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"Decadence-as-a-philosophy" as it is represented through the polarities of art and nature in Justine, Child of pleasure and Death in Venice

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This decadent wisdom encapsulates much of Sade's philosophical hypothesis. Sade, through Clèment, alerts his reader to what he believes is the imposition of the moral tenets of Judeo-Christian culture on the masses. He argues that centuries of cultural acceptance of virtue has led Western civilisations' collective belief in the attractiveness of established moral laws. These laws are merely custom in Sade's philosophical scheme. In a compelling and logical argument, Sade asserts the following : since civilisation has accepted a system of societal behaviour governed by a set of principles which raises virtue above evil, cannot a new society be formed where this hierarchy is reversed? Rodin, libertine-philosopher makes this clear :

> In a totally vicious society, virtue would be totally worthless [...] virtue is not some kind of mode whose value is incontestable, it is simply a scheme of conduct, a way of getting along. (Sade, 1991 : 544)

For Sade, the elevation of virtue over evil discounts human behaviour, since he is acutely aware of "aberrant" sexual behaviour in society, largely concealed through fear of the law, but active just the same. Rodin expounds :

> how are you going to persuade me that a virtue in conflict or in contradiction with the passions is to be found in Nature? And if it is not in Nature and natural, how can it be good? (Sade, 1991 : 545)

Virtue, then, is not natural or inherently good in this philosophical approach. Sade believes that the basis of our belief in virtue is founded upon religious principles, which he believes to be little more than fairy-stories or legends. To convince us of the falsity of our adherence to a life governed by principles of virtue, Sade employs a simple device in his text : repetition. Rita Felski points out that "the organizing principle of the Sadean text, as a number of writers have noted, is that of negation.

It depicts the compulsive and mechanical repetition of acts of erotic violence by the solitary ego as a means of negating the reality of the other and affirming the absolute sovereignty of the self." (Felski, 1991 : 189) This assertion is adequately borne out by the text in which Sade's motives, through repetition of negativity (negative in relation to Judeo-Christian moral laws, are to present an alternative, philosophical approach to sexual morality.

If, as Sade argues, we accept virtue as being the correct way to live in a civilised society, it is only because Western religion has reinforced this belief through constant repetition of the goodness of virtuous conduct. What then if this value-system is reversed and the reader is bombarded with the belief that vice is good? After all, says Sade, humans are imbued with instincts and impulses deposited and installed by Nature, which are considered evil by society. Why not decriminalise natural behaviour by accepting what is, in Sade's view, natural to the individual, to a greater or lesser degree? Gernande advances Sade's cause :

> Because I have the misfortune to live amidst a people still so uncouth as not to dare abolish the most ludicrous of prejudices, I should deprive myself of the rights Nature has granted me! (Sade, 1991 : 650)

Dubois, female brigand, shows similar contempt for the societal status-quo in which she lives :

> Do not imagine that Providence invariably favours Virtue [...] Virtue, like vice, is nothing beyond a scheme of getting along in this world.
> (Sade, 1991 : 693;4)

Following the example of Voltaire's philosophical discourses, Sade provides an

hypothesis via the mouths of his libertine philosophers and then provides *exempla* as justification for his philosophy. This serves to heighten the tone of his discourse, while at the same time showing his reader that constant reinforcement of an idea can lead to acceptance. This is certainly effective, since the bombardment of his philosophies with their attendant pornographic and extreme sexual scenarios eventually lead to a saturation in which the reader becomes immune to the horror of Sade's message for civilisation. In a letter to Mademoiselle de Rousset in 1782, Sade writes :

> You insist that the whole universe be virtuous and you do not feel that everything would instantly perish if virtues alone existed on the earth; you refuse to understand that since vices exist, it is unjust for you to punish them as it would be to jeer at a one-eyed man [...] Remember, in short, that it is to make your fellow-men happy, to care for them, help them, love them that Nature puts you in their midst, not to judge and punish them and above all not to shut them away in prison. (Sade, 1965 : 101,102)

Obviously, for Sade, the Judeo-Christian morality embraced by Western civilisation is too narrow to encompass the wide range of sexual desire felt by certain individuals. Clèment speaks for all libertines when he declares : " By means of tastes given me by Nature, I shall have carried out the intentions of Nature". (Sade, 1991 ; 607)

This point is reiterated by Saint-Florent, who adds that the weak (including women),

> incline in the direction of procuring moral ecstasies which are more keenly felt than any other by these persons whose physical constitution happens to be entirely devoid of energy. (Sade, 1991 : 661)

Sade's libertine-philosophers have much to say on the status of women in society :

Monsieur Dubourg asks,

> what does the virtue of women profit us ! It is their wantonness which serves and amuses us; but their chastity could not interest us less. (Sade, 1991 : 470)

And Roland remarks about women :

> It must not be supposed that it is a woman's beauty which best stirs a libertines mind, it is rather the species of crime that the law has associated with possession of her. (Sade, 1991 : 680)

These comments, which assume the weakness of women, should not be taken too literally, since Sade offers his readers two pertinent examples of women who do not conform to sexist stereo-typing, namely, Juliette and Dubois. Both women consciously eschew virtue in favour of vice as a means of achieving their desires, both sexual and financial. Sade gives the reader a lengthy account of Juliette's rise to social and economic power, (Sade, 1991 : 458-468) a journey punctuated by murder, prostitution and extreme vice. Sade asserts that Juliette knowingly chooses vice as guide : "perverted was what she desired to be" (Sade, 1991 : 463) and he calls her "clever creature". (Sade, 1991 : 464) Similarly, Dubois chooses a life of crime and evinces the behaviour prevalent amongst Sade's male libertines. Justine tells the reader :

> I felt in need of Dubois' support and wanted to pass the night by her side; but it seemed she had planned to employ it otherwise than protecting my virtue from the attacks I dreaded; three of the thieves surrounded her and before my very eyes the abominable creature gave herself to all three simultaneously. (Sade, 1991 : 486)

Angela Carter offers the following view, which aids in our understanding of Sade's approach to women and sex :

> Pornographers are the enemies of women only because our contemporary ideology of pornography does not encompass the possibility of change, as if we were the slaves of history and not its makers, as if sexual relations were not necessarily an expression of social relations, as if sex itself were an external fact, one as immutable as the weather, creating human practice but never a part of it. (Carter, 1978 : 3;4)

Carter also finds justification for the assertion that women *per se* are not always seen as "weak" in Sadean terms. She acknowledges Sade's portrayal of certain women as she-predators rather than prey. She contends :

> Sade's heroine's, those who become libertines, accept damnation, by which I mean this exile from human life, as a necessary fact of life. This is the nature of the libertine. They model themselves upon libertine men, though libertinage is a condition that all the sexes may aspire to. (Carter, 1978 : 25)

In many ways, Justine, in Carter's terms, is Sade's anti-heroine. She is Judeo-Christian morality manifest in a world governed by natural, innate brutality. Sade offers Justine up to his audience as an example of the futility of the moral status-quo. At every turn, she is exhorted by the host of libertine-philosophers to adapt to the "natural" world, but she resists, to the detriment of her financial and physical well-being. Indeed, her exposure to the realities of the dark side of human nature expose a masochism of sorts, a state Sade believes that religion and the law forces its subjects to endure, with no tangible benefits to themselves.

