

DECADENCE AND LITERATURE

Decadence and Literature explains how the concept of decadence developed since Roman times into a major cultural trope with broad explanatory power. No longer just a term of opprobrium for mannered art or immoral behaviour, decadence today describes complex cultural and social responses to modernity in all its forms. From the Roman emperor's indulgence in luxurious excess as both personal vice and political control, to the Enlightenment libertine's rational pursuit of hedonism, to the nineteenth-century dandy's simultaneous delight and distaste with modern urban life, decadence has emerged as a way of taking cultural stock of major social changes. These changes include the role of women in forms of artistic expression and social participation formerly reserved for men, as well as the increasing acceptance of LGBTQ+ relationships, a development with a direct relationship to decadence. Today, decadence seems more important than ever to an informed understanding of contemporary anxieties and uncertainties.

JANE DESMARAIS is Professor of English and Director of the Decadence Research Unit in the Department of English and Comparative Literature at Goldsmiths, University of London. She has written numerous essays on the theme of decadence and has co-edited several works, including *Decadence: An Annotated Anthology* (with Chris Baldick, 2012), *Arthur Symons: Selected Early Poems* (with Chris Baldick, 2017), and *Decadence and the Senses* (with Alice Condé, 2017). Her monograph, *Monsters under Glass: A Cultural History of Hothouse Flowers, 1850, to the Present* was published in 2018.

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For Alcide Bava and Vic le Fesq

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