials. Naidu embraced the eroticism of poly-decadent exoticism in order to convey the powerful, the elicit, the forbidden, the pornographic, and the aesthetic experience of the divine irradiating each other—a common trope of the European *fin-de-siècle*. In poems such as “The Song of Princess Zeb-Un-Nissa, In Praise of Her Own Beauty (from the Persian)” Naidu explicitly unites sex, power, oriental exoticism and the poly-decadent feminine great self. Within the poem the Princess is, because of her pure aesthetic beauty, capable of commanding nature:

When from my cheek I lift my veil,
The roses turn with envy pale,
And from their pierced hearts rich with pain,
Send forth their fragrance like a wail.
(The Golden Threshold, 70)

By dwelling explicitly in the veiled Persian/Muslim subjectivity of the powerful Princess Naidu gestures towards the radical powers of womanhood that have informed how we understand the natural phenomenal world.

By melding together different aspects of the poly-decadent aesthetics Naidu was capable of creating a uniquely hybrid selfhood via poly-decadent eroticism, exoticism and poly-decadent devotional models. Naidu highlighted the Sufi heritage of Hyderabad, and as future poet of Hyderabad she courted the call of the divine other as lover and as destroyer—all of which might both titillate and seduce the British *fin-de-siècle* reader or collector of rare, perfumed, illicit poetry books, much as Leonard Smithers was marketing during the period—placing *The Kama Sutra* and *The Arabian Nights* alongside works of outright erotica, pornography and such notable *fin-de-siècle* works as the homoerotic pornographic work *Teleny*. By unifying nineteenth century theories of poetry and eroticism with Indian medieval poetics of erotic mystic devotion, Naidu refigured nineteenth century Decadence into an un-decadent pan-Asian and European movement that can clearly be an extension of long-standing aesthetic and devotional traditions—traditions that encompassed a variety of periods, philosophies and literatures.

4 The Ends of Decadence

Sarojini Naidu's poetry project comes to its effective end with the final sequence of poems in her last published work, *The Broken Wing*. This movement, The Temple sequence, presents the summation of Naidu's development as a poet and the summation of the Decadent movement and decadent aesthetics as they were confronted with the realities of modern politics, modern society and profound alterations in modern generic and mediated experience. This changes effectively ended ideas of decadence literature as a catalyst for new thought in the

period. The Temple sequence provides a fitting end for this chapter and for my discussion of poly-decadence by emphasizing how poly-decadent aesthetic devotion reached its point of ultimate stress, a point that Naidu organizes into a ritualized meditation on aesthetic interiority in the Temple sequence. The three sources of poly-decadence that I have outlined earlier in this chapter are each present within the Temple sequence. Poly-decadent eroticism, poly-decadent devotion and poly-decadent exoticism each play a key part in the organization of thematic contents that the Temple sequence instantiates and these thematic contents are staged in a pointed relation to the construction of the author and to the generic conditions that inform the decadent author-reader relation. In this section of the chapter I outline how the Temple sequence organizes this author-reader relation and I analyze how this organization of ideas radiates outward shaping a larger and more comprehensive reading of modern generic forms and the aesthetic/ideological narrative structure of modernity.

The Temple sequence, fully titled “The Temple: A Pilgrimage of Love”, is composed of three movements: “The Gate of Delight”, “The Path of Tears” and “The Sanctuary”. The Temple sequence is introduced by a quote from Rabindranath Tagore: “My passion shall burn on the flame of Salvation, the flower of my love shall shall become the ripe fruit of Devotion” (*The Broken Wing* 83). The title and the epigraph from Tagore frontally define for the reader the contents of the sequence, a pilgrimage of love will be undertaken to reach “salvation” and this “pilgrimage” will transform love into the “ripe fruit of Devotion”.

Each section of the poetic sequence is composed of eight poems and the poems follow a common thematic in their titling: “The Offering” “The Feast”, “Ecstasy” “The Lute-Song”, “If You Call Me”, “The Sins of Love”, “The Desire of Love”, and “The Vision of Love” compose the first series; “The Sorrow of Love”, “The Silence of Love”, “The Menace of Love”, “Love’s

Guerdon”, “If You Were Dead”, “Supplication”, “The Slayer” and “The Secret” compose the second series; and “The Fear of Love”, “The Illusion of Love”, “The Worship of Love”, “Love Triumphant”, “Love Omnipotent”, “Love Transcendent”, “Invocation” and “Devotion” compose the third. In addition to the repetitive nature of the titling and the explicit development of the cardinal devotional thematic matrix the poems emphasize their hieratic and thetic contents by numbering each group of poems within the greater sequence with the numbers one through eight, emphasizing the linear nature of each movement. The Temple sequence notates, through its titling and explicit linear and formal structure, the organizational development of its principle endeavour: pilgrimage into interior states of aesthetic interiority and into interior sites of mystic devotion. The sequence establishes its connection with its primary subject: the elaboration of the meaning of the central causal term “Love”. The formal construction of the Temple sequence radically inscribes the highly stylized and artificial nature of reading that the poems embody both in terms of style and in terms of how the author-reader relation is staged within the series as a whole.

P.V. Rajyalakshmi, in his elaborate mystical reading of Naidu’s poetry *The Lyric Spring* : *A Study of the Poetry of Sarojini Naidu*, explicitly ties Naidu’s usage of image and metaphor in the Temple sequence to “sacral and ritual experience” eliciting one of the central poly-decadent complexes that informed Naidu’s thought and that Naidu brought into its purest form in the Temple sequence: “The images and metaphors employed to describe love’s progress are mostly conventional and brought together in the poet’s usual “purple manner.” But the interplay of different conventions—Hindu, Buddhist, Sufi and Christian—creates something new and positive, extending and diversifying the vision of love as a sacral and ritual experience” (80-81). Rajyalakshmi’s analysis of the Temple sequence situates Naidu’s radicalized poly-decadent

“conventionality”. By mutating and re-routing Indian and English conventions Naidu’s literary, aesthetic and religious themes enter a state of radical anxiety, a state of anxiety that leads to a breaking point in the Temple sequence—a breaking point that exactly figures the fragile nature of poly-decadent cultural integration as a multitude of variant traditions reach a point where these variant traditions cannot be contained within the conventional aesthetic poetics of Naidu’s poly-decadent poetics. The Temple sequence, through the severity of its point of attack and its attempt to create a deep and resonant portrait of poly-decadent aesthetic devotion and of the emotional and affective life of poly-decadent aesthetic experience, takes Naidu’s poly-decadent poetics to an ultimate staging ground where the author is obliterated in the face of overpowering historical orders.

The poem organizes this entry into aesthetic experience in the first poem of the series, “The Offering” as the poem begins with the attempt to enter the temple through the “Gates of Delight”:

With Beauty mine Beloved, I would bring it
Like a rare blossom to Love’s glowing shrine;
Were dear youth mine, Beloved, I would fling it
Like a rich pearl into Love’s lustrous wine.

(The Broken Wing 85)

The first stanza in its radical conventionality enforces a particularly normative reading of what poetry is, of what the set of poems will do, of who the reader is to be to properly read the text and how the reader should read the sequence in the proper manner. By enforcing poetic conventions concerning such conventional concepts as beauty, “youth” and “Love” the Temple sequence begins its attack on conventional aesthetic experience by forcing the *fin-de-siècle* reader to either deny the poem any meaning outside of its staged conventionality or for the reader to embrace the highly stylized and elaborately archaic artificiality of its conventionality and Indo-English derivation and thereby give up a sense of historical irony or paradox. In the place

of irony, paradox or absurdity the poem in its highly mannered naivety places itself as, in a sense, the real, true or natural recording of aesthetic experience, no matter how stylized, archaic in manner, or mannerist in execution. The sequence fashions a highly stylized author and invites the further stylization of the reader, the two conventions constructing both how the poems can be read and what they mean as an art-work. Via this intensive conventionality the Temple sequence asks the reader to “buy” what the author is selling, to participate in an explicitly derivative economy of aesthetic relations that governs the reading/writing of the text and the necessary erasure of the self that this over-reliance on “tradition” necessitates. Here, “normal” romantically generated conceits of the heroic, highly individualized author are negated through the usage of such well-worn epithets as “youth and beauty”. Through its explicit conventionality Naidu inaugurates a poly-decadent poetics of evasive referentiality and biographical models of “authorship” and of biographical “authority” are negated through the power of generic poetic conventions that nullify the commercial/biographical/modern author/biographical-subject and its reality as a being inscribed in the socio-political/cultural contract of the *fin-de-siècle* contemporary historical milieu. By the end of her poem “The Offering” Naidu makes this necessity even more clear:

But I have naught save my heart's deathless passion
That craves no recompense deathly sweet,
Content to wait in proud and lowly fashion,
And kiss the shadow of Love's passing feet.
(*The Broken Wing* 85)

By the end of the poem Naidu explicitly notates the allegorical, imagistic, and non-real domain that the series of poems will inhabit, and the necessity of the reader's imagination to exist within this frame of highly stilted, artificial, and elaborately over-inscribed point of reductivity. Via a-historically antiquated and generally reductive symbolic terrain of meaning. Naidu's idea of

“Love” is constructed as not exactly amorous love, but in a sense it is, where the “I” of the author is a vaguely initiatory figure intent on the entrance to an as yet unnamed aesthetic experience, an aesthetico-mystical experience that will use highly conventional, archaic, and over-determined language models and an elaborately ritualized and hieratic “pilgrimage” to undertake its “offering” of authorial power and vision before “Love’s bright and sacral flame”.

The three movements of the Temple sequence “The Gate of Delight”, “The Path of Tears” and “The Sanctuary” each employ similar themes, ideas, poetic styles and principal characters. We may understand the movements as constructing a type of dramatized ritual theatre wherein the depersonalized self, the archetypal “I” or the normative soul enters into a series of relations with “Love” and with the various manifestations of Love’s being. As an explicitly mystical ritual drama the Temple sequence traffics in a generalized mystical and devotional domain working through states of ardor, of angst, of fulfillment and returning again in a cyclical nature to previous states of mystical initiation. This pathway from a state of initiation to a state of being, fully welcomed into the cult of Love, is the Temple sequence’s primary evolutionary pathway—a pilgrimage to the embrace of Love as an ideal metaphorical being that grants bliss, rapture and joy as well as suffering, enslavement and abject terror. The poems in each of the three movements of the Temple sequence embody these qualities and this organizing problematic.

The third poem of the first section titled “Ecstasy” explicitly outlines Love’s qualities and gives us a potent representation of the initiation experience and specific qualities that Love possesses as the key leitmotif of the Temple sequence:

Let spring unbid upon the breeze tresses of rich perfume
To lure the purple honey-bees to their enchanted death—
But sweeter madness drives my soul to swift and sweeter doom
For I have drunk the deep, delicious nectar of your breath!

Let spring unlock the melodies of fountain and of flood,
And teach the winged wind of man to mock the wild bird's art,
But wilder music thrilled me when the rivers of your blood
Swept o'er the flood –gates of my life to drown my waiting heart!
(87-88)

Here Spring becomes a gateway to aesthetic and mystical experience and to the state of “ecstasy”. “Ecstasy”, within this poem, becomes a state of aesthetic and devotional being that the “rivers of your blood” have taught to the uninitiated soul, instilling the poet/soul’s subjectivity with its aesthetic and devotional summons. Here “ecstasy” explicitly links devotion to Love with devotion to aesthetic beauty, associating love with “melodies of fountain and of flood”, and beauty with both natural and artificial experience. By mixing together these two antithetical terms, that of culture and of nature, of wildness and of civility, something of Love’s poly-decadent character, intentions and power is displayed. Poly-decadent illicit mixtures of religion, spirituality, race, culture and national or cultural origin permeates the devotional programme of the Temple sequence in general and is a key method that the poems use to organize and animate this pilgrimage. In this passage the term “ecstasy” highlights the purpose of the Temple sequence’s first movement, where the key note of the movement is one of initiation and this poem highlights the opening of the soul to aesthetic rapture and devotional sublimity, an experience that is at once terrible and beautiful, drowning the soul and seizing the senses.

