1 Decadence in Nordic Literature

An Overview

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Decadence, "a strange and singular plant" growing "in the over-cultivated soil of modern society"? (Hansson 2002, 4).[1] This is how Swedish author Ola Hansson interpreted the title of his *Sensitiva amorosa* (1887), one of the landmarks of Nordic decadence. Hansson signaled his decadent stance by introducing the Baudelairean trope of "sick" or "evil" flowers in his text studying "unnatural" erotics. The strange poisonous herb invented by the author, as further explained in the poetic preface to the prose-poem-like stories, was a plant with morbid veins and "sickly sweet scent," and with a color resembling "the light in a sickroom."[2] As a metaphor, the trope characterized Hansson's work, reminding us of an essay by J.-K. Huysmans, where he describes decadent texts that grow from the soil of the dreams of exceptional individuals as a reaction to the disgusting materialistic tyranny of money.[3] These blossoms of the genius of the decadent age were supposed to manifest the creative spirit of the new art that sought to go against the grain while revealing it as the outgrowth of the muddy soil of a decaying culture. In the Nordic countries, these herbs were not welcomed by those who guarded the national cultures, as Hansson himself was to experience. Still, a great variety of these outgrowths or decadent texts emerged from the Nordic soil.

In the second half of the nineteenth century, the spread of European currents in Nordic countries caused unusually strong tensions in the local cultures. In particular, the controversial new art and literature of decadence seemed to intrude on a region of healthy, "young" and aspiring nations, where the turmoil of modernity was not yet acutely felt, where "over-cultivation" was hardly a problem, and where the national and nationalist circles glorified progress and modernization. In this atmosphere, ideas of cultural decay or degeneration seemed anathema or doomed to remain "theoretical" (see Hinrikus in this volume). From the critics' point of view, the new Parisian movements caused a malicious invasion, a "black flood" that was destroying the very foundations of Nordic national cultures (Ahlund 1994, 18). Nevertheless, the appeal of this controversial movement was irresistible to innovators and discontented individuals, even in countries where the old moral, religious and nationalist atmosphere still retained its stranglehold, and modern

urban, industrial and social developments lagged behind those of the European metropoles—notably Paris—where this new literature and art were breeding.[4] In fact, European currents were mediated among the Nordic cultural elites relatively quickly.[5] Travel to European metropoles was, by the end of the nineteenth century, already frequent; letters and journals circulated widely and there was a lively exchange with members of international circles of artists, writers and musicians.[6]

The black flood comprised the complex of ideas that in France were known as naturalism, decadence and symbolism—and by other more ephemeral designations. These movements reached the North more or less simultaneously, although no actual "schools" were formed under these banners. Naturalism often went under the name of realism, and what can be identified as decadent literature often did not dare to mention that name. Instead of openly taking a provocatively decadent stance,[7] like Ola Hansson, most authors avoided direct associations with specific movements. In critical accounts and later literary histories, terms such as "the Modern Breakthrough," "neo-romanticism" and "national romanticism" tended to hide the connections to foreign impulses and marginalize the more radically decadent texts.[8] Nevertheless, the complex constellation of French currents that reacted to the turmoil of modernity by deploying an imagery of cultural, social or individual decay formed and inspired Nordic literatures in ways that have only recently been connected to naturalism and decadence.[9] At the same time, the local circumstances of the Nordic countries engendered original texts that explored decay and other decadent themes in contexts that were far removed from metropolitan over-cultivated settings. Insofar as the actual processes of modernization supposedly breeding decay were still threats rather than realities in Nordic societies, authors with metropolitan mindsets either invented imaginary sites and times of decadence, described the decadence of foreign metropoles (Paris and St Petersburg were the favorites) or concentrated on small town and rural decay. Thus, the ways in which "local traditions meet the forces of modernization" (Gagnier 2015, 97) are mediated on the one hand by the awareness of different types of European decadence and their interpretations of modernity, and on the other hand by the willingness of the Nordic decadents to reflect, imitate and modify, comment, and reconfigure European ideas in the light of those traditions.[10] Nordic nature and rural settings, important in the early national literatures, continue to play a key role for many authors and gain new importance as sceneries of decay, for example in August Strindberg's and Joel Lehtonen's prose; and Nordic mythology inspires the Finnish national poet Eino Leino even after he turns to symbolism and decadence: it provides an alternative to Ancient Roman or Hellenistic settings and Greek or Roman mythological figures as starting points for a decadent imaginary. Reflections on Nordic religion fuel nostalgia and longing for change in decadent characters by Arne Garborg, Juhani

Aho and others. Critical attitudes toward foreign decadences are often entertained while specifically Nordic forms of decay are explored on the basis of existing literary traditions. All in all, the literary texts of Nordic decadence are generated by a fruitful tension between traditions and new, controversial ideas.

Decadence as Constellation

The present book sets out to explore Nordic decadence(s) by adopting a broad and relatively open concept of decadence which comprises (1) decadent naturalism, (2) what we call *core decadence* and (3) the "afterlife" of these in early modernist and neo-naturalist literature—focusing largely, but not exclusively, on prose. This broad understanding resonates with the way David Weir circumscribes the field, arguing

> that the various nineteenth-century movements that proliferate in the period between romanticism and modernism (naturalism, symbolism, Parnassianism, Pre-Raphaelitism, aestheticism, *décadisme*, and others) can be best understood if they are all seen as grounded in some concept of decadence or decadentism.
>
> (Weir 1995, xvi)[11]

We examine, in the Nordic context, a constellation or a network of family resemblances rather than a school or a set of determined features and emphasize that the varieties and "generations" that we study constitute a field of resonance by sharing an interest in decay, a sensibility related to antimodernity and a sense of ending, and an investment in new forms of literature against the grain.[12] In circumscribing the field, we also follow suggestions that have been made within Nordic research.

In his book *Medusas huvud* (The Head of Medusa) on Swedish decadence, Claes Ahlund warns his readers that the texts with which he deals do not contain much of the characteristics common to "continental decadence"—meaning the more restricted, core decadent movement. Accordingly, he understands literary decadence as a concept bringing together the works that thematize and analyze the supposed decay of modernity and modern humanity (Ahlund 1994, 11, 13). This concept then allows him to focus on the shared imaginaries of naturalism interested in decay and core decadence, understood as the Huysmansian movement that usually profiled itself antithetically vis-à-vis naturalism.[13] The same approach will also serve the purposes of the present volume and our understanding of the Nordic context, with the difference that we also include the neo-naturalisms of the early twentieth century in our conception of decadence. Thus, our constellation of decadence, while including Nordic texts that show most of the characteristics typical

of French core decadence, goes well beyond these and explores a wide spectrum of texts dealing with different aspects of decay.

The ideas of modern decay and degeneration and a vision of modernity as the fall of Western culture comparable to the fall of the Roman Empire created the sense of ending connected to *fin de siècle* pessimism. Decay was thought to threaten the whole culture, but it was also seen as attacking individual creative energy and personal morality. According to this point of view, the appreciation of the arts was also declining.[14] Understanding this sense of ending as the defining sensibility of decadence also permits us to reopen the entrenched border between decadence and modernism. Vincent Sherry has recently argued in his *Modernism and the Reinvention of Decadence* (2015) that decadence passes on this founding sensibility to modernism.[15] He draws on Baudelaire, who "provides a tuning fork for a poetics of decadence as the music of melancholy in urban modernity, which occurs in an imaginatively late historical time." Sherry argues that this decadent sensibility and the sense of "afterwardness" or lateness it implies are important driving forces that reach well beyond the *fin de siècle*: "this sense of time will abide as one of the most powerful imaginative tenses in literary modernism" (17). He opposes what he considers to be the common view of modernism as the march of progress toward the future.[16] But Sherry is not the first one to raise these issues. Weir already sees decadence forcefully in the light of "making of modernism" as the title of his book indicates. Weir presents perhaps the best discussion of the complex relationship of decadence to modernism to date. He refers also to the sense of ending in decadence (Weir 1995, 17). Matei Calinescu (1987, 156) also already points out how widespread the disbelief in progress was:

> The critique of the myth of progress was started within the romantic movement, but it gained momentum in the antiscientific and antirationalistic reaction that marks the late nineteenth century [...] people experience the *results* of progress with an anguished sense of loss and alienation. Once again, progress *is* decadence and decadence *is* progress.

Regarding Nordic literary history, this approach also makes a difference, as it enables us to see the broad field of decadence as connected to antimodern and antiprogressive thinking (see Compagnon 2005). Aligning modernism with decadence not only tears apart the supposedly natural complicity of modernism with modernity but it also emphasizes the continuation of the provocative mentality of *à rebours*, against the grain—the core attitude of literary decadence. Furthermore, despite Huysmans's emphasis on a "new literature" and a "new style" which purported to distinguish core decadence from naturalism, provocative antimodernity not only continues in modernism but is significantly present in the texts

by naturalists, those "adorers of the disgusting," as Finnish poet Arvi Jännes termed them (see Rossi 2007, 54). Our broad view of Nordic decadence helps us to trace the common undercurrents of what have often been treated as separate movements.

The Nordic Background

The pace at which decadent motifs, themes and styles emerged in the North varied in the different countries involved—albeit within the timeframe of the process elsewhere.[17] In all five countries considered in our volume, decadent elements and constellations were quite often met with resistance and incomprehension, whenever they were overtly presented. In view of the judicial proceedings against Flaubert and Baudelaire and other negative reactions even in France, not to mention the Oscar Wilde trials in the United Kingdom, this is not unexpected. The general tendency of authors toward symbolic allusions and imaginary or faraway settings helped to keep decadent themes acceptable. Still, the cultural and political circumstances in the individual Nordic countries differed greatly despite their common cultural background and centuries-long interaction. Accordingly, each country also encountered different possibilities and challenges in the field of literary culture.

