

Decadence and Catholicism by Ellis Hanson. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard UP, 1997. 448 pp. 10 halftones. ISBN 0-674-19446-2, \$45.00 (cloth); \$19.95 (paper).

Rising Star: Dandyism, Gender, and Performance in the Fin de Siècle by Rhonda K. Garelick. Princeton: Princeton UP, 1998. 232 pp. 19 illustrations. ISBN 0-691-01205-9, \$32.50 (cloth); \$16.95 (paper).

Hanson's *Decadence and Catholicism* is a vast examination of the connection between decadent writers and the Roman Catholic church. This study is very necessary; the list of English writers of the 1890s who converted to Catholicism is long. Many writers even sneer at the connection between Catholicism and decadence--the fact that so many proponents of aestheticism converted to Catholicism. Hanson takes the relationship seriously; he sees in these writers a "genuine engagement with ... orthodox aspects of Catholicism" (16). Hanson wants to examine how writers in England and France used the ideals or imagery of the Church in their work. His ideal of decadence is large: he includes chapters not only on Wilde and Huysmans, but Wagner, Pater, and a list of minor poets, including Lionel Johnson and Digby Dolben.

As work of scholarship Hanson's project is a little unwieldy. Both nouns in his title become too broad. For Hanson, Decadence is "not a style but a sensibility--in particular, a critical sensibility and an unusually worshipful mode of spectatorship" (30). His long list of authors can incorporate almost any late nineteenth-century author as a decadent in his view. Catholicism merely intensifies one's decadence, so that his definition becomes circular: Catholics are decadent, decadents are Catholic. While Hanson rightly assumes that the Catholicism of these writers was heartfelt, he does not interrogate that sincerity. How Dolben, who died at 19 in 1860, fits into the class of Catholic decadents being still a Protestant, despite his penchant for walking around town barefoot in monk's robes, is difficult to justify. Playacting at being a Catholic is not the same as being one. And while Richard Wagner did use Catholic paraphernalia in *Parsifal*, his personal faith never caught up with his delight in that religion's accoutrements. Hanson needs to define what Catholicism is for his purposes--is it a set of private beliefs, an institution, a denominational affiliation, or a merely an aesthetic stance? The context of critical views one expects from a work of scholarship is often thin, so that the exercises in hunting down Catholicism seem oddly uninformed and impressionistic. There is little historical, doctrinal, or liturgical specificity, so I feel that Hanson avoids defining Catholicism in order to find more of it.

When Hanson turns to Huysmans, Pater, and Wilde, his examination is sharpened. Hanson records how Huysmans was fascinated by contemporary studies of the relationship between hysteria and miracles. Huysmans exploited these connections in his own sceptical and bifurcated faith. His chapter on Wilde is also well-informed. Wilde not only converted on his deathbed, but participated in a life-