

Publisher to the Decadents: Leonard Smithers in the Careers of Beardsley, Wilde, Dowson, With an Appendix on Smithers and the Erotic Book Trade by Peter Mendes, and a Checklist of Smithers's Publications by James G. Nelson and Peter Mendes by James G. Nelson. University Park: Pennsylvania State UP and High Wycombe, Bucks: Rivendale P, 2000. xvi, 430 pp. + 35 illus. ISBN 0-271-01974-3. \$40 or £20.

James G. Nelson's book on Leonard Smithers (1861-1907) catapults us from relative ignorance of this shady figure¹ to a framework of knowledge on which subsequent study may reliably proceed. Wilde called him "the most learned erotomaniac in Europe." Essentially a maverick entrepreneur who favoured erotic and pornographic material, Smithers pursued a variety of types of projects--legitimate, clandestine, and pirated; all addressed here, they allow Nelson (and Mendes) to illuminate a considerable expanse of the twilight world of Decadent publishing between the mid-1880s and 1907. Bursting with fact, from Acknowledgements through Appendices, and widely and exhaustively researched, this book will be essential to scholars of publishing history, bibliography, English literature, art history, and cultural studies. As the author of earlier studies of Elkin Mathews and of *The Early Nineties* and the Bodley Head, Nelson is an acknowledged expert in this niche of period and print.

Primarily, *Publisher to the Decadents* is a work of book history, and then a *literary* biography of Smithers, whose private life is only limned here.² The volume consists of eight chapters, four chronologically arranged, centred on specific projects or people--Smithers's early collaborators, Richard Burton, whom Smithers never met, and John Nichols, the printer/publisher; his heyday (1895-1900); and the *Savoy*. Three chapters follow on Smithers and Beardsley, who was employed on the *Savoy*; Wilde, for whom Smithers published the first edition of "The Ballad of Reading Gaol"; and Dowson. A last chapter on the years after his bankruptcy ("Obloquy") concludes the volume's first section, consisting of 286 pages.

Additionally, the last third of the volume comprises four heavily researched and detailed appendices, and informative, often lengthy notes. The first appendix is an essay on Smithers and the erotic book trade which, as Mendes states, displaces "rumour." The remaining three are bibliographical, with the checklist of the Chiswick Press providing valuable detail of print runs and prices, for example, of several issues of the *Savoy*; the last two list the publisher's Rare Book Catalogues and all of Smithers's publications. This third of the book is important in its own right, and contributes significantly to the work's value. There is a good index as well, and the absence of a bibliography, leaving the reader to trawl the endnotes, is its only regrettable feature.

Intellectually, the content stems from older categories of knowledge,