Whereas Denmark had been participating in Western and Central European cultural life for centuries, and Sweden, also an old kingdom and formerly a great power in European politics, had had lively cultural contact with France and other centers of European culture since the seventeenth century, the other countries developed their independent national cultures mainly in the nineteenth century. Norway, formerly under Danish rule, was still looking forward to its final independence from personal union with Sweden but was also beginning to assert itself as a literary and cultural center. Finland and Estonia had never been independent states, remained part of the Russian Empire until the end of the First World War, and struggled to build national cultures under the increasing pressure of imperial Slavophile politics. Finland, until 1809 a part of Sweden, benefited from its autonomy as a Grand Duchy in the Russian Empire, enabling the building of a strong national movement in the mid-nineteenth century. Finnish culture was favored by the Russian authorities as a means to detach the country from Swedish influence. The national movement itself originated with the Swedish-speaking elite, who decided to "be Finns" (see Klinge 1990, esp. 66–95). It then became possible to establish Finnish as a literary language and to educate a new Finnish-speaking elite for the country.

Estonian cultural development still mostly depended on the small German-speaking elite, who retained most of the land and their long-held privileges even during Russian rule, but the impact of other cultures gradually increased as the nineteenth century progressed.

Finland's nation building, which started earlier than Estonia's, served as an important model for Estonian activists and led to the construction of a shared Finno-Ugric identity in the late nineteenth century. This identity was thus based on the close relationship between the two languages (members of a language group quite different from the Indo-Germanic languages, where the Scandinavian languages belong), following Herderian ideas of national identity. Although the prevalent cultural nationalism suppressed all things perceived as decaying or decadent, it also paved the way for new currents. In the first two decades of the twentieth century, Estonia was catching up with modern European trends from the *fin de siècle*, building national institutions and constructing modern identities. Thus, with some temporal lags and some "noise" in the cultural transfer, the new decadent constellation of ideas and sensibilities penetrated all these countries.

The antagonism between nationalism and decadence was felt particularly strongly as national imaginaries were largely based on the idealization of the people and folk traditions, notable in the "Nordic fusion of folk poetry and neo-humanist ideals" (Klinge 1990, 16), as well as in the belief that reviving the national soul with the great memories of its (idealized, often invented) past would guarantee the development and progress of the nation. The possible decay or corruption prevalent in the present was considered a foreign phenomenon or regarded as caused by the failure of the educated classes to listen to the inner voice of the nation (ibid.). Progress was seen as a sacred mission not to be spoiled by naturalist and decadent pessimism. Especially in Finland, Estonia and Norway, which were aspiring nations struggling for autonomy and in the process of defining their identities, any idea of decay seemed to offend. Although international contacts increased, and the young generation of artists and writers aspired to broadening their horizons, it was not easy to find any place or support for decadent ideas in national cultural life. Such ideas did not easily accommodate the ideals of national progress and the ideology of "young" nations.

Other factors contributed to this antagonism. Nordic national cultures relied heavily on the church: nationalist thinking was anchored in the Lutheran religious tradition, and the church was experienced primarily as a national institution closely connected to the state (unlike non-Lutheran countries). The relatively democratic ideas of the nationalists vis-à-vis the rural population and peasantry included a positive idea of women as equal builders of the nation. The position of women in the Nordic nations was good compared to many other countries in Europe and, consequently, the misogynistic tendencies of much decadent literature were also countered as something very unwelcome. These same factors contributed to the quasi-invisibility of decadence as a literary movement in Finland and Estonia, for example. The authors themselves usually did not dwell on the issues it raised. If they did, they tended to reject

the term decadence, as Verner von Heidenstam did, despite his obvious enthusiasm for decadent themes and ideas (see Brantly in this volume). In Sweden, the openness of Ola Hansson caused a scandal that drove him into exile (see Evangelista in this volume). In contrast, the spread of the movement in Denmark not only followed French, Western and Central European developments more closely (as Norup in this volume suggests) but even anticipated them.

The marginalization and persecution of many literary decadents in Nordic countries took similar forms as in France, even if outright legal proceedings were rare. It was much harder to publish texts with erotic content than it was in France. The scandal caused by Hansson's *Sensitiva amorosa* was largely due to its cynical presentation of various erotic relations. Restrictions on religious and political matters had to be taken into account as well. Even using biblical texts to convey modern emotions was problematic: in Finland, the young author Volter Kilpi was castigated when he published a version of King David`s love for Bathsheba in his novel *Bathseba* (1900). In this transformation of the biblical story, the mind of King David was dramatized to present a modern sensibility ending in Schopenhauerian pessimism after the death of Bathsheba.[18] In Estonia, the radical social-cultural movement Young Estonia (1905–1915) began to be known as "the worshippers of sickly eroticism" after their third album was published in 1909. The whole content of the album (including pictures) with its transgressive and pessimistic sentiments had an irritating effect on the conservative public. Yet, the main targets of criticism were J. Randvere's (alias Johannes Aavik's) decadent essay-novella "Ruth" and Eduard Vilde's naturalist story "Kuival" (Beached). The former was condemned mainly for some explicitly erotic passages,[19] and the second for its allegedly pornographic scenes. The dominant negative atmosphere provoked by this type of texts persisted and even gained momentum when neo-nationalist trends spread at the beginning of the new century, to be fueled, in turn, during and after the First World War. Developments in the 1920s and 1930s also contributed to the absence of decadence from literary histories that were written mostly from a nationalist point of view.[20]

Travelers and mediators brought new concepts from Paris to authors in the Nordic countries. Early interpreters of the *Zeitgeist* transferred certain inaugurating and prototypical texts (by means of critical surveys and reports rather than full translations) and discursive formations that subsequently circulated, forming the kernel of new constellations. The most important individual mediator from French culture was Paul Bourget. His *Essais de psychologie contemporaine* (1883), which explored the key ideas connected to decadence, was influential for both Nordic and other manifestations of decadence throughout Europe. Bourget's role with respect to Baudelaire; his ideas concerning the decadent style, cultural decay, the sensibility of melancholia, the sense of ending and

the spirit of dilettantism offered many authors an introductory course in decadence (see Pynsent 1989).[21] Furthermore, some Nordic decadent writers largely made their careers abroad, often in voluntary, or more or less necessary exile. Ola Hansson, the Nordic author most outspoken about decadence and well-versed in French decadence, wrote on decadence while living in Germany (see Evangelista in this volume). Others learned their decadence while residing in Paris, Berlin or Rome, and returned with ideas that did not please their readers at home.[22]

Local enthusiasts and mediators within the Nordic region included, first and foremost, the Danish critic Georg Brandes, whose critical works and lecture tours brought the new ideas within the reach of the whole North. For example, the Young Estonian poet Gustav Suits began corresponding with Brandes at the young age of nineteen, later publishing some of Brandes's texts and even meeting him in Stockholm in 1906 when he attended Brandes's lecture about Ibsen (Teder 1992, 163).[23] Denmark, with its lively contacts with Central European culture, became an important gateway to new trends in art and literature. Copenhagen was the first regional center where elements of decadent sensibilities and styles were learned, from which ideas of naturalism and decadence spread to the other Nordic countries. Danish authors and critics mediated their own radical ideas as well as international trends. French naturalism was well established when the short-lived but influential journal *Taarnet* (1893–1894) brought symbolism and "spiritual" decadence into the forefront, and the circle of its founder, Johannes Jørgenssen began spreading such ideas throughout the Nordic region.[24] Copenhagen also played the role of mediator in the Scandinavian reception of Oscar Wilde. Herman Bang was highly instrumental in introducing Wilde in Denmark between 1903 and 1910.[25] When these impulses then entered into dialog with local literary traditions and local cultures, specifically Nordic decadences emerged.

In Finland and Estonia, some decadent impulses arrived from Russia. For example, during his exile period (1906–1917), a large part of which he spent in Finland, Young Estonian Friedebert Tuglas undertook extensive reading in Russian symbolist and decadent newspapers at Helsinki University Library (Undusk 2009, 660). In Estonian literature, Russian influences are more visible than in Finnish texts; for Finnish writers, Russia played a more important role in the imagery of decadence and degeneracy than as a mediator of literary decadence. In the works of *fin de siècle* Finnish authors, degeneracy is often present in association with Russia, and "decadent elements" are identified with Russian art and culture. These moments fuse fascination with foreign exoticism with an attitude of racial superiority toward the Eastern neighbor. St Petersburg is often the place where the protagonists learn their "true lesson in decadence" (Buchwald 1992, 66, 270, 271). Thus, Nordic imagery and styles of decadence, born of many impulses from outside and a busy traffic

within the region, developed into a rich and varied literary field, albeit in the shadow of national doctrines. These various national contexts conditioned the reception, adaptation and development of decadent elements.

Decadence in Naturalism

Like French decadence, Nordic decadence coincides with naturalism on several points, based both on philosophical affinity and historical affiliation.[26] The decadent characters introduced in naturalist texts were the first harbingers of the blasé, egocentric type, more or less corresponding to Paul Bourget's (1993, 4–13) description of the person whose early experiences and depravity, analytical and over-reflective attitude toward life spoiled his/her ability to feel genuine passion, while somewhat retaining nostalgia for their lost innocence, faith or—in the Nordic context—national enthusiasm.

Émile Zola, the father of naturalism and, in many respects, one of the fathers of decadence was influential in the Nordic literary field from the late 1870s onwards. Zola's novels and theories on the novel became widely known in the Nordic countries. The philosophical and scientific theories that shaped naturalism and decadence in France arrived in the North simultaneously. Beginning in the 1860s, discussion of Darwin's theories started to circulate in the Danish and Norwegian press (Shepherd-Barr 2015, 37). The decadent author J. P. Jacobsen translated Darwin's work into Danish: *On the Origin of Species* in 1872 and *The Descent of Man* in 1874–1875. But even in the absence of Nordic translations, literary authors, who were often fluent in many languages, had direct access to foreign works, particularly in German and French.