The conflation of the male and female persona, to create a unisexual, androgynous

character is evident in all three texts under discussion. In Death in Venice there is Tadzio and in Child of Pleasure there is Bébé Silva. In Justine, while many of the characters are portrayed as blurring the boundaries between the stereo-typical categorisation of gender roles, Monsieur de Bressac presents the most obvious depiction of the androgyne. Curiously, but in a strikingly disingenious manner, he is described by Sade, through Justine's eyes, as "defective" because of his effeminate appearance

> If there were some defects in his figure or his features, it was because they had a rather too pronounced tendency towards that nonchalance, that softness which properly belongs only to women, it seemed that, in lending him the attributes of the feminine sex, Nature had introduced its tastes into him as well (Sade, 1991 : 510)

Justine, in the role of voyeur, watches M. De Bressac engage in homosexual relations with a man-servant. She gives a lengthy, detailed account of their activities and describes Bressac's role in the encounter :

> The young lord was constantly the woman and although there was about him what suggested the possibility he could have acted the man in his turn, he had not for one instant even the appearance of wishing to (Sade, 1991 : 505)

Clearly, for Sade, for whom sodomy was a prized form of erotic stimulation[1], the androgyne necessarily represented the ideal human persona. The androgynous character is uniquely positioned between the polarities of male and female sexuality with an *entrée* into both male and female worlds of eroticism. Indeed, M. De Bressac

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[1] In a discussion of the causes of anal fixation as it related to Sade, Maurice Lever points to corporal punishment meted out to Sade as possible reason for his preoccupation with sodomy : "Anal erotic sexuality often originates in this type of experience, and Sade's work is of course full of it." (Lever, 1993 : 62)

is the only "male" in the novel for whom Justine feels any passion. After his final betrayal of her, Justine says of him : "him for whom I once would have sacrificed my life, never once does he deign to show me the least hint of sympathy." (Sade, 1991 : 529)

Like Aschenbach in Death of Venice, Justine worships the androgyne, the unattainable character in which art and nature have conspired to create a new sexual reality - neither completely male nor completely female. In many ways, the eliding of gender roles to create a new sexual reality is symptomatic of all three authors' attempts to create an entirely new moral code to Western civilisation's adherence to the moral laws meted out by the guardians of Judeo-Christian morality.

Through the virtuous protagonist of the novel, Sade points out that the predatory libertine/criminal not only escapes retribution from an indifferent natural environment, but is rewarded by society's structures despite his failure to abide by its laws. Justine says of Rodin's promotion to high office :

> May he prosper, the villain, I muttered to myself, may he be so whilst Providence so wills it; and thou, unhappy creature, suffer, suffer uncomplainingly, since it is decreed that tribulations and pain must be Virtue's frightful share; no matter, I shall never lose my taste for it". (Sade, 1991 : 654)

Rene Girard contends that :

> For cynical moralists, and in a different way for Nietzsche, all altruism, every identification with weakness and impotence, results from

masochism. (Girard, 1984 : 189)

Sade falls into this category of "cynical moralists", although it would be stretching a point to call him a moralist of any sort, since he consistently proposes an amoral society, one he believes is imposed on humans by nature.

Girard makes the connection between religion and masochism and points out that the basis for this state-of-being is to elevate the oppressed (masochists) over the oppressors (sadists) which inadvertently points to the masochist desire to wrest control from the sadist, even though this action is contrary to the avowed victim-status of the masochist, in this case, Justine. He argues :

> All the values of Christian morality can be found in masochism but their hierarchy is inverted. Compassion is never a principle but a result. The principle is hatred of the triumphant wicked. Good is loved in order that Evil be hated more. The oppressed are defended for the sake of overwhelming the oppressors. (Girard, 1984 : 189)

Justine's virtuous conduct is fuelled by a belief in the culturally accepted tenets of goodness advocated by Christian religious philosophy. This, despite her observation that, "Providence [...] wished to convince me that prosperity belongs to Crime only and indigence to Virtue". (Sade, 1991 : 686)

It is not only Providence which seeks to sway Justine's moral convictions, but Sade who seeks to alert the reader to what he overtly believes is an illogical adherence to Judeo-Christian principles in the face of a plethora of evidence to the contrary. We are given an enigmatic clue as to the validity of this contention in the naming of

Justine. Shortly into the novel, Justine relates a conversation with Monsieur du Harpin in which she says, ""Thérèse", this miser said to me (such was the name I had taken in order to hide my own)". (Sade, 1991 : 475)

This short passage allows Sade to show that Justine (spokesperson for religious morality in Justine) is not above what at best could be called concealment, at worst, lying. It also sheds light on her attitude to herself. She chooses the name, Thérèse, which immediately alerts the reader to the possibility of an intertextual association between Justine's choice of name for herself and two famous Christian saints of the same name; Teresa of Avila and Thérèse of Lisieux. In a work appropriately entitled, The Art of Ecstasy, Petersson says of Teresa of Avila :

> many have taken her character to be completely erotic and her spiritual passion to be sexual sublimation. Indeed she is erotic. (Petersson, 1970 : 38,39)

Gian Lorenzo Bernini' s sculpture of Teresa depicts an angelic figure about to spear Teresa while she writhes in (spiritual?) Ecstasy[2]. This is further allusion to the character of Justine. The parallel is obvious; Teresa is penetrated by an "agent of God" (i.e. the angelic figure with a spear in the painting) in a consummation of religious desire, while Justine is similarly penetrated, firstly by a host of

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[2] Rudolf Wittkower describes the sculpture : "In the sculptured group Bernini represented the most important - the canonical - vision of the Carmelite Saint corresponding exactly with her own account of it. She described how the angel pierced her heart repeatedly with a flaming golden arrow [...] The seraph, a figure of heavenly beauty, is about to pierce the heart of the Saint with a fiery arrow of love and thus affect her mystical union with Christ, the heavenly bridegroom. The saint is swooning in an ecstatic trance her limbs hang inert and numb, her head has sunk back, her eyes are half closed and the mouth opens in an almost audible moan" (Wittkower, 1981 : 25)

unscrupulous libertines and then in one final moment, by a bolt of lightning, sent by heaven, and in Sade's scheme as an active and eloquent statement from nature.

Sade's parallel of the characters is enhanced by the earthy, even gory nature of Teresa's visions. Petersson relates :

> In another vision, on a Palm Sunday, it appears that she could not receive the host because she felt Christ's blood overflowing her mouth and pouring down the front of her habit. (Petersson, 1970 : 38)

This macabre vision might have been written by Sade, and illustrates the appropriateness of Justine's renaming of herself. In an ingenious stroke, Sade alerts the reader to what he believes is the hypocrisy of Christianity in the personage of Thèrèse.

The ending of the novel is the subject of intense speculation. Justine is rescued by Juliette and is taken to a luxurious retreat where she is given the utmost care during her convalescence. Sade writes that " Laughter, for so many years banished from her lips, reappeared under the wings of Pleasure". (Sade, 1991 : 740) This state of affairs is short-lived, and curiously, Justine, free of oppression and violation succumbs to an overwhelming melancholy :

> and then, all of a sudden, her humour altered, and 'twas impossible to ferret out the cause. She became sombre, uneasy, troubled, was given to dreaming, sometimes she burst into weeping before her friends, and was not herself able to explain what was the subject of her woe. " I was not born for such felicity [...] "tis impossible it last much longer. (Sade, 1991 : 741)

Justine might be ignorant as to why she cannot find happiness in comfort, surrounded by caring persons, but the reader is given ample evidence of the cause. Justine has clung to certain principles of morality, which saw her through the abuse that was meted out against her. These principles are what have doomed her to a life of masochism. Angela Carter elucidates the point :

> These self-consciously blameless ones suffer and suffer until it becomes second nature; Justine marks the start of a kind of self-regarding female masochism, a woman with no place in the world, no status, the core of whose resistance has been eaten away by self-pity. (Carter, 1978 : 57)

Essentially, Justine has accustomed herself to a life of martyrdom and servility. This is the life she has lived[3] and it is the life she knows. Robbed of victim-status she is deprived of her cause, the cause of virtue which has fuelled and sustained her, allowing her to participate in a libertine-lifestyle without the need for guilt about her activities, since she is always forced to participate. What is left is death, because the life she knows has gone. Janet Todd also notes the relationship between Justine and Christianity in a slightly different way. She writes :

> The religious emblem of Mary at the feet of Christ, so cherished by Hanway, gives way here to the ravishing figure of Sade's Justine, prostrate before the rampant male. (Todd, 1993 : 70)

Justine can no longer play the figure of prostration and allows melancholy to overwhelm her. The degradation of Justine, in which every decadent sexual

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[3] Hence her adoption of the Christian martyr, Teresa's name

practice conceivable is enacted with her as accomplice[4] , has come full circle.