The first section of the Temple sequence gathers together the reasons for and origins of the greater pilgrimage to Love, the summons of the invited subject to abject itself before its devotional absolute. This section explicitly ties many of the key motifs of melancholic decadence and devotional decadence into a theological rapture much as John Gray’s movement from aesthetic art objects, stylized lyric studies and elegant society pieces in *Silverpoints* (1894) would lead to the more fervently Christian, Catholic, and mystical writings of *Spiritual Exercises* in

1898. Similarly, Naidu's sporadic devotional works in her first two collections would eventually lead her to the marriage of aesthetic rapture and mystic devotional rapture in the Temple sequence. This poetic and biographical analogy is not merely coincidental in that both Gray and Naidu effectively abandoned high decadent poetic engagement in exchange for the purity of active, viral and engaged belief systems—in the case of Gray, a sacral belief system, and in the case of Naidu, an ideological one.^{lxix}

Naidu's choice in the end was the end of poetry and the prosefication of the poetic poly-decadent hero. Naidu chose, ultimately, to use her privileged position as “poet”, given to her through her publications history as well as her acceptance by the knowledge systems and traditions of the exoticized poly-decadent English other, to facilitate her political work and her role as cultural intermediary between the East and the West. After ceasing to write and publish poetry in the public domain, Naidu used the powers given to her by her success as a poet, and the notoriety this success bequeathed her, to transfer these inherited poetic powers to the prose-dominated ideological language sphere of rhetorical influence, of power-discourse dynamics and the institutionalization of a modern and robust prose-generated language-discourse-system. The unique rhetorical powers that the speech, letter and essay possessed during the period of her political engagements would be the fit weapons for her ideological combat. Naidu comments, in exaggerated terms, on what the new world needed and she returned to this theme repeatedly and at great length in the majority of her speeches, essays and talks. In one such speech, given in 1917 to “a crowded gathering of ladies and gentlemen numbering about six to seven thousand” at Gouri Vilas, Royapetta, Naidu describes an altogether different presentation of the word “you” than that readerly excess of symbolic otherness that she addresses in the Temple sequence:

A great French poet has said: “To each one his own infinity.” It means that his own infinity is his own infinite opportunity and responsibility. A strange thing is this infinite

spiritual opportunity and responsibility, a thing that you cannot lightly dismiss. You cannot say to-day, "I am busy with my personal gain and personal happiness." It knocks at your door and asks for an answer. Your infinity here is clear: it has no veils upon its face, it has no seals upon its doors. It is an open secret from which you may turn away but it chases you as a hound in heaven. Remember that the national responsibility, the service of India, must chase you. You will be asked, "What did you do to establish that hope of tomorrow, of which I speak to-day? The great French phrase, "To each man his own infinity" reduces itself to the simple question, a thing of daily consciousness, a daily service, a daily manifestation, the sincerity of your own dreams transmuted day by day into that current coin of loving service in the cause of Indian unity. Remember that the poet's dream is no more than the mirror of your hearts. If I say to you that this great hope of to-morrow lies in you, it simply means that within you is the power to achieve. How shall you face the responsibilities?" (*Speeches and Writings* 129)

In this speech, given one year before the publication of Naidu's last collection, *The Bird of Time*, Naidu accentuates an entirely different symbolic order than that poetically enunciated in the Temple sequence. In this speech the audience is brought upon a pilgrimage that will culminate in public service. Naidu asks the modern subject: "How shall you face the responsibilities?"—the question that must motivate and inform the soul of the modern citizen, the devotee of Indian Unity, who will be hounded not by "Love" and by mystical, esoteric, aesthetic experience, but by a spirit of responsibility that will give chase "as a hound in heaven". This speech is notable for its mention of French poetry as a means to bolster the ideological message, here understood as a revolutionary, culturally sophisticated and enlightened poetry that lead to national service rather than a decadent/symbolist poetry that would ascertain the nature of the soul and of original symbolic forms in the Baudelairian forest of symbols. In this speech rhetorical dialectic employs "the infinite" as a guiding metaphorical force that enforces consent to a transformative mission that will overtake the identity and the sovereign will of the free modern subject and compel ideological conformity to a specific daily, hourly and habitual state of liberatory consciousness—consciousness everywhere informed by the pressing need to achieve Indian unity via both interiorized and exteriorized ideological struggle.

The Temple sequence metaphorically narrates Naidu's ever-increasing saturation of poly-decadent thought, of rampant decadent devotion and of mystic derivation as Naidu developed her youthful poetic voice. This excess was an excess of both language and desire that the sequence points towards emphatically in its increasingly excessive imagery in relation to the I~Thou relation and in its nesting of the author-reader relation within this I~Thou contract.^{lxx} In the final movement of the Temple Sequence Naidu explicates what the worship of love entails in her poem "The Worship of Love":

Crush me, O Love, betwixt thy radiant fingers
Like a frail lemon leaf or basil bloom,
Till aught of me that lives for thee or lingers
Be but the wraith of memory's perfume,
And every sunset wind that wandereth
Grow sweeter for my death!

Burn me, O Love! As in a glowing censer
Dies the rich substance of a sandal grain,
Let my soul die till nought but an is the intenser
Fragrance of my deep worship doth remain—
And every twilight star shall hold its breath
And praise thee for my death!

(The Broken Wing 112)

With its repeating lines extolling how the world will praise Love for killing the devotee, the Temple sequence narrates the intimate violence and explicitly sadomasochistic beauties that wait for the ardent devotee within the temple's blessed state of enraptured interiority.

As the "You" of aesthetic-mystic "Love" becomes increasingly abstracted from the conventions of courtly or popular love poetry and the devotional pilgrimage moves further in upon itself as the divine lover becomes the divine destroyer and all possible perceptual distance becomes obliterated in the visceral I~Thou interchange of affective force. This relation is staged in a highly theatrical and symbolic language of self and other, god and devotee, and master-slave dialectics as the "you" become the "Thou" and usurps the self, will and daily life of the

enraptured devotee: “you are the Breath by which I live / And all my days become a consuming pyre.” (98). For the pilgrim soul to reach Love it must give itself away, much as the dedicated liberatory modern citizen must give itself to the normative behavioural Nation that it may exist within a globalized modernity of explicitly democratic, independent, revolutionary and “self-making” nation states. The un-decadent properties of Naidu’s turn to liberatory modern individualism seeking its eternal “Thou” in the unified holistic collectivism of the modern nation state is manifest. The end of decadence for Naidu would be the metaphorical burning of the poly-decadent manuscript as it is consumed in the absolute Thou of the modern nation state.

The interior of the Temple and the end of the temple sequence gifts to the reader an epiphanic experience of aesthetic sublimity where Love is perceived in its raw, inhuman, and unparalleled majesty. In the third section of the sequence the reader is given the frontal experience of Love’s full character: and the poems are titled with different aspects of Love’s eternal nature: “Love Triumphant”, “Love Omnipotent”, and “Love Transcendent”. Once having reached the third movement of the pilgrimage the devotee is fully admitted into Love’s internal court where the pilgrim/devotee/aesthetic practitioner can now behold, appreciate and be part of what Love is and be given the gift of Love’s eternal nature. In this meeting with Love the devotee is transmitted the gift of infinite power and the poly-decadent reader’s will is remade by aesthetic contact with Love’s nature:

O Love, is there aught I should fear to fulfil at your word?
Your will my weak hands with such dauntless delight would endow
To capture and tame the wild tempest to sing like a bird,
And bend the swift lightning to fashion a crown for your brow,
Unfurl the sealed triumph of Time like a foot-cloth outspread,
And rend the cold silence that conquers the lips of the dead.

(The Broken Wing 115)

The Temple Sequence was the last part of Naidu's final collection of poetry published publicly before her death. Naidu, unlike such High Romantic paragons of death and youth, Keats and Shelley, did not die as a young poet, unable to write more words because of her absence from the existential scene—rather she abstained from further publication and her energies became devoted to political activities, the writing of speeches and letters and the concrete needs of real, hourly and daily service to “Indian Unity”.

The final poem in The Temple Sequence “Devotion” narrates, in graphic form, the poetic protagonist's willingness to dismember itself for the cause of aesthetic assimilation into the untold beauty and grandeur of Love and to be part of Love's will:

Take my flesh to feed your dogs if you choose,
Water your garden-tree with my blood if you will,
Turn my heart into ashes, my dreams into dust—
Am I not yours, O Love, to cherish or kill?

Strangle my soul and fling it into the fire!
Why should my true love falter or fear or rebel?
Love, I am yours to lie in your breast like a flower,
Or burn like a weed for your sake in the flame of hell.

(*The Broken Wing* 120)

The consuming desire of the poly-decadent will to find union in unbridled cultural plurality, multiplicity and esoteric devotion leads to the death of the soul and the staging of the mantle of authorial death.^{lxxi} The author-reader relation, in its staged intimacy and its complex aesthetic and theological conceits, overpowers the need for poetry itself.

With the publication of *The Broken Wing* in 1918 Naidu's poly-decadent poetic career came to its effective end. In its place Naidu's public writing engaged with such themes as reminiscences of Gokhale, the Arms Act, the ideals of Islam, self-government for India, the Rowlatt Bills and Satyagraha, and the greater message of Indian Unity.^{lxxii} Addressing a mass meeting “convened by the District Congress Council and Madras Presidency Khilafat Committee

on the Marina” on February 15, 1922 Naidu explicated the clarity of her message and its explicit links to Mahatma Gandhi and to the clarity and purity of her ideological position, as well as the clarity and purity of the linguistic and generic structures she employs in her staging of rhetorical dialectic, her use of modern, infinitely real, prose:

You see it is quite obvious why I must crave your indulgence if my usually audible voice fails to reach the outermost edges of this vast audience. But my voice is capricious like a woman herself and change its mind very often and towards the end of the meeting becomes very clear but whether my voice be hoarse or clear, audible or inaudible, I want you to believe that the message I bring to you is always clear, always unchanging, not capricious but immutable, and it is the message which Mahatma Gandhi, fasting in Bardoli has sent to his compatriots all over the country. Like Mr. Andrews I also have a train to catch, like Mr. Andrews I also have a message to deliver but unlike Mr. Andrews I am not swayed or inspired by a double inspiration. One single heart is the devotion of my life and my life is applied in the service of my leader Mahatma Gandhi. (...) So it is the Gods of chance have blown me hither like the seawind the sands that blow across your face in the evening but I hope that unlike the sea-weeds and the sea-sands you will not try to blow away from your minds the message that my words contain—that same message that Mr. Andrews has given you in his touching and earnest fashion, the message of Unity, unity to-day, unity tomorrow, unity always, as the one imperishable foundation of that Sawaraj of which you and I dream with such longing heart.

(Speeches and Writings 268-9)

Barthes discussed the author-reader relation in Mallarmé’s poetics in terms of “suppression” and “writing” where Mallarmé’s poetics attempted to liberate the reader to create meaning within the death of the authorial power and the liberation of the reader to construct meaning within the open text: “Mallarmé’s entire poetics consists in suppressing the author in the interests of writing (which is, as will be seen, to restore the place of the reader)” (*Image, Music, Text* 143). Naidu’s development of prosodic meaning effectively reversed this relation, avoiding the stylized excesses of readerly potentiality and of overly ritualized aestheticism in her poetry for the programmatic excess of clear, purposeful and stylized ideological over-determination in her prose—effectively nullifying the modern reader’s ability to create meaning.

In this condition of authorial purity the imperilled modern subject must either be compelled by the voice of historical necessity or violate its ethically and spiritually requisite destiny.