It is also important to remember that the cultural transfer was not unidirectional: there was, at the same time, a rich stream of ideas that went from the Nordic region to the European centers. In particular, Nordic drama aroused interest in Western and Central Europe. In Germany, Ibsen's work was performed at the main theatres of Berlin, Leipzig, Munich and Dresden, and in the 1890s his works were launched in Paris and London, both in print and stage (Shepherd-Barr 1997, 1). Plays by August Strindberg, Ibsen and Bjørnsterne Bjørnson were staged in André Antoine's experimental *Théâtre Libre* in Paris; Ibsen's *Gengangere* (1881, tr. as *Ghosts*) was banned in many countries but played uncensored in Antoine's theater. *Ghosts* impressed and inspired Zola while writing *Docteur Pascal* (1893), the last novel of the *Les Rougon-Macquart* series (Borie 1981).

The sprouts of Nordic decadence germinated in naturalist novels and drama of the 1880s, which frequently enveloped motifs of decay and decadent characters within story worlds that depicted everyday realities. From Jacobsen to Herman Bang, Juhani Aho, Eduard Vilde, August Strindberg, Arne Garborg, Ibsen, Amalia Skram, Victoria Benedictsson,

Minna Canth and Ina Lange, Nordic naturalist authors presented a multitude of decadent characters: young hysterical women, seductive *femmes fatales* and prostitutes, nervous aesthetes, dilettantes and cynical medical doctors. Like the Goncourt brothers and Zola in France, the Nordic naturalists sought ideas from contemporary psychopathological theories of hysteria, neurosis, heredity and neurodegeneration. Bjørnson and Strindberg, who both lived in Paris in the 1880s, most probably followed Jean-Marie Charcot's famous demonstrations of hysteria with real patients in Salpêtrière Hospital (see Koehler 2013, 107). However, these "French influences" were transformed to meet the issues under discussion in local cultures. For instance, critique of the Lutheran Church meets Jean-Marie Charcot's theories in Bjørnson's *Oever Ævne I* (Beyond Human Power I, 1883), which deals with hysterical paresis and miraculous healing (Barstad 2013).[27] *Fröken Julie* (1888, tr. as *Miss Julie*), staged in Antoine's theater, reflects Théodule Ribot's psychopathological theory,[28] yet employs ideas of hysteria to question the emancipation of women, an issue that divided opinions in Nordic intellectual circles. In the Darwinian struggle for survival, heredity and natural forces overcome the efforts of culture. Miss Julie, a New Woman figure, is raised like a boy to prove that "a woman is just as good as a man" (see Strindberg 1992, 21); however, she falls and ends up committing suicide.

Female authors, who played a central role in the Nordic *fin de siècle*, even a leading role in the Nordic naturalism as in the case of Minna Canth in Finland, employed the repertoire of hysteria and sickness in a slightly different way than their male counterparts. In the female authors' work, the misogynic tropes of women as degenerate and primitive were transformed into a critical discussion of the female condition and the pathological narratives and effects of disgust were often intended to shock conservative audiences. The works by female authors presented the tragedy of decay and illness from a female perspective, and revealed how female suffering was perpetuated by the existing patriarchal order (see e.g. Lappalainen 2007; Rossi 2007).

The themes of decay are not confined to the margins, but are significant to central works of late nineteenth-century Nordic literature. For instance, the decadent strain is salient in Ibsen's naturalist drama that was widely recognized in the late nineteenth-century France and Britain, thus circulating ideas of Nordic decadence in Western and Central Europe.[29] While literary histories have presented Ibsen generally as a realist, a man of the Nordic Modern Breakthrough, many contemporaries perceived Ibsen as a naturalist, or a man of the *fin de siècle*. Ibsen featured among the "degenerate authors" whom Max Nordau attacked in his polemic interpretation of the current age of degeneration, *Die Entartung* (1892, *Degeneration*). Nordau dedicated a chapter to Ibsen, considering "Ibsenism," alongside Friedrich Nietzsche and Théophile Gautier as an example of *fin de siècle* "egomania." Nordau's moralistic attack

betrays the author's prejudices against and contempt for decadence. Yet his diagnosis that decadent topics are prevalent in Ibsen's work remains valid. The myth of hereditary degeneration permeates Ibsen's tragedies and their protagonists, starting from *Et dukkehjem* (1879, *A Doll's House*), which affiliates Nora's impulsivity with her father's tendencies and depicts Dr. Rank's illness as hereditary.

As in Zola's work, in Ibsen's drama biological degeneration is paired with social corruption and psychic degeneration. Yet in Ibsen's plays, the psychic modes of decay tend to dominate. There is a movement from the scientific rigor of naturalism to a survey of the sentiments of a modern man. Ibsen's international fame and his role for later modernism derive largely from this new psychology and "psychodrama" with its forceful expressions—further intensified by the Nordic atmosphere of the plays. These tendencies are articulated notably in *Ghosts*, a play frequently considered as Ibsen's most naturalistic drama. While *Ghosts* deploys the motif of hereditary syphilis based on contemporary theories of degeneration, Ibsen's play is essentially concerned with inner debility (Meyer 1971, 298–299). The hereditary taint extends to inherited feelings and beliefs, emotional and psychological obstacles, which occupy the present and prevent an individual's authentic self-realization. Often, the past appears as a manifold burden haunting the present. To quote Mrs. Alving in *Ghosts*, the "ghosts" represent "all kinds of defunct theories, all sorts of old defunct beliefs, and things like that. It's not that they actually *live* on in us; they are simply lodged there, and we cannot get rid of them" (Ibsen 2008, 126). In Ibsen's drama, the naturalist quest for the truth frequently turns into the recognition of reality as a trap and a lie. The characters' tendencies toward decay lead to suicide, a recurrent motif in Ibsen's important plays from *Vildanden* (1884, tr. as *The Wild Duck*) to *Hedda Gabler* (1891) and *Rosmersholm* (1886).

Many Nordic authors were also inspired by the Flaubertian type of naturalism, concerned with the general depravity of life rather than depictions of physical corruption and biological illness. The Flaubertian "sentimental education" echoes in many Nordic novels of the era, which portray the protagonists' loneliness and existential disgust for the human condition in modernity. Bovarism, the characters' tendency to dwell in illusion is essential to novels such as *Fru Marie Grubbe* (1876, *Marie Grubbe*) and *Niels Lyhne* (1880) by Jacobsen, or *Yksin* (1890, *Alone*) and *Papin rouva* (The Pastor's Wife, 1893)[30] by Aho. These novels offer Nordic versions of Bovarists, aesthetes and *flâneurs* or dandies, who escape the grayness of everyday realities by plunging toward illusion and a sensual dreamworld.[31] The painful contrast between reality and illusion—or dream—is frequently toned with Schopenhauerian pessimism. The mindscapes of the protagonists suggest a decadent turn away from ordinary bourgeois realities while the narrative discourse remains anchored in realist writing.

Decadence is an art of contradictions. Some of these Nordic "decadent naturalists" were inspired by radical and liberal French ideas and nationalists at the same time. Bjørnson, the first Norwegian Nobel Prize winner in 1903 and the writer of the Norwegian national anthem, campaigned for the independence of Norway and Finland. In Finland, Aho, upon whom the critics bestowed the label "national author," figured in the liberal wing of the nationalist Fennoman movement. In Estonia, Anton Hansen Tammsaare is canonized as one of the best national realist writers. However, decadence and many other discourses of decay play an important role in his work. From the First World War to the mid-1920s, a period that is especially rich in examples of decadence both in Estonian art and in literature (Hinrikus, Kass, and Pählapuu 2017), Tammsaare published some of the most complicated examples of Estonian literary decadence. These include two stories, "Kärbes" and "Varjundid" ("The Fly" and "Shadings," both 1917), and his play *Judith* (1921). Both stories function as responses to Tuglas's *Felix Ormusson* (1917), an interesting example of "becoming European while remaining Estonian," thus illustrating Young Estonia`s well-known slogan (see Hinrikus in this volume).

In the Nordic context, ideas of degeneration intertwine with national self-reflection. Pessimism is not only metaphysical and Schopenhauerian but it also relates to fears concerning the national future and uncertainty in the face of the turbulence of history. The future of the North and its cultural heritage causes anxiety on the cusp of modernity. Oswald in Ibsen's *Ghosts*, lacking "the joy of life" and missing "the sun," feels paralyzed by the melancholia of the Protestant North, where people "are brought up to believe that work is a curse, and a sort of punishment for their sins; and that life is some kind of miserable affair, which the sooner we are done with the better for everybody" (Ibsen 2008, 145). In *Rosmersholm*, it is suggested that the tendency toward melancholia is a hereditary taint. Even if these circumstances sometimes made Nordic decadents dream of more passionate southern climates, they remained attached to Nordic nature and national ideas. Ideals of Finnishness and cosmopolitanism alternate, for instance, in Aho's Finnish naturalism. In *Alone*, a novel set in Paris, in the context of the World Fair (*Exposition Universelle*) of 1889, Aho creates an image of a Finnish bohemian who is trying to adopt the cerebrally oriented cynicism that Baudelaire featured as pivotal to a dandy, but fails because of his (supposedly Nordic) vulnerability and tendency to sentimentality. Even the austerity of Nordic morality comes up in his thoughts. At the foot of the *Tour d'Eiffel*, among the joyful crowd of the World Fair, the narrator-protagonist sinks into feelings of ennui and resignation, looking at their "enthusiasm like a Pietist condemning earthly pleasures."[32]

The sensibility and emotional makeup of Nordic decadence stem from these naturalist works. Another highly influential work in this respect

was Herman Bang's novel *Haabløse Slægter* (1880, Hopeless Families), one of the texts that mark the transition from naturalist decadence to what we have designated as core decadence, where decadence as the theme is accentuated, new decadent motifs circulated and decadent style foregrounded. The "hopelessness" and degeneration of old families indicated in the title create the sense of ending which haunts decadent literature. Nordic core decadence also inherits the centrality of disgust from the works of Zola and the Goncourt brothers, as well as from Nordic naturalism. The disgust is solicited by the pessimistic views of humankind and modern culture and connects to themes of morbidity and sickness.

