

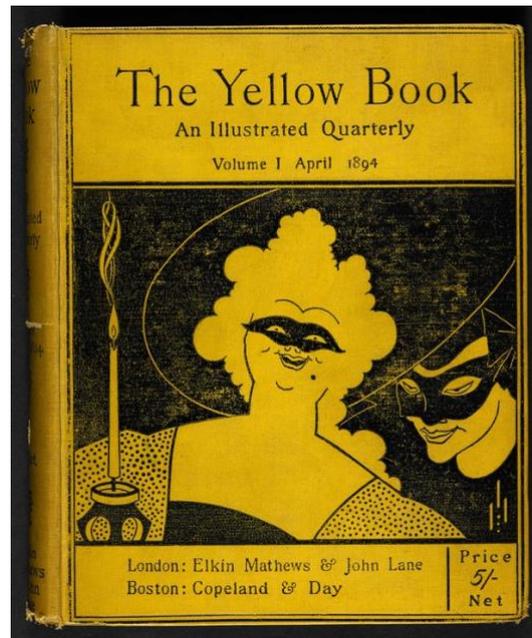
****FOURTH WORKSHOP OF THE DACH VICTORIANISTS NETWORK****

“Late-Victorian Decadence as Mode, Theory & Attitude”

organised by

Dr. Katharina Herold-Zanker (Durham) & Dr. Heidi Lucja Liedke (Gießen/Frankfurt)

Friday, 21 July 2023 (online)



Aubrey Beardsley, cover design for *The Yellow Book* 1894 ©The British Library Board

The recent decade has seen a surge in the interest of Decadence studies as a distinct field of enquiry uncomfortably perched at the cusp between late Victorianism and Modernism. In 2019, the editors of the *Cambridge Critical Series on Decadence and Literature*, Jane Desmarais and David Weir, attest to the temporal elasticity of Decadence studies, claiming that the ‘study of decadence has been extended well into the twentieth century, and some would argue, [...] that the concept has contemporary relevance as well.’ (1)

Indeed, as Kate Hext’s and Alex Murray’s *Decadence in the Age of Modernism* (2019) finds, Decadence has bled into the following literary periods in a way that prompts the question whether it has ever been truly ‘over’. As a consequence, decadent modes of enquiry prove illuminating in topical 21st-century debates. For instance, Ben Morgan’s essay ‘Fin du Globe: On Decadent Planets’ in *Victorian Studies* outlines the potential of Decadence to function as a critical tool to historically re-evaluate the planetary and historical dimension of the climate crisis. As Morgan finds, ‘figures of the planet within the cultural production of the fin-de-siècle decadent movement can help us understand the promise as well as the limitations of a widely held view that criticism oriented by climate change requires expanded scales of analysis that are cognizant of planetary space and deep time.’ (2016, 610).

Similarly pointing to the expansive aftermath of Decadence, Regenia Gagnier has alerted us to its global dimensions and the imperial implications of literature subsumed under that umbrella term arguing that ‘decadence and modernization are mutually constituting, global,

and subject to ongoing renegotiations that have their own varying rhythms when viewed geographically' (2018). While thus affording a seemingly trans-historical and global potential, the term 'Decadent' also warrants a reassessment. In *Vexy Thing – On Gender and Liberation* (2018) Imani Perry highlights the problematic dimensions of Decadent literature by celebrated (queer) icons such as Oscar Wilde. Racialisation, sexuality, class and imperialism find themselves in unholy allegiances in decadent writing, pointing to Wilde's problematic entanglement in a colonial 'fantasy of domination' despite his rebellion 'against the constraints of gender for a European with recognized personhood' (79). Pointing to the complex implications of Decadence as simultaneously defying (post)colonial power structures and reiterating them, Robert Stilling's 2018 monograph *Beginning at the End* argues that Decadence became a key idea in postcolonial thought, describing both the failures of revolutionary nationalism and the assertion of new cosmopolitan ideas about poetry and art.

Considering these rich scholarly assessments and the discussed array of transgressions 'Decadence studies' appear as a global, transhistorical, potentially decolonial train of thought. How do texts we study today under the umbrella term 'decadent' still adhere to the markers of Victorian literature?

This workshop aims to reconsider and revalue the messiness of Decadence in Victorian studies by conceiving of Decadence as a **mode (i.e. style, topics), critical theory (links to postcolonialism, gender and queer theory) and attitude (e.g. counter-culture vs. conservatism)**

We welcome contributions which

- Showcase the diversity of decadent literary and visual **styles**
- Reconsider the potential of Decadence as a **critical framework**
- Address questions of how Decadence helps us re-think Victorian **canonicity**

Papers may address but are not limited to topics such as:

- Historical and geographical demarcations of Decadence: Decadence as connective tissue/disruptor between Victorianism and High Modernism
- 'The Edwardian Summer' – modes of receptions of decadent styles, idealisation of the past
- Decadence in the late 19th/early 20th centuries as a mode of thinking and/or writing
- Genres & forms of Decadence – novel/drama/decadent short story/essay/magazine and periodical publications
- Decadent performance and spectacle
- Artificiality and technology in literature; neo-Victorianism and Steampunk

- Global Decadence – trans-nationalism, de-colonising approaches
- Decadence and gender: New Women/New Men/dandyisms/masculinities
- Decadent systems of belief – Catholicism, aestheticism, paganism, occultism
- Decadence and narratives of endings, decay, the apocalypse
- Decadent perceptions of time: belatedness, ennui, slowness, idleness
- Interdisciplinary approaches to Decadence: medical humanities, music, philosophy, fashion, (art) history, visual studies

Contributors can opt for either of the following formats:

- A flashlight presentation of ca. 10 minutes, which outlines the scope and aims of a research project (such as a PhD thesis, a postdoctoral project or a collaborative research project) situated in the field of late-Victorian Decadence studies and Modernist studies.
- A paper of 15-20 minutes, which focuses on a case study or on specific historical, theoretical, methodological or didactic aspects related to the workshop theme

Please send your abstracts (250 words) and a brief bio note (max. 200 words) to Heidi L. Liedke heidi.liedke@anglistik.uni-giessen.de and Katharina Herold-Zanker katharina.h.herold-zanker@durham.ac.uk by **31 March 2023**.

More information on the DACH Victorianists Network:

[DACH Victorianists](#) is a network that brings together scholars from the “D-A-CH” region (Germany, Austria, and Switzerland) whose research and teaching focus on Victorian literature and culture.

See [DACH Victorianists](https://dachvictorianists.blogspot.com) online: <https://dachvictorianists.blogspot.com>