Schiller writing on the nature of the political artist can help us understand the reach of Naidu's prose and something of the nature of this prosefication of political experience and the nature of modern, post-decadent aesthetic forms:

With the pedagogic or the political artist things are very different indeed. For him Man is at once the material on which he works and the goal towards which he strives. In this case the end turns back upon itself and becomes identical with the medium; and it is only inasmuch as the whole serves the parts that the parts are in any way bound to submit to the whole. (*On the Aesthetic Education of Man* 4th letter)

In prose, in the rhetorically interrogative prose sentence, in Mahatma Gandhi, and in the transcendental supreme cause of Indian Unity Naidu fulfilled her new aesthetic mandate via post-decadent ideological devotion and prosetic manipulation—here the capricious mixtures and the sensitive winds of the evening are transformed into the singular, monotypic immutable 'message', the prosetic message purifying decadent poetic forms and the real "Thou" of the enlightened ideological listener generically transforming the unreal "you" of the intimate aesthetic reader. lxxiii

Conclusion

The literatures of un-decadence in the *fin-de-siècle* helped shape and inform modern culture in a variety of significant ways. From aesthetics to ethics, visions of the future to visions of the past, ideas of the good and of the beautiful, theories of the soul and the self, were significantly altered and re-formulated in the counter-poetries of the period that shadow and outline the dominant modes of cultural aesthetics and generic media systems of the period. If nothing else I hope that this study has marginally altered the way that we perceive the late-Victorian period in order to reveal something of the complexity, fecundity and strangeness of its cultural productions and how these cultural productions attempted to both alter and radically transform the nature of modern lived reality, both in art and in political, historical, aesthetic, economic and metaphysical fields of action. From their emergence in relation to aestheticism and aesthetic poetry of the period, un-decadent poetries in the *fin-de-siècle* articulated both love of beauty and love of self-discovery, the development of aesthetic systems that were in direct relation to the powerful systems of thought represented by Ruskin and Pater's prodigious influence, but altering and redefining these methods of engagement in order to redistribute and reorganize the post-decadent self's capacity for new methods of aesthetic engagement. Naidu could both write the high decadent poem "Alabaster" where the poet's heart is represented in its delicate aesthetic inviolability: "Like this alabaster box whose art / Is frail as a cassia flower, is my heart, carven with delicate dreams and wrought / With many a subtle and exquisite thought" (*The Golden Threshold* 53), and then deploy her lyric talents to call on the children of new India to rise up and deploy their collective will for Mother India as she awakens from her slumber:

O young through all thy immemorial years!
Rise, Mother, rise, regenerate from thy gloom,

And, like a bride high-mated with the spheres,
Be new glories from thine ageless womb!

The nations that in fettered darkness weep
Crave thee to lead them where great morning break...
Mother, O Mother, wherefore dost thou sleep?
Arise and answer for thy children's sake!

The Future calls thee with a manifold sound
To crescent honours, splendours, victories vast;
Waken, O slumbering Mother and be crowned,
Who once wert empress of the sovereign Past.
(The Golden Threshold 94).

The poetries of Naidu, Davidson and Carpenter are full of such alchemical mixtures, subtle, precocious or exquisite aesthetic desires counterpoised with the immanent need to engage with history in order to produce something else, something new, strange, re-imagined and transformed by the poet's life, life-work and aesthetic practice. Indeed this is perhaps the most Wildean trait that three poets I have examined in this study possess, the combining of life and aesthetic ideology where poetry and existence blend together and fuse until the real and the poetic are inexorably altered by the transforming will of the work, here where the critic *is* the artist and the artist *is* the critic and the dialectic of historical forms is imaged and re-imagined by the critical imagination in full possession of its requisite powers:

That is what the highest criticism is, the record of one's own soul. It is more fascinating than history, as it is concerned simply with oneself, it is more delightful than philosophy as its subject is real and not vague. It is the only civilized form of autobiography as it deals not with the events, but with the thoughts of one's life, not with life's accidents of deed or circumstance but with the spiritual moods and imaginative passions of the mind.
(The Artist as Critic 365)

Naidu, Davidson and Carpenter transformed the records of their spiritual autobiographies acting as both critics and artists of the self. They transformed their spiritual autobiographies into records of ideological action and aesthetic formulation, constructing theories of selfhood and history— and using these theories to represent allusive meta-narratives that would try and

organize the complex and multiple powers of the modern into meaningful, powerful and progressive visions of strange and new post-decadent future societies. In different manners Naidu, Davidson and Carpenter each investigated the nature of the “highest self” of the possibility of “selfhood” that could become the ideal, a theory of the self that had persisted in theories of aesthetics in the nineteenth century from Schiller and Hegel onward as Hegel explicated in relation to the nature of art and the ideal self in Schiller’s works: “A whole set of Schiller’s productions is devoted to this insight of his in relation to the nature of art, especially the ‘Letters Upon Aesthetic Education’. In these letters the central point from which Schiller starts is that every individual human being has within him the possibility of an ideal humanity” (*Introductory Lectures on Aesthetics* 68). Naidu, Davidson and Carpenter’s exploration of the autobiographical self and of an “ideal humanity” lead outwards both backwards and forwards in history as they strived not just to record the lived sensations and incidents of the daily life but to find solutions, both wonderful and horrible, for the degraded nature of the modern.

Carpenter, Davidson and Naidu each proposed a metahistorical thetic construct in order to satiate the needs of the un-decadent will in its desire to remake orders on spiritual, ideological and aesthetic planes. As each of their ‘un-decadent’ poetic paths grappled with the perceived *fin-de-siècle* cultural condition and perceived collapse of natural historical orders, so their paths diverged more and more wildly from orthodox decadence and from high decadence as the two governing spirits of late-Victorian thought. This divergence opened up new, powerful, and sometimes frightening paths of imaginative engagement as each came to terms, in different manners, with what poetry could do in the period, what its distinct limitations were as a genre, and how this medium could transform meaning and discursive/interpellative systems through its mixture of antiquarian, traditional and avant garde generic modulations.

Talia Schaffer writes of the liberties for expression that the “anti-realist revolution” provided for women writers in the *fin-de-siècle* and how they turned to aestheticism as a means to explore possible subjectivities that the Victorian three-volume novel excluded: “The newest, most controversial literary trend was the splintering of the realist marriage plot into a multitude of alternative forms. New Women, naturalist, and decadent subjects all needed new kinds of narratives: psychological, surrealist and journalistic ways of depicting lives that no longer centered around marriage. The variety of the period’s experiments shows why women were drawn to aestheticism; it attracted writers actively looking for alternative modes of writing and provided women writers, in particular, with perhaps the safest way to participate in the anti-realist revolution” (*The Forgotten Female Aesthetes* 34). Un-decadent literatures of *fin-de-siècle* provided alternatives to orthodox decadent literatures and exposed the superficial nature of what critics then and now articulated as normative decadent subject matters for literary and aesthetic investigation. Naidu, Davidson, and Carpenter, as well as “Michael Field”, all turned towards un-decadent subject matters that deepened their visions of the self and provided alternative fields of historical representation in which the *fin-de-siècle* self could seek to create large-scale narrative orders. Equally with Naidu, Davidson, Carpenter and Michael Field I will reiterate the claim that this turn towards un-decadence was not solely that of decadent outliers but that was, in truth, part of the very nature of the decadent aesthetic programme and that the richness, complexity, profundity, and seriousness of *fin-de-siècle* decadent literature has been largely ignored in favour of the orthodox reading of failed decadent lives.

Lionel Johnson in his poem “Youth” describes the immortality of young men, their eternal being, the grace and power of their youth in radiant, inspiring, and decidedly un-decadent tones:

Where now is death? Where that gray land?
Those fearless eyes, those white brows grand,
That take full sunlight and sweet air
With rapture true and debonair,
These have not known the touch of death!
The world hath winds: these forms have breath.
But, should death come, should dear life set,
Calm would each go: Farewell! Forget
Me dead: live you serenely yet.

See them! The springing of the palm
Is nought, beside their gracious calm:
The rippling of cool waters dies
To nought, before their clear replies:
The smile, that heralds their bright thought
Brings down the splendid sun to nought.
See them! They walk the earth in state:
In right of perfect youth, held great:
On whom the powers of nature wait.
(Religious Poems 43)

In “Youth” Johnson celebrates a group of young men and articulates a belief in collective aesthetic education and explicitly rejects obsession with death, obsession with morbidity, and ideas of failure and sin. Indeed the “youths” of Johnson’s poem seemingly know nothing of sin or depravity, instead their very nature is that of eternal innocence, purity and light. “Youth” displays a wholesome high Victorian cleanliness, a belief in the immortality of the spirit, and a spiritualized embodiment of beauty in these male children of Hellas. Johnson’s celebration of maleness, the male body and male aesthetic education came directly from Pater and this shared religion of masculine sanctity and erotic aesthetic spirituality permeates the poem just as Carpenter employed his vision of Uranian beauty and male fellowship. Johnson’s poetry is as equally engaged in this vision of “decadence” as it is with the much re-printed vision of love of evil present in “The Dark Angel”. Even the “decadent” or “evil” nature of the poem “The Dark Angel” must be re-appraised for rather than it being the representation of failed decadent desire it must also be read as a theological poem exploring the conflicting needs of the spirit and the

body, of good and evil, of death and life, and, metaphysically of the nature of those two brothers and children of God, Satan and Christ.

Naidu, Davidson and Carpenter's un-decadent writings form a unique canon of alternative culture wherein dominant orders and narratives of Empire, Sexuality, Gender, Spirituality, Culture and Power are radically re-integrated into complex inter-cultural and inter-civilizational historical and metaphysical orders. A movement that was not limited to un-decadents but that authors associated with high decadence themselves initiated, where Wilde, Pater, Lionel Johnson and John Gray, among others, each acutely grappled with large-order spiritual, philosophical and ideological subjects and how to best represent the truly modern and unique spirit of *fin-de-siècle* temporal being in a period of violent political, economic and moral crisis.

The greater historical field of nineteenth century history and of long-view historical orders provided the background for this development. Reflections and critiques upon the rise of industrialism, capitalism, incipient globalism and modernity's relation to the medieval by such figures as Karl Marx and John Ruskin, and then William Morris and Peter Kropotkin, emphasized the long-view historical orders at work in the greater collective imaginary of the *fin-de-siècle* psyche. The dream of new conceptions of ancient worlds, that was such a strong source of poetic revelation in W.B. Yeats and Lionel Johnson, occurred in different manners in Naidu, Davidson and Carpenter, each emphasizing a return to the past and, crucially, a transformative and fusal vision of a future world reborn through the power of the individual poet's vision and the individual poet's post-decadent will. Carpenter, Davidson and Naidu each used the materials of decadence and concerns about cultural degradation and degeneration to help structure these long-view historical metanarratives—metanarratives that attempted to meld together the

individual psyche of the modern individual into a greater vision of the self within the fields of Empire, Nation, Democracy and in the generic medium of the poem.

Decadent discourse at once created and served as the creative impetus for these poetries. Each of these poetries emerged from the churning miasma of *fin-de-siècle* decadent discourse and used this hostile chaos as a means to generate an affective and liberated vision of the self in history, both for good and bad ends. The dangers of the civilizational as a mode of inquiry becomes apparent in each of their meta-narratives, the tendencies to generalize from a point of strength, to generalize the universal from the perceived, to organize metanarratives on top of universalized objectivity is endemic to each of the idealist messages presented by Davidson, Carpenter and Naidu. With their literary antecedents, Whitman, Baudelaire and Nietzsche, Carpenter, Davidson and Naidu represented the continuance of the nineteenth-century poet and the poetic as a potent site of cultural critique, of visionary ideological transcendence and as a generic object that could, at least within its own imaginary, transform the conscience of infinitely possible mass-cultures.

Carpenter, Davidson and Naidu each re-used and re-purposed tradition in this pursuit of a re-negotiated modern subjectivity. From this re-purposing of convention new, altered and modified subjectivities were fabricated. Each of these new models of subjectivity organized powerful new models of tradition upon the fertile struggles of late-nineteenth century subjectivity. By orienting their philosophical metanarratives upon the changing needs of sexuality, economy, spirituality, culture and personal identity each of these poets targeted the exposed psychic contents of a modern subject adrift in the changing nature of modernity, upon changing models of identity and of subjectivity that were the stage for each of their grand operas of heroic self-making. The heroic nature of their un-decadent metanarratives re-envisioned the

basic tenets of what it was to be decadent and how we can understand not only Carpenter, Davidson and Naidu but a wide range of writers, thinkers, poets and artists during the *fin-de-siècle*, and how decadent literature arose not just as a melancholic withdrawal from action but as a re-making of what it meant to be modern in a period that has routinely been fossilized in a stereotypical vision of orthodox decadence. When such figures of the *fin-de-siècle* as Oscar Wilde, Michael Field, or Lionel Johnson are approached through a lens similar to that which I have used in this study, the nature of their many “un-decadences” can hopefully be realized and the precious, raw, strange, difficult and radically transformative art of the *fin-de-siècle* can be better understood upon the wider and more powerful canvas of ideological actors, aesthetic fields and spiritual planes that I have gestured towards in this brief study.