Nordic Varieties of Decadent Heroes

Decadence, in the sense that here is designated as core decadence, has been connected to an "inward turn" focusing on the central characters' inner worlds (see, e.g., Weir 1995).[33] The visions and experiential sphere of the neurotic (male) heroes invade the literary scene. According to this perspective, the shift from naturalism to core decadence can be described as a radical move toward the subjective worlds of the decadent characters which downplays the role of narrators who observe the fictional world from outside. Typically, the sick mind of the protagonist becomes the main access to the fictional world while the allegedly objective or scientific—but also moralizing—voice of the observer falls away. In Nordic literature, this development is well on its way in Jacobsen's *Niels Lyhne* and Bang's *Haabløse Slægter*, both of which appeared before Huysmans's *À rebours* (the usual paradigmatic example). These early works show how a Nordic "decadent turn" developed independently of the French school, although it profited from the social and intellectual impulses circulating throughout Europe. Furthermore, Bang's and Jacobsen's works inspired many Nordic authors and shaped their decadent works. Bang's role for Swedish decadence, for example, is important, although Hansson's *Sensitiva amorosa* more openly relied on French decadent literature.[34] Hansson's work, in turn, partly contributed to the make-up of Finnish decadence, influencing, for example, Volter Kilpi's early works, in which direct traces of French decadence are hard to find.

The shift to the psychological allows the fictional worlds to be overtaken by fantasies, dreams or visions and enables the dominance of both the cerebral and—especially negative—emotions. Huysmans's "breviary" of decadence propagates this shift via the thought processes of des Esseintes and introduces decadent dreamworlds dominated by horror and perversity rather than (symbolistic) visions of ideals. Still, this text retains the naturalistic point of view and the outside narrator who follows the progress of the protagonist's neurotic malady and attributes his fate to hereditary and social factors.

When there is no "omniscient" narrator, the explicit analysis of the social milieu from an outside perspective—the agenda of the naturalist narrators—falls away. Sometimes, the balancing act between naturalistic explanations involving heredity and social milieu and depictions of sensibilities focusing on inner worlds produces ambivalences that become quite insoluble in core decadence. *Sensitiva amorosa* paints a picture of the sensibility haunting modern humanity by describing the paralyzing *livsångest* or existential anxiety, which constantly poisons the soul and exhausts its energy. This anxiety seems to be, on the one hand, the fruit of the refinement brought about by civilization, which is supposed to awaken awareness of "the universe's own sick essence of being" (Hansson 2002, 21). On the other hand, it seems to be part of the Darwinian struggle for life—and the consciousness of this struggle—as well as hereditary degeneration: "It was as though fungal spore had lain concealed in his father's seed and in his mother's egg" (21).[35] There is a tension between naturalistic explanations and the emphasis on sensibilities, which haunt the refined neurotics' conscience.

Nordic varieties of decadent heroes can be discerned or identified as such only in relation to the general pattern, mainly derived from French prototypes, like Huysmans's des Esseintes.[36] This exemplary type could be described as containing a fair selection of the following characteristics. The core decadent characters and narrator characters are given the space to display their thoughts without censure or comment. These characters are usually young, egocentric and narcissistic men with a neurotic disposition who give voice to and exemplify the experiences of sickness, life-weariness, pessimism and weak will. They may indulge in luxury, perversities and violence to soothe their *ennui*, although, more often, they just think of and imagine transgressive behavior. They typically cultivate a (morbid) aestheticism, immorality, misanthropy, misogyny and despair about modern culture. Their hatred of nature and bourgeois culture is expressed by coloring the outside world with disgust while entertaining a nostalgia for more vigorous pasts, often previous periods of decadence.[37]

In general terms, Nordic decadent heroes remain more down to earth than Huysmans's des Esseintes. They do not suffer from over-cultivation or over-refined senses, nor do they have fortunes to spend on luxury items, or the possibility to live outside the demands of the society. They hardly show any interest in a cult of artificiality, although they might be taken by exoticism and exotic imaginings. They often negotiate their role in national cultural life and politics, although they feel distanced from the interests of both the pillars of society and ordinary folk. Instead of being the last scions of an aristocratic family, they often come from modest backgrounds and have roots in the countryside.[38] Frequently, they are country boys (much more rarely, young women) who come to the city to study, "rural students" who can be characterized

as "upstarts" or "parvenus" (see Hinrikus in this volume). They linger in a kind of intermediate state, an existence between rejection and nostalgia, including both tempting and terrifying urbanity and their primitive and "vital" roots.

The decadent novels that are still firmly anchored in social life have rather mundane heroes, who, nevertheless, exhibit clearly decadent characteristics. An interesting case from Sweden is Oscar Levertin's novel *Lifvets fiender* (1888–1890, Enemies of Life). It depicts a protagonist whose neuropathological state immediately recalls the typical symptoms of neurotic decadent heroes. Only the fact that this condition is induced by overwork (reminding the contemporary reader of burnout symptoms) clearly sets the journalist Imhof apart. Nevertheless, when the excitement and tension behind the depression-like symptoms and anxiety are linked to hectic urban modernity, we are again on familiar ground, although there is a twist in this, too. Stockholm, then still a rather small and idyllic city that serves as the ever-present background of the story, is not a convincing metropolis for Levertin, and he illustrates the Nordic condition vis-à-vis decadence even more generally. Here, the modern metropolitan urbanity that severely affects the journalist protagonist is mediated by newspapers. Awareness of all the ills of modern culture does not arise from the local soil but from the modern media that spreads the virus of hectic, enervating modernity to the still relatively peripheral (and healthier) parts of the world.

Levertin thus gives the newspapers a sinister role. They induce neurotic disorders and bring the modern maladies even to places where the modern urban milieus are not yet highly developed. Although later, in the sick mind of the protagonist, even Stockholm is invested with sinister features, it is first used as a contrast to his fanatic obsession: it irritates him with its relaxed, pleasure-seeking and carefree atmosphere. The protagonist is far from being a decadent dandy and shows no signs of aestheticism, but *Lifvets fiender* fits the larger category of decadence that the present anthology is mapping in its Nordic context. His pathology is related to the urban morbidity and *fin de siècle* pessimism common to naturalist and decadent writing in all their variations. Key elements of the story relate to and are directly influenced by extraliterary discourses on modern decay and degeneration. They are also in dialog with the core texts of decadence; in particular with the *livsångest* and death drive dramatized in *Sensitiva amorosa* (see Ahlund 1994, 11, 86–88). The title of the work, however, not only raises the important question of who the "enemies of life" are but it also reveals that life is seen as a positive value. The dimensions of decadent aestheticism are absent as well. Thus, the naturalist moral perspective personified in the protagonist's loved one, who tries to save him, frames this decadent case.

Levertin's hero can be compared to other more or less naturalistic heroes who still exhibit important decadent features, such as Arne

Garborg's undecided and weary hero in *Trette mænd* (*Weary Men*, see Barstad in this volume). In Jens Peter Jacobsen's novel *Niels Lyhne*, we meet another decadent who is but an observer unfit for real life: at the same time, the protagonist's reflections and impressions are "undermining the naturalistic novel from within" (Norup in this volume). In many texts, visions and a fantasy world seem to take over only partially, creating an uncanny effect in the otherwise naturalist or realist narration. In *I förbund med döden* (In Alliance with Death, 1893), Karl August Tavaststjerna, a Swedish-speaking Finn, presents the confessions of "a sick soul in a sick body" and adds the confused decadent aristocrat Gustaf von Klerchen to the series of decadents grown from naturalist soil. His vision, an imaginary discussion with Death, explains the title, and exhibits one typical trope of decadence; after this vision, the text becomes a Strindbergian tragedy of marriage (see Schoolfield 2003, 135–146). We meet a more fantastic type in Heidenstam's *Hans Alienus* (see Brantly in this volume) where realistic settings—and rural background—alternate with the fantasy adventures of the eponymous hero in ancient history. This novel is a strange mixture, but it predicts the type of narration which involves staging a historical or mythical figure as a decadent. This well-known strategy from the French context—where it often mixes a detailed, pseudo-naturalistic description with a mythical and exotic world—also makes its way into Nordic decadence, though it need not retain much of the naturalistic style.

At this other end of the spectrum, we find a text entirely preoccupied by aesthetic visions of the world. Volter Kilpi's *Antinous* (1903) is a Finnish example of decadence concentrating on the modern aesthetic malaise, although its setting in Antiquity seems to indicate a universal condition (Lyytikäinen 1997, 113 and 2014, 89–91). In a series of *tableaux,* it depicts the life of a decadent Schopenhauerian aesthete loosely modeled on the historical Antinous. The only links to the actual person are the external framework of places (Bithynia, Athens, Rome, Egypt), where he lived and the figure of the ideally beautiful youth (with the connotations of androgyny and "perversity" or homosexuality that Kilpi's text never makes explicit but only implies).[39] The eponymous character is an observer reacting to all things around him solely by looking—only as an aesthete. We find Antinous mostly in front of landscapes, buildings or artworks but even when he is looking at living people he "freezes" them in aesthetic poses, treating them as if they were artworks.

Kilpi creates "a beautiful soul" infected by the "poison" (Kilpi 1903, 91) of aestheticism when he records Antinous's desire to merge into a vision of the world as a passive observing eye. This sort of *Weltauge* is inspired by the aesthetic of Arthur Schopenhauer. Kilpi's *Antinous* shows the morbid and antisocial implications of this kind of aesthetic attitude by connecting the figure to the narcissistic tendencies of the decadent neurotics. The protagonist asks, "isn't a man vibrating with beauty

just great sorrow, sorrow that melts him?" (ibid.).[40] The self-sufficient pleasure of an individual focusing on the life of refined sensations erodes the basis of communal life and morals alike, at the same time being the source of incurable melancholy.[41] The narrative ends with the suicide of the aesthete by drowning in the Nile.