Earlier, Clèment had said to her :

> Extraordinary, you declare that things decayed, noisome, and filthy are able to produce upon our senses the irritation essential to precipitate their complete delirium [...] it would be better to realise, Thèrèse, that objects have no value for us save that which our imagination imparts to them; it is therefore very possible, bearing this constant truth well in mind, that not only the most curious but even the vilest and most appalling things may affect us very appreciably. (Sade, 1991 : 599)

Unconsciously and inadvertently, Justine has learned this lesson; Steeped in a decadent, libertine environment, through constant, unremitting *repetition*, Justine, and indeed, the reader has been acclimatised to a world where the ultimate parallax has been achieved : Vice is now Virtue and Virtue is now Vice. "Decadence-as-a-Philosophy" has replaced Religious "Morality-as-a-Philosophy".

Gilbert Lely adds : "but nature is to claim Justine as a victim". (Lely, 1961 : 401) Certainly, the final blow by the phallo-centric lightning symbol is nature's final lesson to Justine. It is the ultimate penetration and therefore the most potent lesson from Sade : Nature instills in humankind the capacity for extreme decadence in terms of sexual behaviour, and neither nature nor the libertine will give way to Virtue, regardless of the pressure it brings to bear.

Morality, the focus of much of Sade's questioning in Justine, is similarly highlighted in Death in Venice. Thomas Mann, through his portrayal of the character, Gustav

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[4] Albeit that she is consistently portrayed in the role of innocent victim : " Nature in turn enters madness, and there, in an instant, but for an instant only, restores her omnipotence. The storm that is unleashed, the lightning that strikes and consumes Justine, is Nature become criminal subjectivity". (Foucault, 1965 : 284)

von Aschenbach, investigates the role of the artist within the parameters of Judeo-Christian morality. Mann will argue that the artist, as mediator between art and nature, occupies a position unique in society, a position that in his view, should not be subjected to the morality imposed on the average citizen in a society governed by the tenets of Judeo-Christianity. Mann contends that art cannot be conceived and orchestrated within the restraints of Western theology - inspired morality. Joseph Gerard Brennan remarks :

> The finished product of art may be chaste and beautiful; yet how often does it have its origin in darkness and the forbidden. Morality, regarded in one light, is asceticism and self control; in another, it is yielding to adventure and the harmful. (Brennan, 1942 : 177,8)

This sentiment, expressed in relation to Thomas Mann, points directly at the forces at play in Death in Venice. Gustav von Aschenbach, the combination of staid, upright burgher and bohemian artist learns this lesson when he produces his near-perfect work while watching Tadzio on the beach. According to Joseph Brennan's analysis, Aschenbach has swung from the "morality of self-control" to the "morality of the harmful". In normal circumstances, this distinction carries no weight, since morality, as it is defined by Judeo-Christianity is generally characterised by ascetism and self-control. However, there is ample evidence to suggest that Thomas Mann believes the artist has a specialised role in society which circumnavigates traditional notions of morality. Roy Pascal writes :

> In many of the early stories Mann insists like Nietzsche in The Will to Power, on the affinity between the artist and the charlatan and criminal. (Pascal, 1956 : 261)

Essentially, the artist, for Mann, exists outside of the moral boundaries which govern

the society in which the artist lives. This is necessarily so, since if he is bound by common law then his work cannot make objective observations on that society. The artist needs a certain amount of isolation from his fellow-beings in order to expose the nature of the society of which he is a part. For the artist to "see" society, he must be free of the morality which is imposed on the populace, in order that his intellect may prosper, free of restraint[5]. Abandonment to all forces, good and evil, is essential to the artist because human reality is governed by both polarities and to be steeped in only one facet of life is to ignore half of existence, a fact which is illustrated by the gradual degradation of Aschenbach's spirit. Ignoring the under-currents of life, he is overwhelmed by the dark forces he encounters on his sojourn to Venice.

Aschenbach leaves Germany with a restlessness, whose cause he cannot place. The reader, though, is given considerable evidence as to the cause of his unease. He is described by "a nice observer" :

> "Aschenbach has always lived like this" - here the speaker closed the fingers of his left hand to a fist - "never like this" - and he let his open hand hang relaxed from the back of his chair. (Mann, 1971 : 9)

This rigidity of attitude is sharply contrasted with another view of Aschenbach, after he has begun to surrender self-control and to offer himself up to the abandonment of his restricting self-control in favour of the senses :

> and with both hands, hanging limp over the chair-arms, he described a

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[5] This point is at play in all three texts, where the artist (Aschenbach and Sperelli) and the libertine artists in Sade's Justine, demand intellectual and moral freedom in order to enact their "natural" instincts as part of the creative process.

> slow motion, palms outward, a lifting and turning movement, as though to indicate a wide embrace. (Mann, 1971 : 42)

The latter description of Aschenbach had been predicted earlier. The elderly dandy on board the boat to Venice who "leered: and whose tongue kept seeking the corner of his mouth, in a suggestive motion" (Mann, 1971 : 20) presents a portrait of Aschenbach in the final stages of his "degradation". Like the ageing dandy, Aschebach will resort to face-paint, hair-dye and eye-catching clothes in an effort to deny the ageing process and to appear more favourable to the object of his new-found desire, Tadzio. T.J. Reed notes that Dionysus was the god of regeneration, (Reed, 1996 : 406) so it is unsurprising that Aschenbach, under his spell, seeks to "renew" his appearance inasmuch as the outer reality is mirrored by an internal metamorphosis of intellectual activity.

Reed goes on to ask why the object of Aschenbach's desire should be Tadzio, rather than a woman. His reply is that "only male beauty could so insidiously transform cool appreciation into passion" (Reed, 1996 : 148). This analysis is not given reasonable justification. A more plausible explanation is that for the total metamorphosis of Aschenbach's view of reality to be effected, the object of his desire must be totally at odds with the nature of his previous existence and must be the antithesis of everything he has experienced[6]. Aschenbach, we recall, was briefly married and had a daughter[7]. Marin, early in the novel, establishes the fact

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[6] Elaine Showalter argues that "'Decadence was also a *fin-de-siècle* euphemism for homosexuality" (Showalter, 1991 : 171)

[7] "He married young, the daughter of a university family, but after a brief term of wedded happiness his wife had died" (Mann, 1971 : 15)

of Aschenbach's heterosexuality in order to increase the contrast between his earlier existence and his gradual decline into unchartered waters. In addition, Aschenbach's fixation with a young boy alludes to the ancient Greek practice of homo-eroticism, a practice which was deemed culturally and socially moral. The reader is alerted to the differences in perception between pagan and Judeo-Christianity morality - a theme which pervades the work. The choice of Tadzio as love-object, moreover, lends an aura of decadence to the text in a way which could not be possible if Tadzio had been female[8]. Without the homo-erotic element, the *novella* would have inadequately expressed Aschenbach's "degradation" brought on by the Dionysian, pagan influence. T.E. Apter touches on this point. He claims that Aschenbach, "Loves the boy for what he represents, and the drama of his passion is a drama of his intellect's abnegation and degradation." (Apter, 1978 : 132)

A further disturbing element inherent in the relationship between Aschenbach and Tadzio is an oblique reference to an incestuous facet of the desire of Aschenbach for Tadzio. Mann, in his description of Aschenbach's family remarks that Aschenbach had no son. (Mann, 1971 : 15) Later, we hear that Aschenbach's "heart was stirred, it felt a father's kindness"[9] (Mann, 1971 : 35). Naturally, Mann

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[8] Elaine Showalter argues that "women reappear as objects of value in decadent writing only when they are desexualised through maternity or thoroughly aestheticized, stylized, and turned into icons or fetishes" (Showalter, 1991 : 170) This is certainly true of Death in Venice where the women in the novel, namely Tadzio's mother, sisters and governess are presented in a thoroughly asexual manner. Similarly, the women in D'Annunzio's Child of Pleasure are all presented as "aestheticized, stylized and turned into icons or fetishes." This negation of women's innate and natural essence is also at play in Justine, with the possible exception of the characters Dubois and Juliette who are apportioned strong "male" characteristics.