Works Cited

- Alexander, Meena. "Sarojini Naidu: Romanticism and Resistance." *Economic and Political Weekly*, vol. 20, no. 43, 1985, p. 71-78.
- Armstrong, Isobel. *Victorian Poetry: Poetry, Poetics, and Politics*. London: Routledge, 1996.
- Bachelard, Gaston, M. Jolas, and John R. Stilgoe. *The Poetics of Space*. 1994. Print.
- Bakhtin, M. M, and Michael Holquist. *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*. University of Texas Press, 1981.
- Barbin, Herculine, and Michel Foucault. *Herculine Barbin : Being the Recently Discovered Memoirs of a Nineteenth-Century French Hermaphrodite*. Vintage Books, 2010.
- Barthes, Roland, and Stephen Heath. *Image, Music, Text*. Hill and Wang, 1977.
- Barthes, Roland, Richard Miller, and Richard Howard. *The Pleasure of the Text*. New York: Hill and Wang, 1975.
- Barthes, Roland. *Roland Barthes*. New York: Hill and Wang, 1977.
- Bhabha, Homi K. *The Location of Culture*. Routledge, 2004.
- Blackwell, Fritz. "Krishna Motifs in the Poetry of Sarojini Naidu and Kamala Das." *Journal of South Asian Literature*, vol. 13, no. 1-4, 1977, pp. 9–14.
- Blanchot, Maurice, and Ann Smock. *The Space of Literature*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1989.
- Boris, Eileen. *Art and Labor: Ruskin, Morris, and the Craftsman Ideal in America*. Temple University Press, 1986.
- Boyiopoulos, Kostas. *The Decadent Image: The Poetry of Wilde, Symons and Dowson*. Edinburgh University Press, 2015.
- Brinks, Ellen. *Anglophone Indian Women Writers, 1870-1920*. Farnham, Surrey: Ashgate, 2013.
- Bristow, Joseph. *The Fin-De-Siècle Poem: English Literary Culture and the 1890s*. Ohio University Press, 2005.
- . "How Decadent Poems Die". *Decadent Poetics: Literature and Form at the British Fin-De-Siècle*, edited by Jason David Hall and Alex Murray. Palgrave Macmillan, 2013.
- Burdett, Osbert. *The Beardsley Period: An Essay in Perspective*. John Lane, 1925.
- Bridgwater, Patrick. *Nietzsche in Anglosaxony: A Study of Nietzsche's Impact on English and American Literature*. Leicester: Leicester University Press, 1972. Print.
- Boyiopoulos, Kostas. *The Decadent Image : The Poetry of Wilde, Symons and Dowson*. Edinburgh University Press, 2015.
- Buber, Martin. *I And Thou*. Edited by Walter Kaufmann, Charles Scribner's Sons, 1970.
- Buckley, Jerome H. *William Ernest Henley: A Study in the "Counter-Decadence" of the 'Nineties*. Princeton, N.J: Princeton University Press, 1945.
- Călinescu Matei. *Five Faces of Modernity: Modernism, Avant-Garde, Decadence, Kitsch, Postmodernism*. Duke University Press, 1987.
- Camlot, Jason. "Prosing Poetry: Blackwood's and Generic Transposition 1820-1840". *Romanticism and Blackwood's Magazine*. Robert Morrison and Daniel Sanjiv Roberts, eds. Palgrave Macmillan, 2013.
- Carpenter, Edward. *The Art of Creation: Essays on the Self and Its Powers*. London: Allen & Unwin, 1921. Internet resource.
- . *Days with Walt Whitman: With Some Notes on His Life and Work*. London: G. Allen & Unwin, 1921. Internet resource.

- . *England's Ideal: And Other Papers on Social Subjects*. London: G. Allen & Unwin, 1919. Internet resource.
- . *From Adam's Peak to Elephanta: Sketches in Ceylon and India*. London: G. Allen & Unwin, 1921.
- . *Homogenic Love: An Essay*. Sheffield Archives, 1894. Internet resource.
- . *The Intermediate Sex: A Study of Some Transitional Types of Men and Women*. G. Allen & Unwin, 1930.
- . *My Days and Dreams: Being Autobiographical Notes*. London: G. Allen & Unwin, 1918.
- . *Narcissus: And Other Poems*. London: H.S. King, 1873. Internet resource.
- . *Towards Democracy: Complete Ed. in Four Parts*. London: G. Allen & Co., Ltd, 1905.
- . *A Visit to Gñani: Or Wise Man of the East*. London: G. Allen & Unwin, 1920.
- Carpenter, Edward, and Tony Brown. *Edward Carpenter and Late Victorian Radicalism*. Frank Cass, 1990.
- Chaudhuri, Rosinka, editor. *A History of Indian Poetry in English*. Cambridge University Press, 2016.
- Chindhade, Shirish. *Five Indian English Poets : Nissim Ezekiel, A.k. Ramanujan, Arun Kolatkar, Dilip Chitre, R. Parthasarathy*. Atlantic Publishers and Distributors, 2001.
- Copley, A R. H. *A Spiritual Bloomsbury: Hinduism and Homosexuality in the Lives and Writings of Edward Carpenter, E.M. Forster, and Christopher Isherwood*. Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2006.
- Crosby, Ernest. *Edward Carpenter: Poet and Prophet*. London: Simple Life Press, 1905.
- Davidson, John. *The Poems of John Davidson*. Edinburgh: Scottish Academic Press, 1973. Print.
- . *Selected Poems and Prose of John Davidson*. Edited by John Sloan, Oxford University Press, 2018. ,
- . *The Testament of John Davidson*. London: Grant Richards, 1908.
- Davidson, John, and Edward J. O'Brien. *The Man Forbid: And Other Essays*. Boston: Ball Pub. Co, 1910.
- Debord, Guy. *The Society of the Spectacle*. 1st paperback ed., Zone Books, 1995.
- Dowling, Linda C. *Hellenism and Homosexuality in Victorian Oxford*. Cornell University Press, 1994.
- . *Language and Decadence in the Victorian Fin De Siècle*. Princeton University Press, 1986.
- Eco, Umberto. *On Literature*. Harcourt, 2004.
- Ellis, Havelock. *Studies in the Psychology of Sex*. Random House, 1942.
- Ellis, Havelock, and Paul Avrich Collection (Library of Congress). *Personal Impressions of Edward Carpenter*. Free Spirit Press, 1922.
- Ferretter, Luke. *Louis Althusser*. Routledge, 2006.
- Foucault, Michel, and Alan Sheridan. *Discipline and Punish : The Birth of the Prison*. Vintage, 2012.
- . *The History of Sexuality*. Vintage books ed., Vintage Books, 1990.
- Frankel, Nicholas. *Oscar Wilde's Decorated Books*. University of Michigan Press, 2000.
- Fritzsche, Peter. *Reading Berlin 1900*. Harvard University Press, 1998.
- Gagnier, Regenia. "The Global Circulation of the Literatures of Decadence." *Literature Compass*, vol. 10, no. 1, 2013, pp. 70–81.

- . *Individualism, Decadence and Globalization : On the Relationship of Part to Whole, 1859-1920*. Palgrave Macmillan, 2010.
- . *Idylls of the Marketplace : Oscar Wilde and the Victorian Public*. Stanford University Press, 1986.
- . *Literatures of Liberalization : Global Circulation and the Long Nineteenth Century*. Palgrave Macmillan, 2018.
- Gibson, Mary Ellis. *Indian Angles : English Verse in Colonial India from Jones to Tagore*. Ohio University Press, 2011.
- Gregg, William Rathbone. "False Morality of Lady Novelists". pp. 144-67. [National Review, 8 (January 1859) *Victorian Print Media: A Reader*, edited by A. King and J. Pinnkell. Oxford University Press, 2005, p.51.
- Guillory, John. "Genesis of the Media Concept." *Critical Inquiry*, vol. 36, no. 2, 2010, pp. 321–362.
- Hall, Jason David, and Alex Murray. *Decadent Poetics: Literature and Form at the British Fin-de-Siècle*. New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013.
- Hardt, Michael, and Antonio Negri. *Empire*. Harvard University Press, 2000.
- Hegel, Georg W. F, Bernard Bosanquet, and M J. Inwood. *Introductory Lectures on Aesthetics*, 2004.
- Henley, William Ernest. *Poems*. London: David Nutt, 1907.
- Hichens, Robert. *The Green Carnation*. Dover Publications, 1970.
- Hobbs A, and Januszewski C. "How Local Newspapers Came to Dominate Victorian Poetry Publishing." *Victorian Poetry*, vol. 52, no. 1, 2014, pp. 65–87.
- Hönnighausen Lothar. *The Symbolist Tradition in English Literature: A Study of Pre-Raphaelitism and Fin De Siècle*. Cambridge University Press, 1988.
- Jackson, Holbrook. *All Manner of Folk: Interpretations and Studies*. London: G. Richards, Ltd, 1912.
- . *The Anatomy of Bibliomania*. London: Faber & Faber, 1950.
- . *The Eighteen Nineties : A Review of Art and Ideas at the Close of the Nineteenth Century*. Grant Richards, 1913.
- Jameson, Fredric. *Postmodernism, or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*. Duke University Press, 1991.
- King, Andrew, and John Plunkett. *Victorian Print Media: A Reader*. Oxford University Press, 2005.
- Ledger, Sally, and Scott McCracken. *Cultural Politics at the Fin De Siècle*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1995.
- Laity, Cassandra. *H.D. and the Victorian Fin De Siècle: Gender, Modernism, Decadence*. Cambridge University Press, 1996.
- "The Last Darshan." *The India Express*. 3 Mar, 1949.
- Le Gallienne, Richard. *English Poems*. London: Elkin Mathews and John Lane, 1892.
- . *The Romantic '90s*. Doubleday, Page & Company, 1925.
- Livesey, Ruth. "Morris, Carpenter, Wilde, and the Political Aesthetics of Labor." *Victorian Literature and Culture*, vol. 32, no. 2, 2004, pp. 601–616.
- . "Socialism and Victorian Poetry." *Literature Compass*, vol. 1, no. 1, 2004.
- . *Socialism, Sex, and the Culture of Aestheticism in Britain, 1880-1914*. Oxford University Press, 2007.
- Lukács György. *Writer & Critic, and Other Essays*. Grosset & Dunlap, 1971.

- Macherey, Pierre. *A Theory of Literary Production*. Translated by Geoffrey Wall, Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1978.
- MacLeod, Kirsten. *Fictions of British Decadence: High Art, Popular Writing, and the Fin De Siècle*. Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire, England: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006.
- Macleod, R. D. *John Davidson: A Study in Personality*. Folcroft, PA: Folcroft Library Editions, 1974.
- Matich, Olga. *Erotic Utopia: The Decadent Imagination in Russia's Fin-De-Siècle*. University of Wisconsin Press, 2005.
- McGann, Jerome J. *The Textual Condition*. Princeton, N.J: Princeton University Press, 1991.
- Miller, Andrew H. *The Burdens of Perfection : On Ethics and Reading in Nineteenth-Century British Literature*. Cornell University Press, 2008.
- Miller, Elizabeth Carolyn. "Literature and the Late-Victorian Radical Press." *Literature Compass*. 7.8 (2010): 702-712.
- . *Slow Print : Literary Radicalism and Late Victorian Print Culture*. Stanford University Press, 2013.
- Mishra, L. N. *The Poetry of Sarojini Naidu*. Delhi: B.R. Pub. Corp, 1995.
- Moore, George. *Confessions of a Young Man*. Edited by Susan Dick, McGill-Queen's University Press, 2014.
- Müller F. Max, editor. *The Sacred Books of the East*. Clarendon Press, 1879.
- Naidu, Sarojini. *The Bird of Time: Songs of Life, Death & the Spring*. New York: J. Lane Co, 1919.
- . *The Broken Wing: Songs of Love, Death & Destiny, 1915-1916*. New York: John Lane Co, 1917.
- . *The Golden Threshold*. Charlottesville, VA: University of Virginia Library, 1997.
- . *Speeches and Writings of Sarojini Naidu*. 3rd ed., G.A. Natesan, 1925.
- Naidu, Sarojini, and Makarand R Paranjape. *Sarojini Naidu, Selected Letters, 1890s to 1940s*. Kali for Women, 1996.
- Ramachandran Nair, K. *The Poetry of Kamala Das*. Reliance Pub. House, 1993.
- Nelson, James G, and Peter Mendes. *Publisher to the Decadents : Leonard Smithers in the Careers of Beardsley, Wilde, Dowson*. Pennsylvania State University Press, 2000.
- Nietzsche, Friedrich Wilhelm. *Thus Spake Zarathustra: A Book for All and None*. Translated by R.J. Hollingdale, Penguin Books, 1961.
- . *Beyond Good and Evil: Prelude to a Philosophy of the Future*. Translated by Walter Kaufman, Vintage Books, 1966.
- . *The Birth of Tragedy and the Case of Wagner*. Translated by Walter Kaufman, Vintage Books, 1967.
- . *The Gay Science: With a Prelude in Rhymes and an Appendix of Songs*. Translated by Walter Kaufmann, Vintage Books, 1974.
- Nietzsche, Friedrich Wilhelm, and Michael Tanner. *Twilight of the Idols: And, the Anti-Christ*. Translated by R. J Hollingdale, Penguin Books, 2003
- Nordau, Max. *Degeneration*. New York: D. Appleton, 2011.
- Pater, Walter. *Appreciations: With an Essay on Style*. Blackwell, 1973.
- . *Marius the Epicurean: His Sensations and Ideas*. New York: Johnson Reprint, 1967.
- Pater, Walter, and Donald L. Hill. *The Renaissance: Studies in Art and Poetry: the 1893 Text*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980.
- Peterson, Carroll V. *John Davidson*. New York: Twayne Publishers, 1972.

