

*Decadent Ecology in British Literature and Art, 1860-1910* by Dennis Denisoff. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2022. ix + 260 pp. ISBN 978-1108845977. £75.00.

Dennis Denisoff's *Decadent Ecology in British Literature and Art, 1860-1910* proposes a significant revision in our understanding of the fin-de-siècle British decadent movement. The common wisdom for generations of scholars has been that decadence was fundamentally modern and urban, a reflection of the material conditions created by advanced nineteenth-century capitalism and filtered through advanced European social thought (pessimism, Nietzschean genealogy). This line of thinking highlights the decadents' fascination with artificiality and city spaces, like Baudelaire's praise of cosmetics, Wilde's attack on nature's imitateness in "The Decay of Lying," and Arthur Symonds's phantasmagorical city poems. The flowers in a William Morris wallpaper design were acceptable but nature as such was, as Wilde puts it, "uncomfortable."

Tracing the powerful intertwining of pagan influences and the early stirrings of ecological thinking in the works of decadent writers, Denisoff shows us something different: a charged and fruitfully perverse engagement with the natural world and a compelling anticipation of current eco-pagan thinking. This is a fresh and consequential insight, with rich implications for future work in the field, though, as Denisoff notes, it should come as no surprise. The evidence has always been there, hiding in plain sight. For example, he notes that the pervasive decadent imagery of putrefaction and decay – the "greenness of decomposition," as Théophile Gautier puts it in his funeral essay on Baudelaire – are very much natural images, indeed images of ecological cycles. One might say the same thing about such common images of historical transition as falling leaves, seasonal change, and ageing bodies. Here, too, descriptions of natural cycles are central to decadent expression, not opposed to it.

The lynchpin to Denisoff's revision and expansion of the canon in this book is the fin-de-siècle pagan revival, which, along with the influence of anthropology and early scientific conceptions of ecology, provided the intellectual grounding for decadent visions of the relationship between humans and the natural world. For earlier nineteenth-century generations, paganism referred primarily to the religions of classical antiquity and stood in opposition to Christianity. For the fin de siècle, the term also began to encompass other traditions, particularly those with very different ideas about the relationship between humanity and its others: Celtic myth and legend, Egyptian esotericism, South and East Asian religions, occult beliefs from around the globe. Paganism, for writers and intellectuals in the period, became a kind of