Antinous's sickness is not described in a naturalistic way, but instead presents the protagonist as a denizen of an ideal world beyond naturalism. Antinous is the embodiment of the aesthetic impulse that denies worldly morality in order to embrace an ideal vision purified of physical and social contacts. Although bodily realities are out of the picture, this purity and aesthetic bliss cannot be maintained. Kilpi's Antinous is betrayed by his own thoughts: the melancholic sees the horror through the veil of beauty.[42]

Antinous's passivity is in line with the heroes of core decadence. However, with the onset of the Nietzschean influence, another kind of hero starts to emerge. This type seems to be vigorous and, thus, the opposite of weak decadents. Nevertheless, the vim and vigor of these characters is flawed: they still share the horror of life which plagues them and makes their struggles empty and vain. Strindberg's *I havsbandet* (1890, tr. as *By the Open Sea* and *On the Seaboard*), which has as its core theme "the intellectual man in a struggle with lower beings," mixes impulses from Huysmans and an enthusiasm for the Nietzschean Superman. The hero Borg imagines himself a Superman, but is in fact a frail little man, an aesthete dressed like a dandy who suffers from fits of exhaustion. He cherishes objects that show "the power of the human spirit to violate nature's fixed, monotonous forms," and as a scientist he strongly believes in reason and its powers (Schoolfield 2003, 44–45). This effeminate Faust meets a hostile community with disastrous consequences for himself. Even his inappropriate dress "demonstrates both Borg's unawareness of the world he enters, and a desire to challenge that primitive and hostile society" (ibid., 46). The "lower beings" are the vigorous ones, and the ultimately weak "Superman" becomes their victim. These active but sick, often Nietzschean, heroes populate many of the late Nordic decadent texts. They tend to be poets (like the hero of Joel Lehtonen's *Mataleena*) and artists or would-be artists who end up being only "artists of their own life," like in Lehtonen's *Villi* (Wild, see Ahmala in this volume). In the latter, the cerebral and refinement is gone; all that remains is a brutal hedonist.

Though the majority of decadent heroes were men, Nordic decadence also produced decadent heroines, rare creatures among the plethora of *femmes fatales* and female idols, who are seen through the eyes of male heroes but not given an independent role in the narratives. Ibsen's plays present us with strong female figures, reflected upon and appropriated by many *fin de siècle* women interested in decadence and naturalism, from authors like Lou Andreas Salomé and Laura Marholm, to Nordic

women playwrights and actresses in Ibsen's plays. The truly decadent heroines tended to bewilder the contemporary public, like L. Onerva's (pen name of Hilja Onerva Lehtinen) eponymous protagonist in the novel *Mirdja* (1908), a highly intriguing personage to whom we can attach all kinds of decadent labels: would-be artist, New Woman, *femme fatale*, dilettante, Nietzschean Superman and picara (see Parente-Čapková in this volume).

Historical Tableaux of Decadence

Decadence bred a new genre of historical or pseudo-historical novels and dramas dominated by the depiction of periods of decline and cultural decay, often seen as playgrounds for the demon of perversity. Flaubert's *Salammbô* figured prominently as a source of inspiration, but the romantic tradition was also fertile ground. In Nordic countries, one of the influential texts of the genre was Viktor Rydberg's *Den sista Atenaren* (1859, *The Last Athenian*) with the theme of the battle of religions and the sad fall of the Athenian "enlightenment" with the rise of Christian fanaticism. The more "decadent" decay of ancient civilizations is exemplified by Verner von Heidenstam's phantasmagorical imagining of Sardanapal's last days (see Brantly in this volume). The line between the historical, mythical and purely invented worlds was not important: the sceneries of romanticized decay and corruption functioned as projections of the modern mind onto ancient settings rather than any serious attempt to understand historical realities. In Ibsen's early play *Peer Gynt* (1867), Gynt's exotic adventures extend from the mythical realm of Norwegian folklore to the Orient and mirror Gynt's shifting identities. The ideal of authenticity recurs in Ibsen's play in many contexts, but the wisdom of the mythical trolls, "Troll, to thyself be—enough," tempts one only to hedonism and opportunism (Ibsen 1995, 42). Gynt rejects their advice but does not find authenticity elsewhere, either (see Ahmala 2016, 64).

Introducing historical scenery is often part of decadent authors' tendency to "sort incessantly through the materials of the cultural past, defining their relationship to others in the cultural movement by collecting disparate themes, tropes, and stylistic manners from around the globe and binding them together according to their peculiar tastes and proclivities" as Matthew Potolsky describes; he emphasizes that for these writers, reception is "a crucial means of production" (Potolsky 2013, 4). The repertoire derived from ancient history, or any period somehow appealing to the decadent imagination, tended to focus on the same themes and figures (like Nero, Sardanapal, and Salome) even outside France, but the interest often lay in the national varieties and additions to these ready-made *topoi*. Nordic decadence is distinguished by its tendency to mix themes of decay with Nordic myths and history.[43] Mythical realities

could be evoked to reflect upon fears concerning contemporary society and their national causes. Even Flaubert's panoramic spectacle of Carthage has been interpreted as an allegory of contemporary France (Weir 1995, 26–27).

Eino Leino, the leading poet writing in Finnish at the turn of the century, turned to Finnish history and mythology, not only in his enthusiastic effort to create a new national symbolism (reminiscent of the efforts of W. B. Yeats) but also to counter Russian censorship in the Grand Duchy of Finland. When he wrote the play *Sota valosta* (The War for Light, 1900), situated in a mythical history of Finland, he was worried about the future of the Finnish cause and the decay of the national spirit in his own time. Referring apparently to the time when Finland—or the Finnish tribes living in the area today known as Finland—was conquered by Swedish troops (beginning in the twelfth century) and placing the heroes of the national epic *Kalevala* in this quasi-historical scene, the play makes distinct reference to its time of writing. It uses the depiction of the disintegration of ancient Finnish society and its subjugation under foreign rule to create an allegory of the historical scene of the 1890s with the oppressive Russian presence in the country which aspired to national sovereignty. The play also reveals contemporary Nietzschean impulses in dealing with the problems of the individual and the artist, which were important in decadence, as well as the themes of fatigue and the depletion of vitality.

The mythical heroes represent the new national avant-garde of artists and poets in a time when high national hopes were being shaken and oppressive rule was becoming harsher.[44] The idealist image of the common people cherished by the national elite was collapsing due to social turmoil and the advance of socialist ideas.[45] The depicted mythico-historical events show the demise of the "nation" leading the people into "slavery" and the heroes into exile, focusing on the inner causes of this decay that make it possible for the conqueror to subdue the people—giving them false promises and tactically supporting their self-elected prophets—without serious resistance. The people prove treacherous and abandon their heroes who, on their part, suffer from fatigue, pessimism and other decadent affective symptoms—and indulge in contempt of the ordinary folk. Väinämöinen and the other mythical heroes are ready to fight regardless of their suffering, but the people are turning their backs on their warriors, so the gap between them is widening. The play takes the side of these superhuman figures, suggesting that they are the bearers of civilization[46] while the common people in their unreliability and gullibility are ready to further their own demise.

The corrosion of the nationalist elite presents a dilemma for Leino and many other leading figures influenced by decadent ideas. They were preoccupied by the contradiction between nationalist objectives and individualistic ideologies, questioning their worth. Furthermore, the

spread of Nietzscheanism, carving out an opposition between individualistic heroes and the masses, enhanced the sense of disillusionment vis-à-vis the common people, who did not comply with the lofty ideal created by the national movement. The disappointed nationalists flirting with decadent ideas presented themselves as great individuals betrayed by the people—instead of their own illusions. Suffering from the loss of their nationalist mission, they cultivated a tragic superhuman imago. Even if the national romantic conception of the artist leading his people was lost—at worst, decadent artists were presented only as heroes of their own life—there was a tendency to hold on to heroism.[47]

This tendency is manifest in the works of the Finland-Swedish poet, ultraconservative nobleman and aesthete, Bertel Gripenberg, who created a very different kind of mythology. According to Schoolfield (1998, 417), Gripenberg's first books of poetry (e.g., *Dikter*, 1903), "provide a happy hunting ground for an investigator of the Finland-Swedish outskirts of the European decadence." Gripenberg's subtle symbolist and decadent poems are inhabited by *femmes fatales* and other decadent personae, indulging in "autumn eroticism"; others are full of heroic pathos. Here, we enter the realm of decadent racial elitism: some poems appeal to the (Finland-Swedish) reader to defend the "cause," that is, the survival of the Germanic race. Finland's Swedes are acting as a buffer between civilization and the danger coming from the East (and from the "lower race" within the country). This heroic militant poetry, constructing scenes of battle, victories and defeats, comprises a rhetoric of hatred of socialism, and contempt toward Russians and (Finnish-speaking) Finns, which later influenced the reception of Gripenberg's work (cf. Möller-Sibelius 2015).

Female Voices

In the Nordic countries, as elsewhere, the canonized authors of decadence were male. Though many of them opposed bourgeois masculinity and patriarchal values, questioning the heterosexual matrix of society, their approach to women as creative subjects was by no means simple (see, e.g., Ledger 1997; Dellamora 1999). As mentioned above, decadent writing has been often accused of misogyny or, at least, of problematic views on women. During the last few decades, female voices have increasingly become the object of scholarship in decadence studies: as women writing about women and their problems, these authors had, most obviously, a special—though most varied or even contradictory—approach towards femininity and "women's issue" (or, "women's question," the expression used in Nordic languages). Parallel to the growing interest in Rachilde in France, female protagonists of British aestheticism like Vernon Lee became more closely associated with decadence. Nordic authors in this vein include Stella Kleve (pen name of Mathilda

Malling) in Sweden, L. Onerva in Finland and Dagny Juel in Norway. The fame of Nordic women authors such as Benedictsson and Skram as foremost naturalist writers of Sweden and Norway, respectively, was already established earlier (e.g., Engelstadt 1985), followed by the similar recognition of Canth and Lange (Lappalainen 2007; Rossi 2007).