[9] That a "father's kindness" turns into erotic appreciation is the disquietening aspect of Aschenbach's regard for Tadzio, and more forcefully renders the relationship illicit and decadent by adding an incestuous innuendo.

sought to show that Aschenbach in many ways is reliving his own childhood through the contemplation of Tadzio's youth, this time round though, with a relaxation of attitude. Nevertheless, the references to a filial attraction serve to disturb. It is also significant that if Aschebach is indeed reliving lost youth through Tadzio, one of the scenes Mann presents is of an embrace between Jaschiu and Tadzio :

> the two walked along the beach, with their arms round each other's waists, and once the lad Jaschiu gave Adgio a kiss. (Mann, 1971 : 34)

This display of innocent homo-eroticism, in many ways is concrete illustration of Aschenbach's desires[10]. Aschenbach's observation of the affection between Jaschui and Tadzio is representative of the role Aschenbach will enact as voyeur[11]. His "beloved" Tadzio remains aloof in that there is never any physical contact between the youth and the man. A phallic allusion to the events which follow in the *novella* is given early on. The narrator declares that for Aschenbach "it seemed part of common sense not to span the bow too far" (Mann, 1971 : 7). This comment refers overtly to Aschenbach's desire for adventure with his characteristic constraint, but also serves to highlight the platonic manifestations of Aschenbach's desire. Are we to believe that it is restraint which prevents physical contact between Aschenbach and Tadzio? Certainly, Aschenbach's life has been characterised by self-control, but this is discarded by him during the course of the *novella*. Mann tell us :

> an ignoble caution made him keep his eyes in leash. For in the rear of the

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[10] The connection between the outer, worldly reality and Aschenbach's internal state of being will be given elaboration in Chapter Four.

[11] This behaviour is reminiscent of Justine's status as voyeur where she watches the object of her affections, M. de Bressac, engage in homosexual intercourse with a man-servant. (Sade, 1991 : 505)

> terrace sat Tadzio's mother and governess; and matters had gone so far that he feared to make himself conspicuous. Several times on the beach, in the hotel lobby, on the Piazza, he had seen, with a stealing numbness, that they called Tadzio away from his neighbourhood. (Mann, 1971 : 63)

There is no doubt that his caution is ignored and that restraint is imposed on him by external, rather than internal considerations. Nevertheless, Aschenbach is largely undeterred. We are told that eventually Aschenbach "no longer avoided men's eyes nor cared whether he exposed himself to suspicion" (Mann, 1971 : 72). Earlier, he had paused by his beloved's chamber door [...] and remained there long, in utter drunkenness[12], powerless to tear himself away, blind to the danger of being caught in so mad an attitude" (Mann, 1971 : 59).

Self-constraint is rejected in favour of sensual delight[13]. Sublimated passion, under Dionysian influence overwhelms the unprepared, but willing Aschenbach. His being, in entirety, is suffused with passion for Tadzio. Dionysian madness overtakes Aschenbach :

> His nerves drank in thirstily the unlovely sounds, the vulgar and sentimental tunes, for passion paralyses good taste and makes its victim accept with rapture what a man in his senses would either laugh at or turn from with disgust. (Mann, 1971 : 62)

Like Sade's libertines, Aschenbach is seduced by the darker forces of life. The "vulgar" and "unlovely" are rendered aesthetic to an imagination demented by

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[12] Dionysus is also known as the god of wine and drunken revelry.

[13] In all three texts, self-constraint is a sign of the weaker elements of society. The *Other* is subject to the *Self*, a principle most clearly illustrated in Justice and to a lesser degree in Child of Pleasure.

passion. Unlike Sade's anti-heroes, though, Aschenbach does not indulge his lustful imaginings to their fullest degree, as we have seen. He is still governed by the norms of society, his culturally imposed morality. However, his dreams, that is, his subconscious reality enacts out his homo-erotic fantasy. The dream describes a pagan "orgy of promiscuous embraces" (Mann, 1971 : 72) which centres around the personage of Tadzio : "And one and all the mad rout yelled that cry, composed of soft consonants with a long-drawn *u*-sound at the end[14] " (Mann, 1971 : 71). Aschenbach's longing for the physical consummation of his passion for Tadzio assumes a symbolic reality in his dream. What he cannot contemplate while awake, he revels in while asleep :

> His senses reeled in the steam of panting bodies [...] a blind rage seized him, a whirling lust, he craved with all his soul to join the ring that formed about the obscene symbol of the godhead [...] and in his very soul he tasted the bestial degradation of his fall. (Mann, 1971 : 72)

Mann, in this description, attributes Aschenbach's behaviour to instincts instilled by nature[15], at the expense of his intellect. Aschenbach's Apolline behaviour before embarking for Venice is subjugated by the powerful Dionysian wantonness which possesses him after encountering Tadzio.

Indeed, Aschenbach is described as "lost to shame" (Mann, 1971 : 73) and it appears for him that "the moral law were fallen in ruins and only the monstrous and

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[14] This reference to Tadzio's name and the way Aschenbach initially hears its musical sound is discussed in Chapter Two.

[15] This is made clear by the word, "bestial", referring to what Mann sees as the feral-like nature of Aschenbach's behaviour, based as it is on dark instinctual impulse instilled by nature.

perverse held out a hope" (Mann, 1971 : 73). Brennan has the following analysis to offer regarding Mann's attitude to the morality :

> The artist is not "immoral" but he has his own peculiar morality. This lies in abandonment, in surrender to experience, in yielding to the forbidden, even if it lead him to destruction. (Brennan, 1942 : 118)

This assessment is particular to Aschenbach with regard to his "extra-morality". Moreover, Brennan alludes to the importance of taboo in the artist's experience. In the Wordsworth Dictionary of Obscenity and Taboo, James McDonald says of taboo words : "words become taboo by tacit common consent. If everyone accepts that a certain word should be regarded as beyond the pale, then it is, if we all agree that the word *tea-pot* were obscene, then it would be.' (McDonald, 1988 : vi) This process is mirrored when dealing with taboo behaviour : if certain actions are considered taboo by the majority who are influenced by the teachings of Western religious morality, then they *are* taboo. Sade, D'Annunzio and Mann question society's ready acceptance of what constitutes taboo, with all three arguing for the artist's right to be exempt from castigation for courting what is considered taboo. Brennan paraphrases Mann's insistence that the artist be exposed to the taboo and the forbidden in order to see more clearly the society in which he lives, and for whom art is created.

Tadzio, being the same sex as Aschenbach, represents the ultimate site of the forbidden for the staid Aschenbach. His desire for the sensual appreciation of beauty takes on extreme parameters since he has denied himself all sensually stimulating experience. The shocking nature of Aschenbach's homo-erotic, paedo-

centric desire is rendered more so by the coquetry of Tadzio. The youth is increasingly conscious of the lustful homage paid him by Aschenbach. Tadzio,

> modestly cast down his eyes before the grey-haired man of the lofty brows - only to lift them again in that sweet way he had and direct his full soft gaze upon Aschenbach's face. (Mann, 1971 : 39)

This passage describes the first time that Tadzio acknowledges Aschenbach's interest in him. This awareness on the part of Tadzio becomes ever more intense during the progression of the *novella* and Aschenbach's decline into decadent behaviour. We are told that after a while,

> some sort of relationship and acquaintainship was perforce set up between Aschenbach and the youthful Tadzio; it was with a thrill of joy the older man perceived that the lad was not entirely unresponsive to all the tender notice lavished on him. (Mann, 1971 : 53)

Tadzio, aware of Aschenbach's interest, begins to tease and titillate and makes a point of walking close by Aschenbach, "sometimes so unnecessarily close as almost to graze his table or chair". (Mann, 1971 : 53) If the reader is still in doubt as to the enticing nature of Tadzio's behaviour, Mann convinces :

> Tadzio smiled. Smiled at Aschenbach, unabashed and friendly, a speaking, winning captivating smile, with slowly parting lips [...] with a mingling of coquetry and curiosity. (Mann, 1971 : 54)

Beardless and inexperienced, Tadzio nevertheless assumes the role of an androgynous *femme fatale*. Mircea Eliade argues that ,

> The androgyne is understood by decadent writers simply as a hermaphrodite in whom both sexes exist anatomically and physiologically. Their subject is [...] a self-styled sensual perfection [...]. This idea of the hermaphrodite has probably been encouraged by

the study of certain ancient sculptures. (Eliade, 1965 : 100)