- Pittock, Murray. *Spectrum of Decadence: The Literature of the 1890s*. Routledge, 1993.
- Potolsky, Matthew. *The Decadent Republic of Letters : Taste, Politics, and Cosmopolitan Community from Baudelaire to Beardsley*. University of Pennsylvania Press, 2013.
- Pynsent, Robert B. *Decadence and Innovation: Austro-Hungarian Life and Art at the Turn of the Century*. London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1989.
- Rajyalakshmi, P. V. *The Lyric Spring: A Study of the Poetry of Sarojini Naidu*. 1st ed., Abhinav Publications, 1977.
- Ramachandran Nair, K. *The Poetry of Kamala Das*. Reliance Pub. House, 1993.
- Reed, John R. *Decadent Style*. Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Press, 1985.
- Reade, Brian. *Sexual Heretics: Male Homosexuality in English Literature from 1850 to 1900: an Anthology*. London: Routledge & K. Paul, 1970.
- Reddy, Sheshalatha. "The Cosmopolitan Nationalism of Sarojini Naidu, Nightingale of India." *Victorian Literature and Culture*, vol. 38, no. 2, 2010, pp. 571–589.
- Rodensky, Lisa. *Decadent Poetry from Wilde to Naidu*. London: Penguin, 2006.
- Rowbotham, Sheila. *Edward Carpenter: A Life of Liberty and Love*. Verso, 2009.
- Rowbotham, Sheila, and Jeffrey Weeks. *Socialism and the New Life: The Personal and Sexual Politics of Edward Carpenter and Havelock Ellis*. London: Pluto Press, 1977.
- Ruskin, John, and Clive Wilmer. *Unto This Last, and Other Writings*. Penguin Books, 1985.
- Schaffer, Talia. *The Forgotten Female Aesthetes : Literary Culture in Late-Victorian England*. University Press of Virginia, 2000.
- Schiller, Friedrich. *On the Aesthetic Education of Man*. Penguin Books, 2016.
- Schopenhauer, Arthur. *The World As Will and Representation*. Trans. E.F.J. Payne. Dover Publications, 1969.
- Schorske, Carl E. *Fin-De-Siècle Vienna: Politics and Culture*. First Vintage book ed., Vintage Books, 1981.
- Sengupta, Padmini. *Sarojini Naidu: A Biography*. Asia Publishing House, 1966.
- Sharma, K. K. *Indo-English Literature: A Collection of Critical Essays*. Vimal Prakashan, 1977.
- Sloan, John. *John Davidson, First of the Moderns: A Literary Biography*. Oxford, England: Clarendon Press, 1995.
- Shattuck, Roger, and Charles Eastlake. "Vibratory Organism: Seeing Nature Whole." *The Georgia Review*, vol. 31, no. 2, 1977, pp. 454–470.
- Schiller, Friedrich. *Letters Upon the Aesthetic Education of Man*. Kessinger, 2004.
- Spivak, Gayatri Chakravorty. *An Aesthetic Education in the Era of Globalization*. Harvard University Press, 2012.
- . *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason: Toward a History of the Vanishing Present*. Harvard University Press, 1999.
- Stetz, Margaret. "Publishing Industries and Practices". *The Cambridge Companion to the Fin De Siècle*, edited by Gail Marshall. Cambridge University Press, 2007.
- Symons, Arthur, and Matthew Creasy. *The Symbolist Movement in Literature*. Carcanet Press, 2014.
- Tanke, Joseph J. *Foucault's Philosophy of Art: A Genealogy of Modernity*. Continuum, 2009.
- Thain, Marion. *'Michael Field' : Poetry, Aestheticism and the Fin De Siècle*. Cambridge University Press, 2007.
- Thornton, R. K. R. *The Decadent Dilemma*. E. Arnold, 1983.
- Townsend, James Benjamin. *John Davidson: Poet of Armageddon*. New Haven, 1961.

- Tucker, Herbert F. *Epic: Britain's Heroic Muse, 1790-1910*. Oxford University Press, 2008.
- Tsuzuki, Chūshichi. *Edward Carpenter, 1844-1929: Prophet of Human Fellowship*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980.
- Weir, David. *Decadence and the Making of Modernism*. University of Massachusetts Press, 1995.
- Whitman, Walt, and Ed Folsom. *Democratic Vistas: The Original Edition in Facsimile*. University of Iowa Press, 2010.
- Whitman, Walt, and Jason Stacy. *Leaves of Grass, 1860: The 150th Anniversary Facsimile Edition*. University of Iowa Press, 2009.
- Wilde, Oscar. *The Sphinx*. Elkin Mathews and John Lane, 1894.
- Wilde, Oscar, and Linda C Dowling. *The Soul of Man Under Socialism and Selected Critical Prose*. Penguin Books, 2001.
- Wilde, Oscar, and Richard Ellmann. *The Artist As Critic: Critical Writings of Oscar Wilde*. Allen, 1970.
- Wilde, Oscar, and Michael Patrick Gillespie. *The Picture of Dorian Gray: Authoritative Texts, Backgrounds, Reviews and Reactions, Criticism*. 2nd ed., W.W. Norton, 2007.

Notes

- i <http://literature-compass.com/global-circulation-project/>.
- ii See Gagnier, “Global Circulations of Literary Decadence”, 70-78.
- iii See Potolsky: “Decadent writers were fascinated with the creation and destruction of communities. They were drawn to martyrs, who die publicly for a persecuted group, and drew stories and political concepts from moments of historical transition (late antiquity, the end of the Middle Ages, the eighteenth century) marked by underground movements, revolutionary collectives and secret societies. Decadent texts describe a striking range of quasi-utopian communities and promote new ideas about affiliation in the ways they address their readers. Significantly overlapping with the emerging gay and lesbian countercultures, decadence also provided a medium for writers to define communities united by sexual dissidence and nonnormative desires” (*Decadent Republic of Letters* 6).
- iv Rathbone, *National Review*, “False Morality of Lady Novelists” printed in *Victorian Print Media: A Reader* (51)
- v The full text of most of the individual poems discussed in this chapter may be found in the collection edited by Lisa Rodensky, *Decadent Poetry* (2008). Rodensky’s choice of works in this anthology demonstrates the great variety of types of decadent and neo-decadent poetry in the period and is especially useful in the representation of the complex discursive forms at work in the production of decadent poetry and decadent aesthetics in the period.
- vi The publication of such works as *Teleny* and their supposed authorship by one of the standard bearers of High Decadence is symptomatic of erotic high decadent content, high decadent contradictions and the greater high decent aesthetic programme. James G. Nelson documents the significance of this interrelation in graphic detail in *Publisher to the Decadents : Leonard Smithers in the Careers of Beardsley, Wilde, Dowson*.
- vii Leonard Smithers work as the publisher of erotic, transgressive and criminal works alongside the publication of high decadent avant-garde poetry and literature is emblematic of this shared network of aesthetic exchange.
- viii The full text of Johnson’s poem reads:

The Dark Angel

Dark Angel, with thine aching lust
To rid the world of penitence:
Malicious Angel, who still dost
My soul such subtle violence!

Because of thee, no thought, no thing,
Abides for me undesecrate:
Dark Angel, ever on the wing,
Who never reachest me too late!

When music sounds, then changest thou
Its silvery to a sultry fire:
Nor will thine envious heart allow
Delight untortured by desire.

Through thee, the gracious Muses turn,
To Furies, O mine Enemy!
And all the things of beauty burn
With flames of evil ecstasy.

Because of thee, the land of dreams
Becomes a gathering place of fears:
Until tormented slumber seems
One vehemence of useless tears.

When sunlight glows upon the flowers,
Or ripples down the dancing sea:
Thou, with thy troop of passionate powers,
Beleaguerest, bewilderest, me.

Within the breath of autumn woods,
Within the winter silences:
Thy venomous spirit stirs and broods,
O Master of impieties!

The ardour of red flame is thine,
And thine the steely soul of ice:
Thou poisonest the fair design
Of nature, with unfair device.

Apples of ashes, golden bright;
Waters of bitterness, how sweet!
O banquet of a foul delight,
Prepared by thee, dark Paraclete!

Thou art the whisper in the gloom,
The hinting tone, the haunting laugh:
Thou art the adorer of my tomb,
The minstrel of mine epitaph.

I fight thee, in the Holy Name!
Yet, what thou dost, is what God saith:
Tempter! should I escape thy flame,
Thou wilt have helped my soul from Death:

The second Death, that never dies,
That cannot die, when time is dead:
Live Death, wherein the lost soul cries,
Eternally un comforted.

Dark Angel, with thine aching lust!

Of two defeats, of two despairs:
Less dread, a change to drifting dust,
Than thine eternity of cares.

Do what thou wilt, thou shalt not so,
Dark Angel! triumph over me:
Lonely, unto the Lone I go;
Divine, to the Divinity.

ix The full text of Symons' poem reads:
Javanese Dancers

Twitched strings, the clang of metal, beaten drums,
Dull, shrill, continuous, disquieting:
And now the stealthy dancer comes
Undulantly with cat-like steps that cling;

Smiling between her painted lids a smile,
Motionless, unintelligible, she twines
Her fingers into mazy lines,
The scarves across her fingers twine the while.

One, two, three, four glide forth, and, to and fro,
Delicately and imperceptibly,
Now swaying gently in a row,
Now interthreading slow and rhythmically,

Still, with fixed eyes, monotonously still,
Mysteriously, with smiles inanimate,
With lingering feet that undulate,
With sinuous fingers, spectral hands that thrill

In measure while the gnats of music whirr,
The little amber-coloured dancers move,
Like painted idols seen to stir
By the idolators in a magic grove.

x The full text of Henley's poem reads:
Ballade of a Toyokuni Colour Print (1888)

Was I a Samurai renowned,
Two-sworded, fierce, immense of bow?
A histrion angular and profound?
A priest? a porter?—Child, although
I have forgotten clean, I know
That in the shade of Fujisan,
What time the cherry-orchards blow,
I loved you once in old Japan.

As here you loiter, flowing-gowned
And hugely sashed, with pins a-row
Your quaint head as with flamelets crowned,
Demure, inviting—even so,
When merry maids in Miyako
To feel the sweet o' the year began,
And green gardens to overflow,
I loved you once in old Japan.

Clear shine the hills; the rice-fields round
Two cranes are circling; sleepy and slow,
A blue canal the lake's blue bound
Breaks at the bamboo bridge; and lo!
Touched with the sundown's spirit and glow,
I see you turn, with flirted fan,
Against the plum-tree's bloomy snow. . . .
I loved you once in old Japan!

Envoy

Dear, 'twas a dozen lives ago;
But that I was a lucky man
The Toyokuni here will show:
I loved you—once—in old Japan.

^{xi} See Ezra Pound, T.S. Eliot and Virginia Woolf's attacks on Victorian excess and weakness, particularly as an attack on decadent language.

^{xii} The full text of Le Gallienne's poem reads:
A Ballad of London

Ah, London! London! our delight,
Great flower that opens but at night,
Great City of the midnight sun,
Whose day begins when day is done.
Lamp after lamp against the sky
Opens a sudden beaming eye,
Leaping alight on either hand,
The iron lilies of the Strand.

Like dragonflies, the hansoms hover,
With jeweled eyes, to catch the lover;
The streets are full of lights and loves,
Soft gowns, and flutter of soiled doves.

The human moths about the light
Dash and cling close in dazed delight,
And burn and laugh, the world and wife,

For this is London, this is life!

Upon thy petals butterflies,
But at thy root, some say, there lies,
A world of weeping trodden things,
Poor worms that have not eyes or wings.