In the Nordic countries, women employing the decadent mode in their writings not only faced the complex ways of relating to women and the feminine inscribed in decadent poetics but they also faced the issue of the perceived incompatibility of female emancipation and decadence. Everything was further complicated by the fact that women's emancipation was a part of the ideology of the "Nordic self" (e.g., Klinge 1990, 28) and, hence of the national ideology. These were typical examples of the tensions between the feelings of decay and the aspirations of modernity: the female emancipation promoted by patriotic cultural circles could be inimical to issues connected with decadence. Hence, decadent women writers' proximity to artistic circles enchanted with aestheticism, decadence and Nietzscheism often led to a tense relationship with the more conservative wings of women's movements.

We can discern a Nordic counterpart to the figure of the New Woman, known from Anglo-American literature and usually characterized as a figure of negotiations among various nineteenth-century discourses on sexuality and emancipation. In *fin de siècle* Nordic literature, the New Woman as a character meant the search for independence and female subjectivity, often intertwined with a quest for artistic expression. Decadent women authors strove to construct a new and different subjectivity, which often got trapped in the male-authored types of decadent femininity that the writer (in the figure of her protagonist) subverted, appropriated, mimed and ironized. This paradox of the "decadent New Woman" can be found in novels such as *Bertha Funcke* (1885) by Stella Kleve, *Mirdja* (1908) and other texts by L. Onerva, poems, short stories and plays by Dagny Juel, as well as in the works of Marholm.

Marholm's decadent heroines, such as the protagonist of the play *Karla Bühring* (1895) also entered into a dialogue with male-created female figures thanks to Marholm's partnership with the key figure in Swedish decadence, Ola Hansson. Marholm and Hansson grew together as writers and thinkers (see esp. Witt-Brattström 2007), commenting on and translating each other's texts: Hansson translated Marholm's work into Swedish and Marholm translated Hansson's texts into German. Marholm also translated Bourget and published her work in Baltic-German newspapers, which were read by Estonia's educated classes. Other Nordic women writers also had close connections to male protagonists of *fin de siècle* cultural life. On the one hand, these connections facilitated women's entry into the literary scene; on the other hand, they delegated women to the role of muses and/or epigones of their male partners. Such was the case of Juel, wife of the Polish Nietzschean decadent Stanisław

Przybyszewski. L. Onerva and the Finnish-Estonian writer Aino Kallas, respectively, were close friends and, at certain periods, partners of Eino Leino; Kallas also had a close relationship with the Latvian symbolist-decadent artist Janis Rosentāls and, as the only accepted female member in the core of Young Estonia, she was closely connected to Estonian decadent symbolists. Kallas translated their works (especially Tuglas's) into Finnish, whereas Tuglas was her main translator into Estonian. However, women's participation in the aforementioned "decadent republic of letters" not only meant their interaction with men: one of the most famous examples of "decadent women's" mutual dialog is Marholm's *Das Buch der Frauen* (1894, *Modern Women*) with chapters on George Egerton and Skram.

These cases reveal another feature shared by more decadent women writers: a transnational background (such as Marholm's Baltic German origin and Danish-Norwegian descent) or, at least, a cosmopolitan cultural way of life, as in the case of Kallas' Finno-Estonian identity and her later life in London. Stella Kleve and L. Onerva were well traveled and tried to "Europeanize" Swedish and Finnish literature, respectively. L. Onerva was also one of the most prolific translators and promoters of French literature and culture of her time, translating Baudelaire, Verlaine and Bourget.

"Decadent New Women" (see Parente-Čapková 1998, 2014) in the Nordic countries engaged with Friedrich Nietzsche's thought, appropriating his ideas for their own purposes. They also tackled the themes of the unconscious, in conjunction with Freud's theories, either without direct awareness of them, or, anticipating them in their own way (Brantly 1991, Witt-Brattström 2007). Entering into direct or indirect dialog with male thinkers, they redefined the decadent stereotypes of woman, giving them new meanings; they appropriated male decadent roles, masks and poses like that of the dandy or the *flâneur*, and created various androgynous ideals "beyond sex and gender." Hence, they developed various strategies for subverting the gender politics of decadence, experimenting with the decadent play with mimesis, making use of irony and parody while enacting the masquerade of femininity (Parente-Čapková 2014). Within the framework of this "aesthetic feminism" (Witt-Brattström 2004), these writers dealt with the perennial issues of love, (female) creativity and spirituality, searching for inspiration in various traditions. To compensate for the lack of a female cult in the Lutheran religion, they explored various traditions from the Catholic cult of the Virgin Mary to the pre-Christian beliefs preserved in the oral folk tradition.

Rural Decadences and Nordic Primitivism

Literary decadence has traditionally been associated with the urban and the modern, but the idea that *fin de siècle* literary decadence only took

place in the metropolitan centers of the industrial age is far from accurate. In their disappointment with modernity, many authors of decadent literature turned away from the metropolis to alternative spaces outside the realm of civilization and its discontents. As discussed by Scott Ashley (2000, 175), the cultural history of the nineteenth century is focused on great cities, but the decadents were always somewhere else, either imaginatively or physically. While writing *À vau-l'eau* (1882), the naturalist version of *À rebours,* Huysmans was "disgusted by Paris," "the sacred city," which in *À vau-l'eau* fuels both concrete and existential disgust, creating deadening experiences of banality.[48] In *À rebours* and *En rade* (1886), Huysmans then moved to depict provincial milieus outside Paris. Indeed, decadent literature across the continent, from Scottish to Hungarian and Nordic fiction, testifies that provincial milieus and sceneries of nature offered rich sites for decadent imagination.[49]

We may speak of "rural decadence" (see Rossi 2015) as a specific subgenre and an integral form of *fin de siècle* literature. Rural decadence is present as an undercurrent as early as Zola's decadent naturalism. In Zola's novels, the peasant world functions as an ideal site for investigating perversity and the violation of taboos. It is even at the root of the hereditary decay of the family in *Les Rougon-Macquart*.[50] *La Terre*, Zola's epic of the decay of an agricultural family—a novel praised by Huysmans—features among Zola's decadent novels, which prompted reactions of shock even in his own disciples (2015).[51]

Rural decadences take inspiration from the era's fear for and attraction to both the savage and the primordial in nature. Thus, the notion of the primitive in its multiple senses plays a key role in decadent (and modernist) understandings of modernity and modern civilization. The whole long *fin de siècle* culture tends to define itself by what is primeval, savage and "natural," in the sense of uncivilized. As a response to the disappointment of modernity, many authors sought inspiration from exotic natural paradises and pre-civilized cultures. Returning to nature and natural cycles while turning away from progress and degenerating modern lifestyles was a tempting solution to the civilization's discontents. But the primitive became an essential aspect of modern self-understanding and a metaphor for discussing the otherness residing not only outside the Western world but also within the dominant culture; thus ultimately, for imagining the "primitive us" (see Torgovnick 1990, 11–18). Here, the primitive tends to wed all the negative meanings associated with it and becomes a projection of the internal anxieties and attractions of civilized man.[52]

Rural decadences, with their (re)turn to the primitive in human life and nature, can be seen as variants of the general primitivist tendency. Provincial spaces took hold in the decadent imagination because of their capacity to challenge modernity and its temporality: rural milieus and exotic natural paradises seemed to have been caught in a riptide through

time, dragging one away from the modern world. Ideas deriving from contemporary anthropology suggested that the agrarian classes of Europe could be considered archaic remnants in the civilization, analogous to Darwin's living fossils in the natural world, and to the savage "lower races" overseas, in which the primitive was still observable in its full vitality (see Ashley 2000, 177).

In the Nordic context, this ruralist tendency became a core issue of decadence. Authors like Knut Hamsun, Joel Lehtonen, Frans Emil Sillanpää, August Strindberg and A. H. Tammsaare place their paradoxical narratives of decay and degeneration in traditional countryside milieus and the surroundings of Nordic nature: we find decadent fictions set in the archipelago of the Baltic Sea, the mountains of Lapland and the exotic Finnish wilderness (see "Rural decadences" in this volume). These fictions mirror the multiple facets of the primitive in nature. In the spirit of Rousseau's cultural pessimism, introduced to Nordic intellectual circles by Strindberg in particular,[53] rural decadences present us with a nostalgic escape from the entanglements of modern life. At the same time, the rural setting frequently turns into an exploration of the primitive in its most negative sense: the naturalist descriptions of rural life tease out the savage forces of nature and the beast in man, seen to be lurking in the natural paradise.

The centrality of the peasant and the agrarian milieu in Nordic decadence has its historical and cultural background, as mentioned, in the fact that the nationalists considered the peasantry as representative of the core or soul of the nation. In nineteenth-century literature, the figure of the peasant was essential to imagining and narrating national self-identity, until naturalism challenged this romanticized vision.[54] The breakdown of the bucolic idyll is prominent in Strindberg's *Hemsöborna* (1887, tr. as *The People of Hemsö*), a novel in which the archipelago idyll transforms into a morbid satire of Nordic rural life. The Strindbergian struggle for power and the battle of the sexes are coupled with the struggle for life amidst the harshness of nature. A pivotal episode depicts the hardships of transporting a coffin with a dead body during the season of thin ice; first the coffin sinks, then the widower drowns. Strindberg is, in fact, carnivalizing the primitive in nature and how nature takes over civilized man. Conversely, in *Hårda tider* (Hard Times, 1891), Karl August Tavaststjerna addresses the primitive forces in nature with a cold and serious naturalism. Tavaststjerna's historical novel on the Finnish famine of 1866–1868 focuses on the misery it inflicted on ordinary people. The merciless Northern climate prompts a Darwinian struggle of life. But a decadent oxymoron sets the tone. The deadly beauty of frost is depicted as a prelude to the outburst of blind destructive instincts; hunger provokes the beast in man, resulting in a brutal homicide in the wintry countryside.