These comments adequately describe Tadzio, although the reference does not refer to him directly. Apart from the references to Tadzio's resemblance to the purity of Greek sculpture, there is the matter of the Socratic dialogue in which Plato "reproduces" the discourse between Phaedrus (the youth) and Socrates (the ageing philosopher) on beauty. The parallels between Aschenbach and Socrates and Tadzio and Phaedrus have previously been noted in this study. Socrates makes reference to the role of the artist and the artist's morality, comments directly applicable to Aschenbach ;

> what good can an artist be as a teacher, when from his birth up he is headed direct from the pit [...] preoccupation with form lead to intoxication and desire [...] us who are poets - who by our natures are prone not to excellence but to excess. (Mann, 1971 : 76,77)

Implicit in these assertions is the belief shared by Mann that the artist is not bound by the accepted morality of Western society. Aschenbach the artist is not isolated in his worship and awe of beauty as it is represented and manifest in Tadzio. Mann declares : "nature herself shivers with ecstacy when the mind bows down in homage before beauty" (Mann, 1971 : 48). Beauty, then, mediates (via the artist) between nature and art. In this case, Tadzio symbolises the intersection of the Apolline and Dionysian elements necessary for perfection in art. Mann, however, is not content with traditional notions of perfection manifest in physical beauty. Eliade contends :

> As in all the spiritual crises of Europe, here once again we meet the *degradation of the symbol*. When the mind is no longer capable of perceiving the metaphysical significance of a symbol, it is understood at levels which

become increasingly coarse[16]. (Eliade, 1965 : 100)

These are precisely the issues at play in Death in Venice. Beauty takes on a dangerous[17], sensually decadent facet[18]. This is made clear by the imperfection of Tadzio's teeth denoting ill-health (Mann, 1971 : 36); by the inappropriate nature of Tadzio's coquetry and his final summoning of Aschenbach to his grave. Beauty, in Death in Venice, is the tantalising seducer which claims Aschenbach as victim. Unable to resist the charms of Tadzio, Dionysus incarnate, the Apolline-steeped Aschenbach rushes headlong to his grave, knowingly and willingly since the denial of the sensual in his life has led to a total immersion in the extremes of Dionysian influence. The artist dies having reached the perfection of equilibrium when he composes one final piece of master-prose in Tadzio's presence, but this excursion has so excited his senses that only death is left.

As in Justine and Death in Venice, Child of Pleasure evinces a thematic preoccupation with sexuality in a decadent form. Andrea Sperelli, like Thomas

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[16] This is a criticism often levelled at writers of Decadent literature : Stableford remarks that writers of such literature create art out of a sense of degradation, "to savour the aesthetics of descent" (Stableford, 1990 : 6) In this sense, these writers, in particular, Mann, are not incapable of "perceiving the metaphysical significance of the symbol" as contended by Eliade. Rather they embrace this degradation, in the process rendering it art, albeit art in which traditional notions of art and aesthetics are eschewed.

[17] This beauty is so dangerous that not only are Aschenbach's senses fuddled in the presence of Tadzio, but he is so bewitched that his concern for his health is ignored, resulting in his untimely demise.

[18] Rita Felski argues : " The *fin-de-siècle* preoccupation with beauty and appearance made it possible to eroticize masculinity by transforming it into spectacle in previously unavailable ways. The male body was repositioned as a source of visual pleasure and an object of desire at the same time as it was being revealed as a highly coded and artificial construct." (Felski, 1995 : 103)

Mann's Gustav von Aschenbach has lived his life in the service of art. But here the similarity ends. Aschenbach had paid homage to the Apolline facet of artistic creation[19] at the expense of the Dionysian, while Sperelli had steeped his life in the Dionysian sphere. Both characters will pay dearly for their lop-sided views of reality.

Indeed, Child of Pleasure is an exercise which explores a life shaped by and devoted to a decadent, Dionysian existence. The novel deals with a society which eschews Judeo-Christian morality in favour of an amoral, elitist way of life. Extravagance is the by-word for Sperelli's circle of privileged individuals who frequent the salons of the intellectually and financially superior upper-classes. This band of dandys and dilettantes spend their days shopping for precious artefacts from the estates of the deceased and the bankrupt, lending a predatory tone to their existence. Child of Pleasure presents the reader with a glimpse of the lives led by the extremely wealthy and reveals an emptiness, a moral bereavement brought on by an excess of leisure and financial and social power. *Ennui* suffuses the lives of these characters, a boredom and world-weariness which prompts their society to search for ever-new and necessarily decadent pastimes with which to mark the passage of their lives.

Sperelli stands as the extreme example of his social circle. His title, financial means and social adeptness place him favourably as an archetype of the society in which he is positioned. As a poet and engraver as well as a connoisseur of art, Sperelli in

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[19] According to the Nietzschean model in The Birth of Tragedy

many ways resembles the "Renaissance-man" or "Übermensch". However, this is an illusory comparison, since although Sperelli has been given the finest education, his production is sparse. He devotes much of his time to the pursuit of women and other frivolous pastimes at the expense of his own artistic talent. D'Annunzio recounts a conversation between Andrea and three friends in which the [illegible]ance of moral consideration of the society with which the reader is presented is exposed :

> the conversation of the four young men within these walls, hung with the voluptuous scenes of the Bacchic[20] tapestries, it might well have formed the *breviarium arcanum* of the upper-class corruption at the end of the nineteenth-century. (D'Annunzio, 1991 : 181)

Clearly, Dionysian influence pervades the novel and the society which it represents. Untempted, as it is, by Apolline impulse, this society is fertile ground, breeding progeny which isolates itself against the realities of the common existence of others.

The women in the novel are little different from the men. Donna Francesca tells of the May Bazaar :

> For five louis you might have eaten fruit out of which I had the first bite and have drunk champagne out of the hollow of Elena's hand for five more. (D'Annunzio, 1991 : 12)

This decadent behaviour resembles that of sophisticated courtesans, rather than that of society-ladies and shows that moral degradation has been elevated to the stature of artistic endeavour. When men and women are shown together in a social

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[20] Bacchus was the Roman equivalent of the Greek god, Dionysus. The preference for the name "Bacchus" rather than "Dionysus" is in keeping with D'Annunzio's belief in the superiority of the Italian race over others.

setting, this behaviour, evinced separately in all-male or all-female groups is similarly present and translates into sexual tension :

> The slightly erotic excitement, which is apt to take hold upon the spirits at the end of a dinner graced by fair women and flowers, betrayed itself in the tone of the conversations. (D'Annunzio, 1991 : 13)

Even those who are not necessarily part of this decadent inner-circle hover as gossip-mongers on the peripheries. D'Annunzio states :

> in every society there are certain persons who make it their business in life to ferret out and follow up the traces of a love-affair with an assiduity only to be equalled by the hunter of rare game. (D'Annunzio, 1991 : 67)

The novel is pervaded by an extreme sexual tension. Although we are never presented with the explicit details of the sexual antics of the book's characters, we are constantly made aware of the sexual under-tones which lie at the root of this society's definition of morality and the impulses which govern the characters' behaviour. Charles Klopp points out that Child of Pleasure

> is principally an examination of pleasure, especially of a sensual and sexual sort [...] D'Annunzio [...] is concerned instead with the refined eroticism of city dwellers for whom sex is not just one more powerful emotion like hunger, greed, or rage, but a potentially all-consuming passion that often seems to constitute their sole reason for living[21]. (D'Annunzio, 1991 : 37)

There is little doubt that sexual relationships, like all other activities in the novel, are elevated to the plane of art. Sex, as a basic instinct instilled by nature for the

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[21] Erich Fromm offers an explanation for such behaviour : "The advocates of [sexual immorality] try, as far as I can see, only to avoid the problem of their difficulties in loving by curing boredom with ever new stimuli" (Fromm, 1980 : 54)

expres: purpose of procreation is subverted in the novel[22]. Here, we see courtship and titillation as artistic pursuit with the greatest satisfaction from sexual relationships arising from the degree of artistic energy expended in the predatory-like hounding of the object of sexual desire. Should the pursuit be free of obstacle, then the pleasure of the sexual encounter is diminished. The abundance of leisure-time dictates that the consummation of desire should be prolonged and delayed in order that this society, where all manner of pleasure is readily available, may derive maximum gratification from the resultant tension. Unavailability is prized, both in the attainment of the love-object and in the acquiring of the rare *objet d'art*. For Sperelli, Elena and Maria, in different ways, represent the unattainable and describe the attraction which Andrea feels for both.

