

DECADENCE AS THE AESTHETICS OF AMBIVALENCES

Fusions and syntheses

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This article defines decadence as the aesthetics of ambivalences, drawing on Charles Baudelaire's poem "A Carcass" (*Une charogne*), where decadence signifies both decline and deterioration, as well as rising, transition, and renewal. This extends beyond the organic and physiological sense, serving as a reference to the transformation of artistic aesthetics.

The usage tradition of the concept of decadence in 18th and early 19th-century French culture is briefly explored. Initially denoting historical decline (Charles de Montesquieu, Edward Gibbon), it later, in the early 19th century, encompassed aesthetic degeneration (Désiré Nisard). The definitions of literary decadence by Théophile Gautier, Baudelaire, and Paul Bourget, prevalent in the second half and end of the 19th century, are examined in more detail. These three theorists and authors define decadence similarly to Nisard in terms of a specific mode of expression, characterized by accumulating details, a preference for rich vocabulary borrowed from various fields, the principle of syncretism, and an attempt to express the most obscure thoughts and the most fleeting forms. However, unlike Nisard, they attribute a positive value to this style. In addition to Paul Bourget, who expanded the semantic field of decadence, the article outlines Friedrich Nietzsche's understanding of the ambivalent content of this concept and discusses Egon Friedell, a key developer of Nietzschean decadence in the German cultural sphere in the 20th century.

The second part of the article delves into the connection between decadence and naturalism and their merging in the so-called spiritual naturalism. Friedebert Tuglas formulated the latter as an aesthetic ideal, drawing inspiration from Joris-Karl Huysmans' novel *Là-Bas* (1891). The article examines a number of examples of Estonian and international literary decadence, where the combination of decadence and naturalism clearly serves to reproduce the aesthetics of ambivalences (e.g., Fyodor Dostoevsky's "The Idiot", J. Randvere's "Ruth", Friedebert Tuglas' "Felix Ormusson", August Gailit's "Purple Death" (*Purpurne surm*)). It is pointed out that while Estonian literary decadence is influenced by various cultures (in addition to French culture, German, Russian, English, and Italian examples also play an important role), its tonality most closely resembles Scandinavian literary decadence.

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