

Decadent Poetics: Literature and Form at the British "Fin de Siècle" edited by Jason David Hall and Alex Murray. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013. xvi, 235 pages. ISBN 978-1-137-34828-9. £55.00; \$90.00.

This welcome addition to the expanding field of British decadence originated at a conference at the University of Exeter in 2011; in some respects, the excitement of the themed gathering of a conference has carried over into the thoughtful and thought-provoking articles in *Decadent Poetics*. The collection responds to and furthers our understanding that decadence as a "movement" was not only literary, but also cultural, political, sociological, and economic. While its link to French literature has remained a crucial feature of our understanding of British decadence, it is increasingly useful to remember that the French tend to apply the term "decadence" to fiction and "symboliste" to poetry, while English decadence makes no such distinction. As the title of the collection suggests, these essays are concerned with English poetics – the poetics of poetry, prose, and drama – and with finding ways to identify characteristics of decadent literature loosely characterized through the connotations of the term "decadence." The French symbolist movement informs these connotations and is responsible for a body of work that by nature resists characterization. The contributors to this particular collection are experienced and insightful academics, as well as seasoned scholars of decadence; they are also eclectic in their understanding of what constitutes decadent literature. This last feature works against attempts at unity and coherence in the volume; however, in disrupting the sequence of the essays for this review, I hope to demonstrate that the essays can be read productively in relation to each other and that the volume makes a cohesive contribution to the field.

Alex Murray and Jason David Hall, in their introduction, frame the essays through the contemporary critic's struggle to find a philosophically inclusive way to discuss decadence and decadent poetics, admitting that the complex nature of British decadence makes any sort of comprehensive study impossible. However, the premise of this collection, they suggest, is that it is possible to examine elements that decadent works have in common; the unifying thread of this text emerges out of the contributors' collective interest in form – forms of narrative, forms of language, and forms of style. Each essay in the volume, Murray and Hall imply, has as its underpinning the origins of formal decadence as expressed by the nineteenth-century French critic and philosopher Paul Bourget: "A decadent style is one in which the unity of the book falls apart, replaced by the independence of the page, where the page decomposes to make way for the independence of the sentence, and the sentence makes way for the word." It is this exciting, revitalizing, restorative, and creative aspect of decadence that informs *Decadent Poetics*