Valeria Finucci presents a convincing case which sees Maria cast in the novel as the Virgin Mary. She argues that :

> the virginal heroine was also a standard feature of popular literature, a character ubiquitously present in novels to please the reader's mores and to counterbalance the then modish *femme fatale*. (Finucci, 1985 : 23)

The counterfoil for Mary is traditionally Eve, who in this case is the novel's *femme fatale*, Elena. The naming of the two women provides substantiation for Finucci's assertions : "Elena" closely resembles "*Eva*" while "Maria" is the name of the "*Madonna*". To stretch the point somewhat, the same may be applied to "Andrea" which approaches "*Adamo*" or "Adam". Viewed in this way D'Annunzio appears to

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[22] As it is in Justine and Death in Venice where sex is given status above what nature's practicalities dictate.

be investigating traditional Christian interpretations of sexual morality.

Elena plays the role of predatory female. Conforming to the stereotype of the reviled biblical Eve, she is cruel and malicious and uncharacteristically of her sex, she is the one who entices Andrea in their first sexual encounter. Tellingly, this seduction takes place in her sick-bed, (D'Annunzio, 1991 : 49) an allusion to the "sick" nature of the union, unbound as it is by marriage and the laws of Christianity which forbid sex outside marriage. Elena is the woman with whom sexual vice is identified. We are told that Andrea,

> became aware of something excessive, almost - it might be - a touch of the courtesan [...] (she) exhaled a charm that was perhaps a trifle too Aphrodisiac [...] she was, besides, somewhat over-lavish with the visible favours of her graces and the air she breathed was continually surcharged with the desire she herself excited. (D'Annunzio, 1991 : 14)

Elena is cruel to her Japanese admirer (D'Annunzio, 1991 : 10); she is ardently competitive (D'Annunzio, 1991 : 17); she exudes a "hardness" and a "contemptuousness" (D'Annunzio, 1991 : 31). She is vain (D'Annunzio, 1991 : 52,220) and she is described as "an unbalanced mind in a sensually inclined body" (D'Annunzio, 1991 : 214). Importantly, Elena emulates the cruelty of nature. D'Annunzio writes :

> she had a rather cruel habit of pulling all the flowers to pieces and scattering them over the carpet at the end of each of her visits [...] and smile in the midst of the devastation she had wrought. (D'Annunzio, 1991 : 190)

Surprisingly, this destructive behaviour is similarly seen in Delfina, Maria's child

"The mischievous child had stripped half the wood of fruit". (D'Annunzio, 1991 : 139) If the reader is still in doubt as to Elena's reference to Eve, D'Annunzio describes Elena as, " slowly drawing through her fingers the long ends of her boa [...] the thought of the boa evoked the image of Donna Maria's coils[23]." (D'Annunzio, 1991 : 243,246)

The boa obliquely referring to the serpent in the garden of Eden enhances Elena's relationship to Eve. The phallic associations are also explicit. The characterisation of Elena is clearly stereotypical without much depth. We are offered little by way of redeeming factors in which we may mitigate her behaviour. She is the worst of women, the woman who takes advantage of men by virtue of her beauty and stylised, artistic grace. She is the strong Amazon who betrays her own sex and challenges the authority of men and she is the Whore, who uses her considerable sensual charms to wreak havoc on an unsuspecting male population. Andrea is aware, early on, of Elena's dark characteristics. This is shown by the following scene:

> "What a diabolical flower!" said Elena Muti [...] examining the orchid which seemed all blood-stained and deformed "[...] "A symbolical flower in your hands", murmured Andrea. (D'Annunzio, 1991 : 7,8)

However, Andrea and Elena "show much affinity between their two natures" (D'Annunzio, 1991 : 215) and as we are informed, "Ideally he felt himself attracted by those courtesans of the sixteenth-century" (D'Annunzio, 1991 : 28). Since his

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[23] Interestingly, Maria, symbol of virtue of women in the novel, has hair which reminds the reader of the snake in Eden and imbues her portrayal with a sense of wickedness.

education[24] had destroyed his moral force, (D'Annunzio, 1991 : 24) Elena Muti is in many ways his moral counterpart. She is a mirror-image of the vice-ridden component of his nature.

Raymond Rosenthal comments that D'Annunzio's "Fatal woman" who gathers into herself all the world's sensuality, is shown as beautiful but miserable, more her own victim than the victimizer of others, and the usual trio of death, voluptuousness, and love as a sadistic perversity seems to have been viewed at last as squalid makeshifts that do not penetrate to the core of reality. (Rosenthal, 1993 : 5) This assertion is borne out in the case of Elena, since she marries the libertine, Lord Heathfield out of convenience, an action which brings her little happiness. Heathfield is the consummate debauchee in the novel, with his passion for pornography, and this makes Elena, the "wicked" woman perfect as a mate.

On the surface of the novel's discourse, Maria's characterisation as the reincarnation of the Madonna is absolute. D'Annunzio informs his reader that in his[25] imagination, this woman with the sumptuous hair became vaguely illumined like the heroine of the same Christian legend of the childhood of a saint destined for martyrdom and future canonisation. (D'Annunzio, 1991 : 117) Yet, this vision of women as pure, moral and spiritual is undermined by the fact that the feminine note

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[24] An education administered by his father. In a general discussion on the phenomenon of literary decadence, Stableford notes : "Montesquieu's speculations about the decadence of the Romans were recapitulated and much amplified by theories of hereditary decadence which imagined aristocratic families devoted to luxury and vice becoming more effete and less sane with every generation that passed". (Stableford, 1993 : 23)

[25] That is, Andrea's imagination

in her voice "recalled *the other*"[26] (D'Annunzio, 1991 : 119); that her hair recalls the Medusa[27] because "each hair (seems) to stand apart as if permeated by and breathing air". (D'Annunzio, 1991 : 117) and despite being "so spiritual, so soulful" (D'Annunzio, 1991 : 123) she is not above adultery. She is the doting mother, but not the faithful wife.

Indeed, Maria-as-Amazon is hinted at with the comment : "in those ten days how entirely she had subjugated him". (D'Annunzio, 1991 : 124) Seemingly, D'Annunzio points to the hypocrisy of Christian morality with his characterisation of Maria. Her "subjugation" of Andrea is fleeting, but it nevertheless casts her in a similar role allotted to Elena - she is a predatory female all the same. Her artistic sensibility (D'Annunzio, 1991 : 117) and her serene spirituality (D'Annunzio, 1991 : 123) posit her, as a character, on the side of Elena, whose destructive, malicious behaviour (D'Annunzio, 1991 : 8,10) situates her in the realm of Nature. This dichotomy mirrors the conflict inherent in Sperelli's characterisation. His lethargic nihilism is somewhat countered by an intellectual appreciation of the Beautiful[28]. The failure, on the part of Andrea, to reconcile the opposing forces of his nature is what ultimately leads to his downfall. Instead of internal contemplation and reconciliation,

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[26] The other refers to Elena, female embodiment of vice

[27] Medusa was the only mortal member of the Gorgons in classical mythology. The Gorgons were "winged, serpent - haired and sharp - clawed female monsters" of which Medusa was the ugliest. At the sight of her head, the beholder was turned by fright into stone. (Meadows, 1978 : 106). Her monstrous demeanour, coupled with her ability to destroy amply illustrate the dichotomy which D'Annunzio seeks to highlight in Maria's make-up.

[28] Richard Pine assesses : "The dandy is concerned with *style* , and for the pure dandy the accomplishment of manners, the aristocracy of taste, results in sublimation" (Pine, 1988 : 12) This comment accurately describes Sperelli, in whom notions of morality are "sublimated" in favour of "style"

he externalises his energies when he attempts to create the *Ideal* woman by the conflation of Elena and Maria. Umberto Franzoni writes :

> A certain resemblance of features between these two women worsens the situation. In other words, he loves Maria only in so far as she can recall to his memory the absent Elena. (Franzoni, 1981 : 40)

Andrea, mired in the cult of the Beautiful understands, correctly, that the superimposition of Maria on Elena will produce, artistically and intellectually, the perfect woman. Actually, it will create a *real* woman, one with three-dimensional depth, since women are composed of more than just good or bad elements.