Besides agrarian life, the imagining of decay in Nordic decadence is closely connected to Nordic nature, which provides a vibrant store

of decadent tropes. If adoration of artificiality inspired some decadent authors in Western and Central Europe, many Nordic decadents saw in nature an inspiring source of otherness. As early as Ibsen and Bjørnson, sphinx-like mountain landscapes frame bourgeois tragedies and mirror the mysterious forces of nature threatening civilization. Moreover, while Nordic decadence benefited from the cross-cultural imagination of the North as a dark place of unknown wild forces, it also developed decadent imagery of its own, peculiar to Nordic environments. Nature's potential for primitive passions and the ecstatic are essential to the decadent aesthetics of transgression in the Nietzschean, Dionysian wilderness decadence of Joel Lehtonen's novels (see Lyytikäinen in this volume). The gendered image of the bog goes beyond its literal meanings to create an ambivalent space of femininity and otherness (see Parente-Čapková's chapter). In the work of Hamsun and Sillanpää, the Nordic white summer night—which promises an idyll—transforms surprisingly into a trope of decadence (see Rossi in this volume).

Nordic Melancholia and other Decadent Affects

The idea of the "dark North" reinforces the gloomy emotional landscape of decadence and its variants in Nordic literature. Melancholia—the sickness of the nineteenth century, or a mood of modernity as defined by Jonathan Flatley (2008)—is a central affective aspect in Nordic decadent literature. In the North, the extreme forms of aestheticism, artificiality or misogyny are rare, but life-weariness and pessimism are strong. We may even speak of a specific Nordic melancholia and its various shades, ranging from a dreamy, soft kind of nostalgic melancholia prominent in Danish decadence (see Norup in this volume) to resigned visions of the death drive in Ibsen's plays and narratives of female melancholia in the work of Benedictsson and Skram.[55] In effect, the view of the North as a realm of melancholia was current in the *fin de siècle*: from Hippolyte Taine to Paul Bourget, the nineteenth-century spirit of melancholia and pessimism was frequently affiliated with Germanic, Nordic and Slavic cultures (Rossi 2016). "Nordic melancholia" offers a case study for the principles of "race, milieu, and moment" in Taine's *L'Histoire de la littérature anglaise* (1863). According to Taine (1863, 146), the Nordic view of the world, "la conception du monde propre aux peuples du Nord, toute triste et morale" had evolved under the harsh struggle against nature.[56] In the preface to the *Essais de psychologie contemporaine*, Bourget regretted the dissipation of "the ancient French joy" and tracked the contemporary onslaught of pessimism to Schopenhauer's philosophy and Russian nihilism.[57] This imaginary of the North inspired decadents outside the Nordic region to take flight northwards—in fantasy and reality—and to weave tales about its monstrous mysteries and the affective potential of the Nordic Gothic (Hawthorne and Simpson in this volume).

In the Nordic countries, melancholia blends with religiosity and spiritual forms of naturalism, which also became an important strain of Nordic decadence. The concept of "spiritual naturalism," a term first coined by Huysmans in *Lá-Bas* (1891) illustrates the revolt against positivism and documentary naturalism, and the quest for a spiritual refuge inspired by various religious and mystic worldviews. In Western and Central European literature, this tendency, increasing toward the turn of the twentieth century, manifested itself as an interest in Catholicism and various forms of exotic spiritualism (see Pynsent 1989, 216; Hanson 1997). While these aspects of spirituality tempted many Nordic authors like Strindberg, spiritual refuge was also found in local Christian sectarian movements, ancient Nordic beliefs and theosophical thinking. Nordic pre-Christian beliefs, conjured up earlier by romanticism, are echoed in some works,[58] and in still others, as in Garborg's novels, the protagonists show an interest in undogmatic versions of Lutheranism (see Barstad in this volume). At the same time, this new spirituality led to a reconfiguration of the positivistic view of nature. The idea of mystical life-forces resonated in the vitalism that inspired many Nordic authors of the era.

All in all, the spirituality of Nordic decadence and its emotional makeup illustrate a specific kind of Nordic mindscape. Luther was a melancholic, as Julia Kristeva reminds us in *Soleil noir* (1987, 131). The rigor of Lutheranism induces solitary contemplation and existentialist struggle. Although these features resonate with Dostoyevsky's narratives of personal choice and conversion, which inspired Huysmans to elaborate the concept of spiritual naturalism, a certain extra austerity permeates the Nordic texts. The spiritual vein of Nordic decadence generated original forms of nature spirituality, as in Sillanpää's later rural decadence (see Rossi in this volume). This spiritualist trend turns the emotional landscape of Nordic decadence away from pessimistic melancholia toward more regenerative moods, including feelings of mystical bliss, the ecstatic and erotic life-forces—albeit these are still connected to death and the death drive.

We have argued, in this overview, that Nordic decadence offers world literature a rich and original constellation of texts, images and ideas that resonates with Nordic nature and culture. The countries studied—Denmark, Norway, Sweden, Finland and Estonia—developed what can be seen as a specific experience of decadence while entertaining lively contacts with decadences outside the region. The individual articles in *Nordic Literature of Decadence* further elaborate and exemplify the argument by detailed analyses of individual texts and authors, and by bringing forth important aspects of what is specific in Nordic decadence. At the same time, we relate the Nordic to the parallels and paradigms in other decadences. After the sections consisting of chapters that focus mainly on decadence in individual countries, the book turns to aspects

of reception and the imaginary of the North. Finally, the Afterword discusses the relationship of Nordic decadence to Nordic modernism(s) as well as some more decadent-modernist texts and authors.

Notes

1 "[…] en underlig och sällsam ört"; "der växer i det moderna samhällets öfverkultiverade jordmån" (Hansson 1957, 10).
2 "Dess kronblads ådror äro fylda af morbida oljor, dess doft har en sjuklig sötma och dess kolorit är dämpad som dagern i ett sjukrum […]" Hansson 1957, 10–11).
3 Essay "Du dilettantisme – Puvis de Chavannes"; Huysmans (2008, 251).
4 The French decadence gets its due; it is a historical fact that most of the Nordic texts that relate to European movements had French literature in view. Ideas of French naturalism and decadence started to circulate in the North since the 1870s; British, Italian and German decadence mainly arrived after 1900. The major figures of British decadence, such as Oscar Wilde, played a role in some texts in the early twentieth century; his essays were read, but his later plays were more prominent than *Salome* or *The Picture of Dorian Gray*. German decadence was mostly represented by Nietzsche and the later influence of Thomas Mann's decadent texts on late neo-naturalist texts. Italian decadence figures even less and have been concentrated around the figure of Gabriele d'Annunzio, who was translated and whose texts were commented upon in the press. However, similarly to that of Wilde, d'Annunzio's reception dates more from the period after 1900 than from the earlier years.
5 Potolsky's idea of the movement as an imagined community, following Benedict Anderson, emphasizes its global nature, uniting its members "by production, circulation, and reception of art and literature" around the world (Potolsky 2013, 6). It also suggests that this intellectual circulation does not depend primarily upon the socioeconomic conditions at any local level but also on the ideas of culture and cultural development that are in circulation.
6 Nordic artists, writers and composers also formed "colonies" in Paris and Berlin with contacts to local mediators (see, e.g., Sarajas-Korte 1966, esp. 63–105 and 301–324; and Ingwersen 1992, 293). On Strindberg's contacts with French naturalism (see Madsen 1962, 32–41); on the reception of Ibsen in England and France (see Shepherd-Barr 1997).
7 This refers to "a consciously and freely adopted literary stance" (Potolsky 2013, 4) also in the sense of openly declaring its affiliation with what was considered French corruption. Hansson's case illustrates that the tolerance of Nordic audiences was especially low regarding erotic license.
8 The concept of the modern breakthrough, which has circulated in Nordic literary histories, derives from Georg Brandes who used it to characterize the generation of young Nordic authors in his book *Det moderne gjennembruds mænd* (1883). As Brandes featured Nordic authors as moralists and idealists, this concept has been positively valorized and employed in order to establish distance from naturalism and decadence in French literature. In the spirit of Brandes, many scholars argued that Scandinavian authors had nothing to do with French pessimism and determinism. See, for instance, Gunnar Ahlström, *Det Nordiska Genombrottet* (1947, 384); Rossi (2007, 60–61). See also *A History of Danish Literature* (Rossell 1992) with the notorious discourse of the Modern Breakthrough, the word decadence being absent from the index.

9 Prime examples of this recent research include Andersen (1992), Ahlund (1994), Lyytikäinen (1997), Rossi (2007) and Parente-Čapková (2014).

10 In her introduction to global decadences, *The Fin-de-Siècle World*, Regenia Gagnier promotes viewing them as products of "the decline of economic, social, religious, political, ethnic, and gender traditions under the forces of modernization," which "seem to have had similar effects elsewhere, resulting in diverse literatures of decadence." (Gagnier 2015, 96). Her emphasis on local conditions and the idea that decadent literatures "appear at different times in different cultures" at suitable "moments of cultural transition" shifts the focus toward an idea of a universal concept of decadent literatures (corresponding to the constitutive idea of the volume 97). This approach underestimates the circulation of ideas between cultures (see note 4) and the role of ideologies and sensibilities in identifying what counts as "crises", "decay," "transition" and "modernity" itself. Even within a single national culture, the attitudes toward modernity were always under dispute, and one person's decay is another's progress; these are questions of values and affective stances.

11 Other supporters of a broad view include Kirstin Mahoney who tends to see decadence "as a loosely connected set of aesthetic practices and political postures rather than a wholly unified or clearly demarcated movement" (Mahoney 2015, 4). Matthew Potolsky (2013, 4–5) also criticizes the approaches trying to define decadence with "a fixed set of traits," and his idea of the decadent movement as a community shifts the focus of research very interestingly toward new directions and also allows a large variety of themes, forms and ways of affiliation. Our approach does not, primarily, consider the affiliations of the authors or texts, which vary and are complicated in the Nordic context by uneasy relations with the respective national communities. Instead, we take an *a posteriori* approach that pays attention to recent research on the relevant topics.

12 This broad view only partly agrees with some of the more restrictive definitions (e.g., Carter 1958, Pierrot 1981, Bauer 2001) that focus on what, in our definition constitute "core decadence" or the part of the field mainly inspired by French and Huysmansian ideas and inspiration. For a variety of approaches to decadence, see also Weir (1995, 1–10).

13 This profiling, conspicuous, for example, in Huysmans's *À rebours*, is rendered ambiguous by the naturalist aspects of the narration and the style of the novel itself.

