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DECADENCE AND LIFE

Nietzschean-Bergsonian aesthetics of movement and flow in the early prose of Tammsaare and Semper

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This article explores the profoundly affective and ambivalent aesthetics of decadence. The analysis focuses on two examples from the early prose of A. H. Tammsaare (1878–1940) and Johannes Semper (1892–1970): "The Fly" (*Kärbes*, 1917) and "Sacred Weed" (*Püha umbrohi*, 1918). These works are viewed within the broader context of the authors' entire body of work. The decadent aesthetics of Tammsaare's and Semper's works derive from Nietzschean and Bergsonian notions of *decadence* and *life*. The article illustrates the contrasts and similarities between these two notions, with the latter elucidated by reference to movement, change, and transition. Critics have also suggested connections between Nietzschean concepts, such as *life* and the Dionysian, and Bergson's *élan vital* and duration. Scholars have similarly highlighted the association of decadence with change. Moreover, *decadence* and *life* as movement and change partly resonate with Baudelaire's portrayal of *modernity* as fleeting, ephemeral and incidental, which is rooted in the experience of the urban environment. Through these interpretations, the analyzed texts clearly respond to accelerated modernization. The article emphasizes that the Nietzschean-Bergsonian framework is considerably broader than Baudelairean definitions of modernity inspired by the urban environment. At the core of "The Fly" and "Sacred Weed" are practices that enhance one's perception of reality, building on concepts, images, and ideas related to Nietzsche's and Bergson's *decadence* and *life*. Both authors are concerned with the confluence of crises, the representations of which become dynamic through textual strategies associated with decline and decay, as well as their overcoming. The article concludes with a realization that the rich intertextuality steeped in a heightened perception of movement and flow, inspired not only by Nietzsche, Bergson, and Baudelaire but also by several other key influencers of decadent aesthetics, renders Tammsaare's and Semper's works innovative and demanding for the reader.

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