The conflation of the characters Elena and Maria is carried to absurdity in the eliding of gender characteristics with the introduction of the androgyne character, Bèbè Silva - woman masquerading as man :

> She was like a restless schoolboy, a little depraved hermaphrodite [...] she affected the manners of a dandy and spoke in a deep husky voice. (D'Annunzio, 1991 : 186)

Bèbè Silva dresses and behaves like a man. D'Annunzio tells his reader :

> Therein lay the secret of her attraction - in this imprint of vice, of depravity, of abnormity in her appearance, her attitudes and her words. (D'Annunzio, 1991 : 186)

Bèbè Silva is an anomaly in a world based on behaviour governed by strict adherence to gender-typical roles[29]. The women in the novel shop, dress and

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[29] Rita Felski remarks that "the semiotic significance of feminine traits [...] is fundamentally altered through their appropriation by the male aesthete." (Felski, 1995 : 102) Bèbè Silva's portrayal is symptomatic of this desire to alter gender stereotyping.

devise ingenious ways of rendering the ordinary and common-place, artistic. The men engage in sports and duels. Bèbè Silva is the resultant product of the merger between the two genders. She brings to our attention the depravity of both sexes and epitomises the vice-ridden principles which govern Andrea's social circle. More than this, she symbolically represents the absurdity of Andrea's attempt to reconcile the polarities that are embodied in the characterisation of Elena and Maria. Bèbè Silva also illustrates Umberto Franzoni's assertion that,

> one of the main elements of Sperelli's aestheticism is a dandy-attitude which he shows frequently in his social behaviour and particularly in his overly refined personal style. (Franzoni, 1981 : 57)

Bèbè Silva, then, marks the ludicrous behaviour of Andrea. She is the extreme externalisation of his frivolous behaviour.

That Andrea should lose both Elena and Maria is predictable, given that his actions towards both are dishonourable. Both women were his for the asking, but he is ineffectual in moral thought and action. Indeed, spoilt and indulged as he has been, Andrea cannot be satisfied with the common-place, or one woman. Barbara Spackman argues :

> Only Maria-with-the-voice-of-Elena can satisfy Sperelli's penchant for combining the "sacred" with the "profane". (Spackman, 1986 : 155)

His education, grounded in artistic creation, with the absence of moral consideration, does not allow Andrea to *feel*. His feelings cannot be articulated in a natural way, and are only available to him through artistic channels where the real world does not intrude. Richard Pine acknowledges : "dandyism is born out of ennui"

(Pine, 1988 : 12) and "The dandy acts out the comedy of manners; he conceals and refines." (Pine, 1988 : 13) This behaviour is an encapsulation of Sperelli's conduct. Too deeply immersed in a world which reveres the stylisation of an outward reality, he ignores his inner, intellectual voice which understands virtue and morality. The consequences of this neglect are a loss of spiritual awareness, inner peace, and on a practical level, the loss of both Elena and Maria.

Andrea Sperelli, like Justine and Aschenbach is doomed because of his failure to appreciate or act upon the principle that perfection of existence lies in the moderation of the forces of art and nature.

CHAPTER FOUR

SPATIALITY IN JUSTINE, CHILD OF PLEASURE AND DEATH IN VENICE

The relationship between the literary work and the conceptual notion of spatiality within the work is not a recent field of investigation. Joseph Kestner cites Aristotle's Poetics and Horace's *Ars Poetica* as examples of scholarly discourse on the subject. (Kestner in Smitten & Daghistany, 1981 : 101 - 2) Kestner also refers to the earliest work known to have consciously used what he calls "spatial secondary illusion" :

> Like the temporal arts of music, dance, and cinema, the novel has a tradition recognizing its spatial secondary illusion, extending as far back as the ekphrastic painting that generates the tale of Daphnis and Chloe. (Kestner in Smitten & Daghistany, 1989 : 105)

Daphnis and Chloe, its author tells us in the preface, is his written reflection of a painting he has seen. This process illustrates the possibilities of the conflation of the visual, fine arts with the written word, and points directly at the same technique used by D'Annunzio in Child of Pleasure : Andrea Sperelli cannot make sense of the world around him without reference to the visual arts. Most of the characters in the novel are reminiscent of paintings that Sperelli has seen.

This study will focus less fully on the device known as ekphrasis and concentrate on the landscape and environment as the outward spatial reality as it reflects on the internal state of the protagonists of Justine, Child of Pleasure and Death in Venice. In this schema of human reality, the characters, Justine, Sperelli and Aschenbach each follow a path set out by their respective authors in a similar fashion to that of Homer's Odysseus. The classical legend of Hercules's labours is also evoked, especially in the case of Justine.

One of the recurring motifs in Justine, Child of Pleasure and Death in Venice is that of

the labyrinth. Wendy ontends :

> The labyrinth has persisted from the classical through contemporary literature as image and as structural design in urban writing, highlighting the interdependence of those two entities, the city and the text. In a continuously generative project, the labyrinthine city forms the labyrinthine mind and the traces its activity leaves as texts, so that questions of mimesis become curiously involuted (Faris in Caws, 1991 : 33)

This process is clearly at play in all three texts in this study : Justine, whose (latent) masochism is mirrored by the prisons, forests and roads through France; Sperelli, whose journey is a movement from a debauched environment (the city) to a place of spiritual renewal (the country, scene of his convalescence) and back again into the clutches of debauchery; and Aschenbach whose journey to exotic, artistic but dangerous Venice, mirrors his descent from the staid burgher to the lecherous voyeur.

The locus of decadence in Justine, is not, as Susan Stewart suggests, solely confined to the architecturally enclosed space. She states : "In Sade, the enclosed site of pornography is the château or castle". (Stewart, 1988 : 124) Admittedly, *much* of the action that is deemed decadent, be it sexual or otherwise, does take place within the enclosed, artistically manufactured space. However, as we shall see, the forest and the park play host to an array of brutalities as well. Moreover, both the city and the country provide the backdrop for Sade's theatre of horrors.

Libertinage is pervasive. This is Sade's first lesson in his demarcation of specific spatial locales in which the activities of the characters enact their allotted roles. The innocent and the virtuous are set upon by the predator *wherever* they are found. They are abducted from the country, the city, the open, public place and the enclosed spaces

which humans have constructed to ward off nature. But, says Sade, the security of the human-made structure is illusory : Nature cannot be staved off by Art. Michel Foucault asserts,

> Within the château where Sade's hero confines himself, within the convents, the forests, the dungeons where he endlessly pursues the agony of his victims, it seems at first glance that nature can act with utter freedom [...] Everything that morality and religion, everything that a clumsy society has stifled in man, revives in the castle of murders. (Foucault, 1965 : 282)

There can be little doubt as to the validity of this statement. The hunt, the thrill of the chase, the exertion of power over the *other* is essential to the libertine's gratification. The natural, primeval, instinctual behaviour of the human-predator is aroused when those weaker take flight. This lesson is not learned by Justine, even when she notices that the greater her struggle against her tormentors, the greater their ardour. The feline nature of toying with prey is evoked by the use of the symbol of the tiger[1] (Sade, 1991 : 502,569,608,720) As Foucault points out, the predatory libertine chases his prey, until exhausted and subjugated, the victim is incarcerated within the enclosed space of human-construct. The lair of the libertine is invariably a constructed building representative of power and respectability; the monastery and the château, but the humble dwelling; M. Du Harpin's hovel-like apartment (Sade, 1991 : 476) and the poacher's cottage (Sade, 1991 : 480) also feature as locales for the "devouring" of the prey. Again, Sade reminds the reader that the desire instilled by nature leads certain

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[1] The symbol of the tiger is pervasive in Death in Venice. Adopting the way of the predatory tiger, Aschenbach "would follow him [Tadzio] through the city's narrow streets where horrid death stalked too". (Mann, 1971 : 73) The tiger symbol is also to be found in Child of Pleasure and its use serves the "natural" brutal, predatory instincts of human behaviour. Moreover, Dionysus is commonly associated with the symbol of the tiger lending an air of pagan exoticism to the text.

individuals, regardless of civilisation's class structures, to enact cruelty on those weaker than themselves. Gratification of desire, perverted by nature's imagination is the primary goal of the libertine. The predator's need for prey cannot and is not activated only in specifically demarcated spaces.