From out corruption of their woe
Springs this bright flower that charms us so,
Men die and rot deep out of sight
To keep this jungle-flower bright.

Paris and London, World-Flowers twain
Wherewith the World-Tree blooms again,
Since Time hath gathered Babylon,
And withered Rome still withers on.

Sidon and Tyre were such as ye,
How bright they shone upon the tree!
But Time hath gathered, both are gone,
And no man sails to Babylon.

^{xiii} We may compare Carpenter's development of ideas of the natural with the expression of the high decadent antagonism to the natural that Robert Hichens satirizes in *The Green Carnation*: "How I hate that word natural . . . To me it means all that is middle-class, all that is of the essence of jingoism . . . It might be a beautiful word, but it is the most debased coin in the currency of language. Certain things are classed as natural and certain things are classed as unnatural—for all the people born into the world. Individualism is not allowed to enter into the matter. A child is unnatural if it hates its mother. A mother is unnatural if she does not wish to have children. A man is unnatural if he never falls in love with a woman. A boy is unnatural if he prefers looking at pictures to playing cricket; or dreaming over the white naked beauty of a Greek statue to a game of football under Rugby rules . . . Yet it is natural to one man to preach gentleness and love sport; it is natural to another to dream away his life on the narrow couch of an opium den, with his head between a fellow-sinner's feet. I love what are called warped minds, and deformed natures . . . There only a few people in the world who dare to defy the grotesque code of rules that has been drawn up by that fashionable mother Nature." (*The Green Carnation* 44).

^{xiv} Havelock Ellis's *Studies in the Psychology of Sex* (1897) included anecdotes and notes that Carpenter provided from his and his friends' experiences.

^{xv} A.R.H. Copley notates the political crisis that Carpenter underwent in the late-1880s as being a crisis with Socialism as "the god that failed" (31). Copley explicates how Carpenter's disenchantment with practical politics lead him to Vedanta and to the mystic East: "Socialism had proved to be a god that field. Carpenter was increasingly ill at ease in a movement shaping up for a power struggle. In many ways he was a rural romantic, a back to nature advocate, both living and thinking against the grain of a unionizing, urban socialist movement." Copley's analysis is fascinating in terms of its sexuality/politics binary and how we may see the

prose/poetry binary that Carpenter shifted via his development of “prosetry” and his eroto-politico subject mixing in the thematic manipulations of *Towards Democracy*.

^{xvi} Chushichi Tsuzuki provides a key and ambivalent portrait of the relation between *Towards Democracy* and the evolution of Carpenter’s thought: “Towards Democracy provided the starting-point and essence of all his later work.” (45). Tsuzuki states that with its publication Carpenter “was in the midst of the Socialist revival in which millenarian and revolutionary creeds were publicly advocated as the panacea for the evils of industrial Britain.” Tsuzuki’s biography situates *Towards Democracy* as “the starting point” for Carpenter’s thought but it is primarily framed as a pale imitation of Walt Whitman’s *Leaves of Grass* as Tsuzuki associates the text as an act of ‘plagiarism’: “It is not known how Whitman responded to what he might well have regarded as an imitation or even plagiarism of his own work.” (45). Tsuzuki plainly locates the text as a small but key event in Carpenter’s political development, but not, however, in greater relation to it as a literary text. This tendency to read *Towards Democracy* as simply an expression of Carpenter’s biography has greatly limited its critical and aesthetic reading history.

^{xvii} Reginia Gagnier indicates just how difficult the relation to Wilde’s trial would have been for Carpenter’s *Towards Democracy* at the time—If the text would be then associated in the public mind with homosexual aestheticism in the period: “Until 1895 a relatively isolated art world in Britain held two views of aestheticism. For Wilde aestheticism was “a mode of acting, an attempt to realize one’s own personality on some imaginative plane out of reach of the trammeling accidents and limitations of real life” (“The Portrait of Mr. W.H.”). Its political goal was to enable its proponents to “know the meanings of the words, and realise them in free, beautiful lives” (“The Soul of Man Under Socialism”). For others it meant a heightened perception through the senses. (...) Both views resisted the Victorian value of utility, rationality, scientific factuality, and technological progress. In Wilde’s trials in 1895, his perceived position as both spokesperson for art and example of sexual deviant resulted in a remarkable elision in the public domain of art and sexuality and thus in the creation of a new category of aestheticism.”(*Idylls of the Marketplace* 139)

^{xviii} These quotations demonstrate the manner in which Carpenter’s works existed in the economy of *fin-de-siècle* literature, as part of Victorian Sage literature and as a part of the literature of industrial critique, Carpenter’s writing naturally moved between beauty and ideological critique, spiritualism and radical democracy—a movement that was understood to be a natural and engaging area of engagement for the curious and self-perfecting *fin-de-siècle* reader.

^{xix} Livesey on Morris and Carpenter’s aesthetics of labour, politics and art writes: “Both writers worked up against late nineteenth century aestheticism in their belief that the increasing autonomy of art was a symptom of advanced capitalism: a condition that would be terminated by the revolution, but that in the meantime needed to be exposed as the sickness it was.” (“Morris, Carpenter and Wilde and the Political Aesthetics of Art” 603)

^{xx} John Ruskin explicitly ties together the reader-author relation that Carpenter develops in the text: “To yield reverence to another, to hold ourselves and our likes at his disposal, is not slavery; often it is the noblest state in which a man can live in this world. (*Unto This Last, and Other Writings* 86). Carpenter follows here in the style and form of Walt Whitman as Whitman invented his loafer and democrat everyman in *Leaves of Grass* in an explicit attempt to model his reader in the fictional image of the author that the text insists upon.

^{xxi} See Whitman’s use of prose in *Democratic Vistas* and Whitman’s pronounced use of the reader-author complex for the staging of ideological deconstruction and reconstruction:

“I feel the parts harmoniously blended in my own realization and convictions, and present them to be read only in such oneness, each page and each claim and assertion modified and temper'd by the others. Bear in mind, too, that they are not the result of studying up in political economy, but of the ordinary sense, observing, wandering among men, these States, these stirring years of war and peace. I will not gloss over the appalling dangers of universal suffrage in the United States. In fact, it is to admit and face these dangers I am writing. To him or her within whose thought rages the battle, advancing, retreating, between democracy's convictions, aspirations, and the people's crudeness, vice, caprices, I mainly write this essay. I shall use the words America and democracy as convertible terms. Not an ordinary one is the issue.” (11). Whitman’s desire to ‘appeal’ to the reader, to instruct the reader as to how ‘terms’ function, and how it must be read ‘only in such oneness’ by an untutored wanderer, not one who has been ‘studying up in political economy’, evidently goes to the heart of Carpenter’s desire to remodel the prose-poetry divide and to establish a clean and natural channel through which knowledge may pass without the hazards of formal verse or formal science/knowledge. This hybridity performs a powerful re-division of meaning and where and how we can accept truth, both generically and linguistically.

xxii Carpenter’s cleansing and naturalizing of language-use may be understood as being similar to that of Wordsworth in his critique of eighteenth century formality and over-decoration. and that the American poet of *Patterson*, William Carlos Williams would later argue for in his call for simplicity and lack of excess in the writing of modern poetry. Lying and dis-honesty function in a fascinating dynamic here with the poetics of Wilde and his “Decay of Lying”.

xxiii In *A Spiritual Bloomsbury: Hinduism and Homosexuality in the Lives and Writings of Edward Carpenter, E.M. Forster and Christopher Isherwood* Copley discusses at length the numerous gurus that Carpenter had during his life and his desire to experience this state of teacher/student, guru/disciple relationship, and, as well, the erotic aspects of said relationship. We may usefully advance the guru/disciple relation as being explicit in the construction of the author/reader relation of *Towards Democracy*.

xxiv See Jason Camlot’s “Prosing Poetry: Blackwood’s and Generic Transposition 1820-1840”. In particular note Camlot’s discussion of poetry and other modes of discourse in relation to their discursive value and how poetry was understood during the period as a unique, or not so unique, discursive mode. Carpenter’s play on prose and poetry accentuates the complex ties between poetic “emotion” and prose “facts” as Carpenter tends to annihilate each of these hierarchical definitions concerning nineteenth century generic economies as he pursues a pure and innate channel to “Democracy”.

xxv Compare this with Wilde’s development of the future self in “The Artist as Critic”: “For who is the true critic but he who bears within himself the dreams, and ideas, and feelings of myriad generations, and to whom no form of thought is alien, no emotional impulse obscure? And who the true man of culture, if not he who by fine scholarship and fastidious rejection has made instinct self-conscious and intelligent, and can separate the work that has distinction from the work that has it not, and so by contact and comparison makes himself master of the secrets of style and school and understands their meanings, and listens to their voices, and develops that spirit of disinterested curiosity which is the real root, as it is the real flower, of the intellectual life, and thus attains to intellectual clarity and having learned ‘the best that is known and thought in the world,’ lives—it is not fanciful to say so—with those who are the immortals” (*The Soul of Man Under Socialism and Selected Critical Prose* 255).

^{xxvi} By extension we can understand the development of Whitman's democratic-decadent verse forms in its 'freedom' where Whitman's "free"-verse as opposed to the "enslaved" verse of cosmopolitan *fin-de-siècle* high decadents.

^{xxvii} See Roger Shattuck's reading of Baudelaire's early attempt at the prose poem in "De la couleur" and Shattuck's development of how Baudelaire used the prose-poem as a means to chronicle sense-impressions and 'nature' as the prose poem functioned as a "vibratory organism" to respond to the sensorial in a new and unique manner.

^{xxviii} See Carpenter's use of Engels and the Bhagvasda Gita as two poles of ideological foment for the positioning of the "new theology" of Carpenter's revelatory socialism.

^{xxix} See Copley on the significance of the guru-devotee relationship, pp.22-36.

^{xxx} Linda Dowling's *Hellenism and Homosexuality in Victorian England* notates the growth and significance of the cult of Hellas and in particular the development at Oxford and Cambridge of Uranism in relation to ideals of male-friendship and education for the Ancient Greeks. This development was foundational to the emergence of Carpenter's modeling of democratic-decadence.

^{xxxi} We can contrast Carpenter's return to a Hellenic vision of the liberated self with Wilde's high decadent vision of amoral pleasure and a return to Hellas as Lord Henry develops the idea in Wilde's *Picture of Dorian Gray*: "I believe that if one man were to live out his life fully and completely, were to give form to every feeling, expression to every thought, reality to every dream—I believe that the world would gain such a fresh impulse of joy that we would forget all the maladies of medievalism, and return to the Hellenic ideal—to something finer, richer, than the Hellenic ideal, it may be." (19).

^{xxxii} Carpenter's attempts to influence the reader through the development of a perfected self may be seen as deeply tied to Victorian ideals of "perfectionism". This strain of self-development for the Victorians is developed in Andrew Miller's *The Burdens of Perfection* as he outlines perfectionism Victorian thought and "of our susceptibility to influence and our capacities for influencing others" (Miller, 4).

^{xxxiii} Carpenter's work in *Towards Democracy* is naturally aligned to key aspects of William Morris's egalitarian socialism and Morris's advancement of the natural and beautiful embodied self: "To feel mere life a pleasure; to enjoy the moving one's limbs and exercising one's bodily powers; to play, as it were, with sun and wind and rain; to rejoice in satisfying the due bodily appetites of a human animal without fear of degradation or sense of wrongdoing; yes, and therewithal to be well-formed, straight-limbed, strongly knit, expressive of countenance—to be, in a word, beautiful—that also I claim" ("How We Live and How We Might Live" (lecture to SDF 1887)).

