

## *Fall/Winter 2018-2019*

**AP/EN 4581 3.0A (F)**

### ***Decadence***

**Course Director:**

Lesley Higgins  
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Stong 301D

**Delivery Format:**

Seminar

**Time:**

Wednesday 8:30-11:30am

**Description:**

What makes a poem, a novel, or a play “decadent”? How was it that, in the later nineteenth century, “decadence” was both a compliment and a condemnation, a badge of honour and a bane? How could the same word imply both delight and dissolution? This course considers how Decadence was variously defined and practiced—in creative and critical texts, in life—from the 1860s to the early 1900s, in late Victorian Anglo-Irish literature.

Topics to be considered include: the reception, in England, of “dangerous” works by French authors such as Théophile Gautier and Charles Baudelaire; British critics’ feverish condemnation of “the fleshly school” of poets and painters; Walter Pater and the theorization of decadence; Oscar Wilde’s textual and personal performances of decadence; the work of Max Nordau and others to equate decadence with “degeneration.” Parodies of decadence that very quickly emerged—in poetry, prose, drama, and cartoons—will also be studied.

The questions that will frame our work include: what are the requirements and expectations of art in Decadent practice and theory? How is Decadence to be understood in relation to Aestheticism and, later in the 19th century, Symbolism? How does Decadence craft a new model of the subject? How does gender become newly configured in Decadence, if at all? What are the possibilities for spirituality opened by Decadent culture? What questions posed by Decadent art and thought continue to trouble us today? Has the meaning of decadence evolved or devolved?

**Category:**

N/A

**Historical Requirement:**

N/A

**Requirements:**

Essay 1: close reading exercise, 600 words (15%). Essay 2: research project, 2000 words (35%).  
Class presentation, 15 minutes (20%). Class participation (10%). Final in-class test, 20%.

**Reading List:**

Charles Baudelaire, *Les Fleurs du mal [Flowers of Evil]* (Oxford World's Classics); W. S. Gilbert and Arthur Sullivan, *Patience* (Internet); Walter Pater, selections from *The Renaissance* (Oxford World Classics), and other essays; Elaine Showalter, ed., *Daughters of Decadence: Women Writers of the Fin-de-Siècle* (Rutgers UP); Oscar Wilde, *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (Oxford World's Classics); *The Broadview Anthology of Victorian Poetry and Poetics*, ed. Thomas Collins and Vivienne Rundle (Broadview).

We will also be working with *The Yellow Book*, the major journal of decadence in the 1890s (<http://www.1890s.ca/>).

The professor will supply a number of readings.

**Open To:**

YR 4 Honours