

Literature and the Politics of Post-Victorian Decadence by Kristin Mahoney. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2015. xi, 259 pp. + 21 b/w illus. ISBN 978-1-107-10974-2. £57.50.

Decadence, Degeneration, and the End: Studies in the European Fin de Siècle edited by Marja Härmänmaa and Christopher Nissen. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014. vii, 282 pp. + 11 b/w illus. ISBN 978-1-137-47088. \$90; £60.

Kristin Mahoney's fascinating study challenges the long-held view that decadence withered away, along with most of its key exponents, between the imprisonment of Oscar Wilde in 1895 and the end of the First World War, arguing that decadent styles and preoccupations were very much part of Modernism's world, even if many Modernists were unwilling to admit it publicly.

There are two main ways by which such a thesis might be demonstrated. Perhaps the obvious one is to examine key Modernist figures and expose their links to the fin de siècle, following the example of such studies as Ronald Schuchard's *Eliot's Dark Angel* (1999). An approach of this kind shows how Modernism repackaged decadence, appropriating many of the techniques and attitudes of decadent writing while simultaneously distancing itself from decadence in historical and behavioural terms, decadence being figured as a late-nineteenth-century phenomenon and then made synonymous with hedonism and self-indulgence. This "reformation," in which decadence is analogous to a degenerate and obsolete Catholicism alongside the more progressive and vigorous Protestantism of Modernist writing is addressed briefly in Mahoney's introduction, in which she shows how figures such as Wyndham Lewis "*BLASTed*" decadence in public ("Blast with the force of whirlwind the Britannic aesthete") despite their private interests in those whom T.S. Eliot would term their "immediate predecessors." Her archival research here reveals some intriguing moments of cultural history, for who would have thought that Eliot, Pound, and Ernest Hemingway would all visit Max Beerbohm in Rapallo during the 1920s? Surely, one might think, the retired dandy who told the world that he belonged to the "Beardsley Period" could have nothing in common with a new generation of aesthetic radicals. "The peculiarity of Beerbohm's temporal and political positioning in the interwar period, the extent to which he seemed so contemporary and so anachronistic, so conservative and yet somewhat radical, registers even more clearly in his reception by the high modernists," Mahoney writes. Arguing that his "aloofness and anachronistic civility" allowed him to remain separate and distinct from contemporary culture but to understand it better, she makes a convincing