^{xxxiv} See Rowbotham: "His democracy is personal and momentary—a flash of loving recognition, a close relationship to nature and the loving comradeship of men" (*Edward Carpenter: A Life of Liberty and Love*, 72). Rowbotham's title for Carpenter's biography is also radically indicative of this manner of seeing Carpenter's life as being fully imbued/saturated with his political/social message, and the way that Carpenter embodied the personal as the political. In this sense, Rowbotham may be understood as an "ideal" reader for the text of *Towards Democracy*, one who appreciates 'democracy' as emotional, affective and real rather than as a historical, ideological or merely 'political' theoretical order. Carpenter (and Whitman's) desire to evade the theoretical, scientific or analytical in favour of the sensual, the sentimental and the honest is fulfilled in Rowbotham's definition of Carpenter's "democracy".

xxxv Peterson recognizes that the speaker of the *Testaments* is, implicitly, John Davidson himself, and that while the *Testaments* may be classified as “dramatic monologues” they are really “dramatic diatribes”. Peterson states: “Ostensibly the *Testaments* are dramatic monologues, but the dramatis personae—Vivisector, Empire Builder, and Prime Minister—have no existence independent of John Davidson. They all seem to be John Davidson in some mood or pose; and, if we called them all John Davidson, it would make no difference to the poems” (Peterson, 92). That Peterson sees the personae of the *Testaments* as “having no existence independent of John Davidson” is crucial to understanding how thin the veil of illusion is being produced by the fictive realities produced by the poems. Contrary to Peterson Sloan argues that “one has to be careful about identifying Davidson with the speakers of his *Testaments*. An ironic distance is maintained by the use of the monologue form and the inclusion of dream visions. (...) It was not that Davidson did not share the materialist convictions expressed in his *Testaments*, only that he saw these as poetic statements which he was anxious should be distinguished from his life” (Sloan, 206). For the sake of this study I believe that both lines of argument are correct, but that in a sense all the speakers are aspects both of John Davidson himself, but that the biographical, singular, historical actor John Davidson is also a fictive or poetic unity that stands in for a voice of that greater unity, the *fin-de-siècle* itself.

xxxvi I refer to this set of plays as “The Mammon Plays” for the duration of this study.

xxxvii Davidson’s relation to Nietzsche is fundamental to my development of Davidson’s relation to the muscular-decadent movement. Patrick Bridgewater’s *Nietzsche in Anglosaxony* provides a pivotal reading and examination of the relation of British thought to Nietzsche and how exactly Nietzsche’s thought penetrated the British Isles. See pp. 51-64 for Bridgewater’s discussion of Davidson’s relation to Nietzsche.

xxxviii Davidson’s remodeling of poetic form, style and genre may be compared to other poetic innovators of the period: like Mallarmé who would use impressionistic music and chance connections to orchestrate the complex language games of “L’après-midi d’un faune” or of “Un coup de dés jamais n’abolira le hasard”, Baudelaire and Rimbaud who would investigate the prosing of poetry in order to convey the complex material metamorphosis of the late nineteenth century city and anti-rational themes of revolt in *Le Spleen de Paris* and *Illuminations*, or Yeats would search out the pure folk language in which to combine the cultural dream of an antique Celtic Spirituality—Davidson combined poetic generic forms in order to construct a fit vehicle for his polemical vision.

xxxix Davidson’s relation to the marketing of writing may be usefully compared to that of Gissing’s portrayal of market forces and individual psychology in *New Grub Street*. Within the world of Grub Street and within the world of literary fiction Gissing portrays the intimate links between books, between the failure to write and publish, and the failure of the immanent will: “A week or two more would see him at the end of his money. He had no lessons now, and could not write; from his novel nothing was to be expected. He might apply again to his brother. But such dependence was unjust and unworthy. And why should he struggle to preserve a life which had no prospect but of misery?” (527). Gissing recognizes, and then goes on to represent the way the will garbs itself in the shades of death and the melancholic raptures that suicide can provide for its supplicants.

xl Townsend, perhaps the most seminal and engaged critic of Davidson, responds negatively and dismissively to the themes and excesses of Davidson’s poetic output of the 1900s thus: “In reality these plays add little to what he had already stated or implied in the *Testaments* and elsewhere, but they do formulate with lurid and tiresome explicitness his blasphemous gospel of

sexuality, primitivism, science, and power—a perverted religion of humanity” (337). That the greatest (or most thorough) critic of Davidson would themselves paint such a hostile image of Davidson’s work is itself telling considering the reception of Davidson’s works in total.

xli See Davidson’s letter to Edmund Gosse, *Collected Works* p.324.

xlii *Selected Poems and Prose of John Davidson*, p.166.

xliii From Nietzsche’s, *The Gay Science*, Book II, sec. 92, tr. Kaufmann.

xliv Nietzsche’s attack on Wagner is symptomatic of the desire in the *fin-de-siècle* to attack aspects of decadent culture. In *The Case of Wagner* Nietzsche writes: What does a philosopher demand of himself first and last? To overcome his time in himself, to become "timeless." With what must he therefore engage in the hardest combat? With whatever marks him as the child of his time. Well, then! I am, no less than Wagner, a child of this time, that is, a *décadent*: but I comprehended this, I resisted it. The philosopher in me resisted” (46). Nietzsche’s attack on Wagnerian theories of art and the folk should not confuse us to the distinct similarities in relation to Nietzsche and Davidson’s development of muscular-decadent thought. Indeed, Wagner’s development of the *gesamtkunstwerk* and his usage of a strong mythological lineage to create a new man is nearly identical to Davidson and Nietzsche, both of whom used Wagnerian modes of art and thought in the development of their philosophical crusades. See again Nietzsche’s continued development of Wagner’s significance for an analysis of the modern soul: “My greatest experience was a *recovery*. Wagner is merely one of my sicknesses.

Not that I wish to be ungrateful to this sickness. When in this essay I assert the proposition that Wagner is *harmful*, I wish no less to assert *for whom* he is nevertheless indispensable—for the philosopher. Others may be able to get along without Wagner; but the philosopher is not free to do without Wagner. He has to be the bad conscience of his time,—for that he needs to understand it best. But confronted with the labyrinth of the modern soul, where could he find a guide more initiated, a more eloquent prophet of the soul, than Wagner? Through Wagner modernity speaks *most intimately*: concealing neither its good nor its evil, having forgotten all sense of shame. And conversely: one has almost completed an account of the *value* of what is modern once one has gained clarity about what is good and evil in Wagner.— I understand perfectly when a musician says today: "I hate Wagner, but I can no longer endure any other music." But I would also understand a philosopher who would declare: "Wagner *sums up* modernity. There is no way out, one must first become a Wagnerian ..." (48)

xlv Nordau’s classification of Wagner provides another useful key for this study and for the attack on ‘decadence’ by the reformers of *fin-de-siècle* culture: “Richard Wagner is in himself alone charged with a greater abundance of degeneration than all the degenerates put together with whom we have hitherto become acquainted. The stigmata of this morbid condition are united in him in the most complete and most luxuriant development. He displays in the general constitution of his mind the persecution mania, megalomania and mysticism; in his instincts vague philanthropy, anarchism, a craving for revolt and contradiction; in his writings all the signs of graphomania, namely, incoherence, fugitive ideation, and a tendency to idiotic punning, and, as the groundwork of his being, the characteristic emotionalism of a colour at once erotic and religiously enthusiastic” (*Degeneration* 172).

xlvi Dowling emphasizes two conflicting modes of literary language and literary discourse in the *fin-de-siècle*. Writing of Yeats’s response to these two modes Dowling states: “Seen from the perspective of Victorian literary history, however, such a pattern simply recapitulates the *fin-de-siècle* hesitation between the two competing ideals of Pater’s elaborate written language and the idiomatic speaking voice, with Yeats persisting in *fin-de-siècle* ambition to accommodate both

by finally rejecting neither.” (248-9). Dowling analyzes the usage of colloquial, common language in Davidson’s poems of the ‘90s (Dowling, 226-30) to develop this thematic but for a full and comprehensive understanding of the myriad types of literary discourse at work in the *fin-de-siècle* it is important to amend Dowling’s analysis by emphasizing the variety of schools and ideological or thematic domains that modeled *fin-de-siècle* literary production, and in particular in this study, of *fin-de-siècle* poetic models and modes of poetics. Davidson’s Testaments and Carpenter’s *Towards Democracy* provide key works that deeply broaden and alter Dowling’s common language—decadence duality.

xlvi See Eileen Boris’s *Art and Labor, Ruskin, Morris and the Craftsman Ideal in America* for a key examination of the growth of the Morris and Ruskin cults in the Americas and their relation to the marketing of fine objects and the cultivation of middle-class bourgeois theories of beauty, socialism, self-development and decoration.

xlviii See Peterson’s discussion of Davidson’s pronouncements on what war will give to humanity and, notably, the future artists who will be born through the “competition of empires” pp.109-10.

xliv From ‘On Poetry’ the introduction to *Holiday and Other Poems*, qtd in *The Poems of John Davidson*, vol. 2: p.536.

i For discussion of the Darwinian popularizers whose works Davidson drew on for his scientific materialism such as Edard Aveling’s *Darwin Made Easy* (1887) or translations of Ernst Haeckel’s *The Wonders of Life* (1904), *The Pedigree of Man* (1883) or *The Riddle of the Universe* (1900), see Sloan pp.213-16.

ii See Gagnier’s description of Vivisection’s role in Davidson’s *Testament of a Vivisector* is telling: “The vivisector sees carving up living creatures as the “zest” of scientific inquiry: matter is “thought achieved, unconscious will” (...) He soon begins to “study pain” for its own sake, until there is only pain, pain as knowledge, whether in the heat of the sun or the contractions of maternity” (*Individualism, Decadence and Globalism* 98-99). Gagnier pinpoints how the will in Davidson emerges in and works its way through a gross, material, corporeality, the great individual will routing itself through natural history via lived, existent sense-experience. The experience of material sensation grounding the individual will as opposed to the immaterial spiritual withdrawal of death.

iii qtd in Townsend, 281.

liii See Townsend’s elucidation of this disturbing ideological outgrowth in the later years of Davidson’s thought: “Without specific reference to Nietzsche he clearly regards suicide as the ultimate expression of the individual’s jubilant *Willzumacht*. He advocates for civilization the same solution as for the individual. To “weed” humanity and to create a “race of heroes in a golden age,” he approves the “excellent expedient” of voluntary euthanasia and eugenic evolution.” (81).

liv See Dowling, *Language and Decadence* 239.

lv Townsend describes “Honeymoon” as: “a sentimental, rather lush epithalamion, alludes to a marriage that began in hope and happiness but with the provision for joint suicide should it be overtaken by sorrow and despair” (416).

lvi From ‘On Poetry’ from *Holiday and Other Poems*, printed in *The Poems of John Davidson*, vol ii, pp. 536.

lvii See Milton Bronner’s essay from the *Forum* (1910) for a fascinating early analysis (just two years after the publication of the last *Testament* and one year after Davidson’s death) of Davidson’s poetics, an analysis that I have utilized as a point of departure for some of the key motifs of my interpretation: “In the past sixty or seventy years, the doctrine of individualism, of

egoism, of the I, has been largely proclaimed. Max Stirner and Nietzsche, who followed him in point of time, though not always in doctrine, were the philosophers of this new propaganda. Ibsen was its dramatist and, in some phases, so is George Bernard Shaw. Whitman and Davidson must be accounted its poets. Whitman proclaimed the sacredness of the body and put forth the dream of the superman. Davidson gave us rather the anarchical phase of Nietzschean philosophy. He is the smasher of things as they are, the pessimist dissatisfied with the present, the optimist dreaming of the larger and nobler to-morrows. His position was the direct result of his temperament, of his own struggles for success in a heedless world, of his wrath and tears over the sufferings of the submerged tenth, of his reading of the advanced thinkers” (*The Poems of John Davidson* 304-5).

lviii Davidson’s interest in “self-suicide” and in the nobility or greatness of death ties him neatly to such diverse major modernist thinkers and artists as France’s George Bataille and his ceremonial relation to death or “beheading” or to Japan’s Yukio Mishima and the cult of sacrificial death and the value of pain in his philosophy and forcibly concretized in the work *Confessions of a Mask* (1949).

lix The ubiquity of this mode of overwrought sexualized *fin-de-siècle* ideological discourse may be illustrated by its ties to the artistic productions of Gustave Klimt. Klimt, whose works are contemporary to the works of Davidson, similarly tied themes of sex and death with a highly mannered pagan or classically modeled mythology of symbolic forms. As well as Klimt, Sigmund Freud as well in Vienna, was at this moment exploring his psychoanalytic and civilizational critique of sexual modes in the development of the Oedipal and Narcissistic models. See Carl Schorske’s *Fin-de-Siècle Vienna* for a discussion of the cultural moment that birthed the works of Freud and Klimt in Vienna.

lx Rather than engaging in a greater elaboration of Naidu’s meaning in the mid-or late-twentieth century, let alone within the twenty-first century, Indian context, which would entail at least another chapter, if not an entire book outside of the chapter I have devoted to Naidu—I have chosen instead to emphasize the *fin-de-siècle* reading of her works in their immediate background of primarily cultural issues related to the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century decadence and modernism.