14 Théophile Gautier connected "le style de décadence" to Baudelaire's poetry "because it seemed to him perfectly suited to articulate the complexity of cultural decline, the anxiety of social decay, and the morality of personal corruption" (see Weir 1995, xiv).

15 Cf. (Mahoney 2015), introduction and Murray and Hall (2013, 1–5).

16 Sherry refers to Anglo-American histories of modernism.

17 Compare the general timeframe recently proposed by David Weir, where the dates of Nordic decadence from its early emergence in Danish literature in the 1880s to their later appearance in Estonian literature in the 1910s seem to fit in. Weir argues,

> A case can be made, however, that decadence reached its peak in the second decade of the Third Republic in France (the 1880s), in the last decade of Queen Victoria's reign in Great Britain (the 1890s), in the middle decade of Archduke Ferdinand's status as heir to the throne of Austria-Hungary (the early 1900s), and in the tumultuous decade of the Weimar Republic (the 1920s).
>
> (Weir 2018, 7)

Cf. (Weir 2008) for the American dates.

18 Both Bathseba's death and King David's imagining how the world was created by the Devil and not by God exemplify the provocative "aberrations of the modern mind" (Suomi 1952, 114–116).
19 Even before "Ruth" was published, the editorial board of the album removed a whole chapter containing erotic discussions.
20 In Nordic countries, apparently no efforts were made to counter this development by emphasizing the critical and cosmopolitan value of decadence, comparable to those efforts observed by Mahoney (2015) in the United Kingdom, but similar critiques of nationalism emerged in avant-garde movements, often inspired by decadent themes and ideas.
21 In Estonia, the concept of decadence and Baudelaire were introduced in Bourget's terms right at the beginning of the Young Estonia movement in 1905. This was due to the activities of the francophile Young Estonian Johannes Aavik, who wrote his (lost) master's thesis about Bourget while studying at the University of Helsinki around 1906 (Mihkla 1971, 30–31). About ten years later, F. Tuglas argued that "Bourget was read (by intellectuals) in Estonia like a catechism," Tuglas (1920, 33).
22 Berlin, where international trends were followed rather than invented, was important also because it willingly welcomed Nordic writers and authors: The idea that "light comes now from the North" was strong in the 1880s and 1890s (Sarajas-Korte 1989, 272).
23 For Brandes's visits to and lectures in Finland (see Sarajas 1962, 7–37).
24 The new journal even shocked Brandes, who was then a firm believer in Zolian naturalism (see Sarajas-Korte 1966, 140–145).
25 *Salomé* was premiered in Copenhagen in 1903, but the opening night was not a success: the play was booed at the theatre, and a reviewer commented on the "perverted fantasy" and the playwright's "diseased imagination." Yet, *Salomé* continued to be staged in Nordic countries, for instance in Helsinki in 1905 and in Stockholm in 1906. The first ever film version of Wilde's *The Portrait of Dorian Gray*, directed by Alex Strøm was shown at the Panoptikon Theatre in Copenhagen in 1910 (see Østermark-Johansen 2010, 231, 237–238).
26 On affinities between naturalism and decadence (see Weir 1995, 43–46). This issue is discussed further in the *Afterword* of this volume.
27 In the first edition of *Oever Ævne I*, Bjørnson directly referred to the theories of Charcot and Paul Richter.
28 Théodule Ribot's *Les Maladies de la volonté* (1883), a popularization of Schopenhauer's ideas, and *Les maladies de la personnalité,* were both found in Strindberg's library (Madsen 1962, 71). The resignation of *Miss Julie* has been compared to *abulia* as discussed by Ribot, which refers to the pathological lack of will (see Madsen 1962, 71) or the apathy characteristic of 'weak' decadent figures.
29 On the reception of Ibsen in France and Britain, see Shepherd-Barr (1997).
30 This novel was translated into French in 1943 as *La Femme du Pasteur.*
31 For Joel Lehtonen's later Bovarism see Ahmala in this volume.
32 "Katson heidän innostustaan melkein samalta kannalta, jolta pietisti tuomitsee maallisia huvituksia" (Aho 2003, 51).
33 This remains the focal aspect of decadent heroes, even if we accept their or the authors' dreams of "communities of outsiders" (Potolsky 2013, 29).
34 See Ahlund (1994, 45–55).
35 "[…] universets egen sjuka väsensessens"; "Det var som om ett svampigt groddämne legat gömdt I faderns säd och moderns ägg" (Hansson 1957, 49, 49–50). The reference to the struggle for survival betrays Darwinist influences on Hansson's idea of the nature of man. Huysmans, in contrast to

Hansson, does not pay any attention to Darwinist developments and the "cell-substances" that seem to determine the emotional life of Hansson's characters.

36 Once again, Bourget's efforts in defining the type are not to be neglected when we consider the rapid circulation of this type.

37 These themes of decadence have often been listed without considering how they are positioned in the narrative world: sickness, the identity of life and death, artificiality and hatred of nature, weakness of the will, misanthropy and hatred of the whole world, aestheticism, sensitivity and irritability, forms of perversion, *femme fatale* and the feminine man or androgyny, misogyny, the allure of cruelty, seclusion, sense of loss, nostalgia and melancholy, and ennui (e.g., Rasch 1986, 5–8). But the essential change in the structure of the narratives better explains the shift from naturalism to core decadence: many of these themes are already embedded in the prototypical naturalist novels, but, in core decadence, we are immersed in the display of these features in the characters' minds and the judgments of the outside narrators most often fall by the wayside. The responsibility for making judgments is placed on the shoulders of the reader.

38 Twisting the original idea, they often belong to the last generation of a peasant family or, alternatively, to the first generation of urban intellectuals (often university students), whose roots are in the countryside, as many chapters in our volume show.

39 There were perhaps external reasons for the decision to leave Hadrian out of the picture (drafts with dialogs where Hadrian represents the "practical man of action" exist), but the internal reasons seem more evident: aesthetic sickness requires the self-centeredness of Narcissus; the external world is the mirror image of the figure.

40 "Eikö kauniiksi värähtynyt ihminen juuri ole suurta sulattavaa surua?"

41 Kilpi wrote an essay about the two "ethics," communal and individual-artistic (Kilpi 1902).

42 This view is expressed in Nietzsche's *Birth of Tragedy* as well (Nietzsche 1980, 33–37). Cf. (Lyytikäinen 1997, 99–100 and 257).

43 Nordic decadents' fantasies about Scandinavian history were numerous, from Johannes V. Jensen's widely translated *Kongens Fald* (1900–1901, *The Fall of the King*), to the typically decadent "passionate interest" for rococo art and eighteenth-century culture, as shown in Oscar Levertin's and L. Onerva's work (Brantly 1996, 281; Parente-Čapková 2014, 8).

44 In his lecture series on *Heroes, Hero-Worship, and the Heroic in History* (1910), Thomas Carlyle observed that "the Hero as Divinity, the Hero as Prophet, are productions of old ages" and of "a world vacant […] of scientific forms" so that "we are now to see our Hero in the less ambitious, but also less questionable character of Poet" (71), whose appearance, as he wrote in *Sartor Resartus* (1900), is closely related to the phenomenon by virtue of which "the Religious Principle, driven out of most Churches, either lies unseen in the hearts of good men […] or else wanders homeless over the world, like a disembodied soul seeking its terrestrial organization" (249).

45 This used to be connected to the 1905 Revolution that shook the whole Russian empire (see Sarajas 1962, 132–180) but the process had begun earlier (see Lyytikäinen 1998, 32–45). Leino's disappointment derives from the wave of denunciations where common people betrayed those who refused, for political reasons, to participate in a newly introduced conscription of Finns into the Russian army.

46 Allegorically, this battle of light is the national battle between the weary cultural elite and the masses, as well as a pessimistic warning.

47 In a sense, this heroism harks back to Baudelaire's elitist heroism (of the poet and dandy) (see Potolsky 2013, 26–31).
48 "[C]ar le dégoût de Paris me vient, par époque, moi qui n'aimais au fond que cette sacrée ville!"; "even Paris begins to disgust me – me who deep down has loved nothing else than this sacred city." A Letter to Camille Lemonnier, September, 27 1881 (See Huysmans 1957, 101).
49 On Scottish decadence (Ashley 2000); On the ruralist tendencies in Hungarian literature (Pynsent 1989,163).
50 In Zola's work, the figure of the peasant is already connected to bestiality in *Thérèse Raquin* (1867): the sanguine temperament of the coarse artist-murderer, Laurent, is related to his rural origins (cf. Rossi 2015). The peasant origins of the hereditary taint are depicted In *La Fortune des Rougon* (1871): Tante Dide first marries Rougon, who is termed a "paysan mal dégrossi," a "pauvre diable, épais, lourd, commun, sachant à peine parler français"; but she later enters into a romance with a savage smuggler and poacher of the forests, Macquart.
51 In "Le manifeste des cinq," published in *Le Figaro* on August 18, 1887, Alphonse Daudet, Paul Bonnetain, Lucien Descaves, Paul Margueritte and Gustave Guiches featured La Terre as "scatological" novel, accusing Zola of abandoning his ideals.
52 For example, in Joseph Conrad's *The Heart of Darkness* (1899), one of the founding texts of *fin de siècle* primitivism, the voyage to savage, dark Africa becomes an allegory of the dark side of the civilized Western mind, pointing to the failure of progressivism and rationalism.
53 For Rousseau's influence on Strindberg, see Poulenard (1959).
54 See Rossi (2007).
55 On the representation and experience of melancholia in the work of Benedictsson, Skram and Laura Marholm, see Tuohela (2008).
56 In English, "The view of the world characteristic of the peoples of the North, quite sad and moral."
57 In line with the contemporary positivist accounts of race and milieu, Bourget asked if the half-Asiatic blood found in Slavic cultures induces pessimism, impelling them toward destruction (see Bourget 1993, 10).
58 This tendency is visible in Aho's *Panu* and in the decadent-symbolist poetry of the era.

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