lxi See Fritz Blackwell’s “Krishna Motifs in the Poetry of Sarojini Naidu and Kamala Das”: “A favorite motif of the medieval *bhakti* or devotional poets of India, as well as of the later Himalayan schools of *bhakti* miniatures, was the *abhisarika*--a woman going to meet her lover, braving the elements, blackness of night, and dangers of the forest--including snakes and various categories of ghosts and goblins. She is, of course, Radha, or at least a *gopi*, and the lover she is risking life and social acceptance to seek, is Krishna. And it is all metaphorical of the soul's (Radha) quest for God (Krishna). Very often the poet identified himself with the heroine in the conventional signature line at the end of the poem. Even when not, however, as in Vidyapati, she was usually the sympathetic focus” (10).

lxii John Reed notates a way of understanding decadent style, as an intra-artistic theory of aesthetic forms that provided the *fin-de-siècle* decadent practioner with a distinct mode for the construction of both aesthetic and ideological forms (*Decadent Style* 24-34). Mathew Potolsky in *The Decadent Republic of Letters* similarly gestures toward a circuitous vision of decadent art and decadent style as a “means” rather than as an end or a fixed set of formulae: “decadence is a consciously adopted and freely adapted literary stance, a characteristic mode of reception, rather than a discernible quality of things or people. It is a form of judgment and a way of doing things with texts” (29).

lxiii Much as the French Surrealists splintered and surrealist aesthetics grew into proto-communist aesthetics and social-communist aesthetic ideology came to organize and deploy Surrealist thought, so political liberationism came to dominate and deny the possibility of Naidu's poly-decadence as political ideology supplanted aesthetic ideology in her consciousness.

lxiv See Gagnier's *Individualism, Decadence and Globalization* 1-27.

lxv Attacks on Naidu's poetry after-Independence routinely attack this blending of India and England where her writing is seen as not truly Indian in its relation to British models and British Empire. The perversity and excess of Naidu's work elicited harsh criticism, particularly in the decades after Indian independence. The retrograde Marxist/Modernist desire to damn the prolix, artificial, artful, and societally unconcerned poetics of nineteenth century Romantics, Victorians and Decadents is powerfully executed as well within the Indian cultural scene as Shirish Chindhade gleefully succumbs to this manner of ritualistic literary critique: "'of those who wrote poetry in the first half of the present century, only a handful are worthy of note (...) Sarojini Naidu, like Toru Dutt, is worth remembering only for a few stray poems. Her themes are Indian and she had the finest ear for the sound of English. As a result she has treated Indian themes in totally un-Indian rhythms" (*Five Indian English Poets* 24). Chindhade goes on to quote the remarks of Keki Daruwalla on the stylistic and thematic excesses of Naidu's "dandified Georgianisms" and repellent works that "were untouched by the reality around them, drought, famine, plague, colonial exploitation or by the reality within, namely erosion of faith and the disintegration of the modern consciousness."

lxvi See Hardt and Negri's *Empire*: "The passage to Empire emerges from the twilight of modern sovereignty. In contrast to imperialism, Empire establishes no territorial center of power and does not rely on fixed boundaries or barriers. It is a decentered and deterritorializing apparatus of rule that progressively incorporates the entire global realm within its open, expanding frontiers. Empire manages hybrid identities, flexible hierarchies and plural exchanges through modulating networks of command. The distinct national colors of the imperialist map of the world have merged and blended in the imperial global rainbow" (xi-xii).

lxvii Naidu's subservience to imperial traditions was widely attacked by post-Independent critics. Attacking mysticism and domesticity as the dominant traditions of Indian Women's poetry, Kamala Das wrote pointedly: "The prescribed themes for women's writings were God and domestic bliss. Nothing else. This body, this physicality was to be ignored. We had Avvayyar, Mirabai, but they wrote of God, they sang of God. That was allowed. But what happens to you, what happens to a woman, when a man becomes her god, her living god? Has she no right to write about that god?" (*The Poetry of Kamala Das* 41).

lxviii K. Ramachandran Nair highlights Das's attacks on tradition in dramatic terms—writing of Das's poem "Daughter of the Century" Nair states: "Nothing short of cannibalism can serve the purpose of expressing the fury and agony of Kamala Das. (...) Das implies that that one generation flourishes after having massacred and smashed the earlier one" (*The Poetry of Kamala Das* 44). Nair represented Das's work as a radical alteration to the neo-Romantic, nostalgic, and 'orientalist' mode of Indian women's writing that was commonly found by modern, post-Independence critics, in Naidu's poetics. But rather than simply placing Das's attack on tradition as monumentally contrary to that of Naidu, or Mirabai for that matter, the note of Kristevan abjection, and the focalized concern with tradition and the place of a highly strategic poetics of *écriture féminine*, in Cixous' terms, may be traced within this lineage. Indeed, Das's violent representation of the "cannibalization" of tradition by each new generation provides an important lens through which to understand Naidu's poly-amorous devotion to a

variety of meta-narratives concerning the self, history, and representations of the divine. Much as Eliot's poetics of experimental and allegorical bricolage uses the *Wasteland* to cannibalize tradition in order to ultimately produce *The Four Quartets*. These two divergent modes of understanding tradition and the poetic past are neatly presented in Eliot and Harold Bloom's dual understandings of the poet's relation to his or her poetic forebears.

lxviii We can turn to Guy Debord to consider the relation between the project of the workers to dismantle the modern spectacle and Naidu's simultaneous deconstruction of accepted traditions and re-formation of this spectacle as her poetics and ideological aesthetics moved meaning from poetry to prose, but did not attempt to profoundly dismantle the spectacle's status quo, rather reinstituting a new society of modernist spectacle with Mahatma Gandhi that would be Indian Independence: "The consciousness of desire and the desire for consciousness are identically the project which, in its negative form, seeks the abolition of classes, that is, the direct possession by the workers over all the moments of their activity. Its opposite is the society of the spectacle, where the commodity contemplates itself in a world which it has created." (*Society of the Spectacle* Thesis 53).

lxix It is useful as well to quote from Naidu's letter to her daughter in 1932 that gives a fascinating portrait of Naidu's domestic life in India at the time and how she continued to enjoy the earthly, aesthetic and daily during these years of political engagement: "I have been reading a great deal, grave and joy [ful?]. I have been experimenting vigorously, but not in vain, the art and science of cookery and have composed many new and delectable sweets and savouries and salads. I have been planting flowers and tending a miniature kitchen garden under my back window and already I have coriander and mustard, radish and capsicum coming up" (*Selected Letters* 279). As well it is useful to point out that a great deal of her political activities involved various acts of social networking among prominent figures in India, South Africa, England and the United States and that this incessant political activity was largely in the form of various dinner parties, speaking engagements, teas and other miscellaneous daily minutiae that Naidu notates in great detail in her letters to friends and family as well as to Nehru and Gandhi. Naidu's letters, in their expressive eloquence and ardent emotionality provide a constant index of her moods and experiences but neither in her letters or her speeches does she actively theoretically or philosophically develop ideas concerning the nature of her poetry, of poetry and prose as generic forms, or of any potential limitations to the use of nominal philosophical abstraction or purified ideological idea-systems. Indeed, Naidu's comfort with abstract generalization is a constant from the 1890s to the 1940s and may, perhaps be understood as an aspect of her thought and character that was explicitly conforming to High Victorian language systems and the tendency in thinkers such as Ruskin, Tennyson or later Mathew Arnold to delight in "sweetness and light" and other modes of managed idealism and historically univocal rhetorical stagecraft.

lxx Here I synthesize Buber's development of the I-Thou relation with a Barthesian development of the author-reader relation, a synthesis that I believe is particularly useful when treating the intertwined mystical and aesthetic/textual properties of Naidu's poly-decadent mysticism. See Martin Buber's development of the I-Thou relation: "The I of the primary word I-Thou is a different I from that of the primary word I-It. The I of the primary word I-It makes its appearance as individuality and becomes conscious of itself as subject of experiencing and using). The I of the primary word I-Thou makes its appearance as person and becomes conscious of itself as subjectivity (without a dependent genitive). Individuality makes its appearance by being differentiated from other individualities. A person makes his appearance by entering into relation

with another person. The one is a spiritual form of natural detachment, the other the spiritual form of natural solidarity of connexion” (*I and Thou* 62).

lxxi See Homi Bhabha’s *The Location of Culture* as a means of thinking through Naidu’s relation to “tradition” and the difficult issues involved in attempting to “invent” tradition: “The recognition that tradition bestows is a partial form of identification. In restaging the past it introduces other, incommensurable cultural temporalities into the invention of tradition. This process estranges any immediate access to an originary identity or a received tradition. The borderline engagements of cultural difference may as often be consensual as conflictual; they may confound our definitions of tradition and modernity; realign the customary boundaries between the private and the public, high and low; and challenge normative expectations of development and progress” (2)

lxxii We can compare Naidu’s early prose from her later prose with Pater’s vision of prose as the great genre of the next century from his 1890 essay “Style” that discusses how ‘lawless’ prose will overtake poetry as the great ‘creative’ medium.: “Such is the matter of imaginative or artistic literature -- this transcript, not of mere fact, but of fact in its infinite variety, as modified by human preference in all its infinitely varied forms. It will be good literary art not because it is brilliant or sober, or rich, or impulsive, or severe, but just in proportion as its representation of that sense, that soul-fact, is true, verse being only one department of such literature, and imaginative prose, it may be thought, being the special art of the modern world. Imaginative prose should be the special and opportune art of the modern world results from two important facts about the latter: first, the chaotic variety and complexity of its interests, making the intellectual issue, the really master currents of the present time incalculable -- a condition of mind little susceptible of the restraint proper to verse form, so that the most characteristic verse of the nineteenth century has been lawless verse ; and secondly, an all-pervading naturalism, a curiosity about everything whatever as it really is, involving a certain humility of attitude, cognate to what must, after all, be the less ambitious form of literature. And prose thus asserting itself as the special and privileged artistic faculty of the present day, will be, however critics may try to narrow its scope, as varied in its excellence as humanity itself reflecting on the facts of its latest experience -- an instrument of many stops, meditative, observant, descriptive, eloquent, analytic, plaintive, fervid. Its beauties will be not exclusively "pedestrian ": it will exert, in due measure, all the varied charms of poetry, down to the rhythm which, as in Cicero, or Michelet, or Newman, at their best, gives its musical value to every syllable” (7-8). Naidu’s ‘purified prose of the post-poetry era localizes its idea structures in a relentless manner to undo an impressionistic/aestheticized Paterian prose ideal that embraced “a certain humility of attitude”, or, perhaps we may understand Naidu as re-routing this model of creative prose to use Paterian prose methods for the sake of the politically ideological and the post-decadent aesthetics of the free, modernist state and universal Humanism.

lxxiii To understand Naidu’s move from the excessive aesthetic manipulation of decadent and poly-decadent intimacy, intimacies and elite interiority, into the mass, democratic and collective *prosefication* of thought, emotion and ‘affect’ we may look toward the virtualization of emotion, art, character and being that postmodernism has produced within modern subjectivity as Jameson diagnosed it in the *fin-de-siècle* 1990s: “Post-modernism will presumably signal the end of this dilemma, which it replaces with a new one. The end of the bourgeois ego or monad no doubt brings with it the end of the psychopathologies of that ego as well—what I have generally here been calling the waning of affect. But it means the end of much more—the end for example of style, in the sense of the unique and the personal, the end of the distinctive individual brushstroke

(as symbolized the emergent primacy of mechanical reproduction). As for expression and feelings or emotions, the liberation, in contemporary society from the older anomie of the centred subject may also mean not merely a liberation from anxiety, but a liberation from every other kind of feeling as well, since there is no longer a self present to do the feeling. This is not to say that the cultural products of the postmodern era are utterly devoid of feeling, but rather that such feelings—which it may be better and more accurate to call ‘intensities’—are now free-floating and impersonal, and tend to be dominated by a peculiar kind of euphoria to which I will want to return at the end of this essay” (*Postmodernism, or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* 64). As poetry in the late-nineteenth century became more ‘decadent’ and decayed in relation to the living relations of labour, technology, mass urbanism, mass tourism and imperial globalism, so it may be understood as having less capability for the staging of emotional interiority within the modern reading subject. The aesthetic-poetics of Naidu, Carpenter and Davidson each play upon this failure and each respond to the failures of modern poetry to speak to the modern and to the modernized, mass-published, mass-circulated and mass-performed staging of modern consciousness.