The dungeon is the libertine's refuge and the locus of the victimised prey's nightmare. The dungeon, hidden, secret and cave-like, transports primitive activity back to the natural enclosure of primeval man, a place hidden from civilisation's moral gaze. In this sense, Sade shows the absurdity of Civilisation or Art trying to obliterate Nature from its presence. Humankind cannot banish Nature by means of Art, since humans are part of nature's creation. As the supreme artist, in the absence of God, Nature's libertinage and those at its mercy create a decadent Art, progeny of Nature and conforming to notions of "Decadence-as-a-Philosophy". These propositions are mirrored and reflected by the landscape through which the philosophical narrative navigates.

Michel Foucault's assertion that, "it seems at first glance that nature can act with utter freedom" (Foucault, 1965 : 282) is partially valid. Yes, nature does act with impugnity, but not only "at first glance". Indeed, the climax of the novel, the penultimate[2] philosophical lesson for the reader is Justine's impalement by a bolt of lightning. This event occurs *inside* the château which has promised safety from Nature's activities. Again, Sade reminds the reader of the omnipresent force of Mother Nature. Nature cannot be excluded from existence by the erection of a fortress. Art, necessarily composed of the natural, in physical terms as well as the metaphysical, cannot inhibit the processes of the universe.

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[2] The final lesson is Juliette's renunciation of vice.

We are offered, by Sade, the spectacle of two lives. One, led by Juliette, is the life of a woman who consciously seeks out vice and decadent behaviour and whose "humble" beginnings in a brothel lead to a life in châteaux and mansions with attendant wealth. The other, led by Justine, who adopts a virtuous life, occupies those spaces, both public and private reserved for the weak, the poor and the set upon. Although Juliette enters a convent, one of the sites of Justine's debauchery at the hands of a corrupt clergy, the reader is aware that the paragraph, seemingly added as means of placating critics and censors alike[3], is a means of softening the tone of the novel's rhetoric. There is also the suggestion that Juliette's departure for a spatial setting which has been avowed as a seat of vice is perfectly in keeping with Sade's characterisation of her personality.

Justine, on the other hand, begins her adventures in Paris and completes her journey by being transported back to Paris for her execution, an execution ordered unjustly by the laws of civilisation. Snatched from this fate by Juliette, she is still executed, but this execution is carried out by Nature. Clearly, for Justine, who wilfully and consistently refuses the lessons of Nature's laws there is no spatial setting in which she is safe. Her virtue, at which the libertine-philosophers, civilisation and Nature sneer, forces her to occupy a physical and metaphorical landscape teeming with predatory elements.

The labyrinth is a recurring trope in Justine. It is to be found in the forest, (Sade, 1991 : 502) in the monastery, (Sade, 1991 : 564) and on the road (Sade, 1991 : 666). Indeed, the whole of Justine's journey resembles a maze. She leaves Paris for the

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[3] Considering the philosophical discourse set forth in the novel, this part of the narrative is difficult to accept at face-value.

northern country-side of France, tries to find relief in the south and is on her way back to Paris when rescued by Juliette. Her journey is largely pointless, since she is unable to escape the libertine element. She fails to find the way out of the metaphorical labyrinth and we are told that after her escape from Rodin, Justine, like a lone desert walker, loses her bearings and after a "swing in a circle round Paris" (Sade, 1991 : 557), finds that after four days she has travelled no further than Lieursaint.

The pointlessness of Justine's journey, motivated solely by a wish to find the utopian society which she believes exists, is Sade's lesson for the virtuous : there is no utopian society which can circumvent Nature's design. Rodin makes this clear : "It is politic to adopt the virtue of the country one inhabits" (Sade, 1991 : 545). While Rodin here means that as a libertine in France, he must necessarily conceal his activities from the moral gaze, the lesson for Justine is implicit : her refusal to accept society as cruel and unfair leads to her discomfort. The narrative is spatially ordered in such a way that the reader is made aware of the futility of Justine's struggle against Nature. It is a series of chases, captures and escapes through forests, woods, parks, chateaux, mansions, cottages, humble apartments and caves.

The trope of the prison is repeated throughout the narrative. Roland Barthes notes that the Sadean "enclosure" or prison has two functions. Firstly, it "shelters vice from the world's punitive attempts" and secondly " it forms the basis of a social autarchy" in which both servant and master, abuser and abused form a capsule world with its own system of human interaction, far removed from the surrounding environmental reality. (Barthes, 1971 : 16,17). In this sense, the trope of the prison is distorted by Sade in

that it serves to protect the strong from censure and its captives are the innocent rather than the guilty. This shift of perception indicates Sade's desire to shift the reader's acceptance of a philosophical and religious morality to an acceptance of an alternative world order with "Decadence-as-a-philosophy" as the governing philosophical morality. Justine is wrongfully imprisoned by the authorities for theft (Sade, 1991 : 479) and unjustly reimprisoned for infanticide (Sade, 1991 : 720). The irony of the lesson offered to Justine regarding her rescue at the hands of the libertines is lost on her. Twice, she is delivered from civilisation's laws by the lawless, yet she refuses to accept Nature's process, believing instead in the virtue espoused by civilisation, a civilisation which offers her scorn.

The prison, for Justine is not solely confined to civilisation's prisons, but extends to every human-constructed spatial setting she occupies. She is held captive in the poacher's cottage by *Coeur-de-fer* (Sade, 1991 : 480); she is a prisoner of his band of brigands in a camp in a copse (Sade, 1991 : 481); she is imprisoned by Rodin (Sade, 1991 : 531); held captive by the clergy at Saint Mary-in-the-Wood (Sade, 1991 : 560); held as prisoner by Gernande in his château (Sade, 1991 : 629) and his dungeon (Sade, 1991 : 652); held as a slave by Roland at his château (Sade, 1991 : 665) and held against her will in Saint-Florent's mansion (Sade, 1991 : 735).

This series of confinements interspersed with successful escape attempts reflects Justine's attempts to escape from the realities of the world which surrounds her. Her attempts to finally be free, as we have seen, are continually thwarted. She is intellectually and emotionally imprisoned by what Sade sees as unrealistic expectations

of the people which populate the landscape of her life. Temporally, Justine's spatial organisation ill-equips her to deal with the dangerous landscape with which she is confronted.

As noted, it is not only the human-constructed space which is the site of Justine's violation. She is raped, and loses her virginity in a forest (Sade, 1991 : 501); she witnesses homosexual intercourse and is tortured by the two men in the same forest (Sade, 1991 : 505); she is deliberately set upon by Bressac's dogs in the forest (Sade, 1991 : 528) and she is abducted by Gernand's men in a forest (Sade, 1991 : 628).

Not even the road, representing escape for Justine is without its perils. She is disorientated when setting out for the country from Paris (Sade, 1991 : 557); the corridor which leads out of the monastery is strewn with traps to prevent escape (Sade, 1991 : 580); she is robbed by an old woman on the road to Dauphine (Sade, 1991 : 664); she is marched by the authorities to Grenoble for wrongful incarceration (Sade, 1991 : 692) and she is taken by road en-route to Paris for execution (Sade, 1991 : 736).

Clearly, for Justine, there is no spatial setting, be it public or private, that offers refuge. Not even the supposed safety of her sister's château can protect her from Art or Nature. Indeed, she is at the mercy of both realities, hounded by both the symbols of human vice and the symbols of human "civilisation". Both Art and Nature deny Justine the justice she believes exists.

Ironically, Justine asks Roland, the counterfeiter who has subjected her to considerable

abuse to take her with him to Italy, setting for the Gothic novel and home of the Roman Empire, famed for scenes of debauchery. Justine pleads with Roland, "take me to Venice with you[4]; I will perhaps find gentler hearts there than in my native land". (Sade, 1991 : 689). Justine's masochism, it seems for Sade, has its roots in her "inability" to make informed decisions about her circumstances. She eschews Nature in favour of Art to her peril. Roland Barthes notes that,

> the Sadean enclosure is relentless, it has a dual function; first of course, to isolate, to shelter vice from the world's punitive attempts [and] it forms the basis of a social autarchy. Once shut in, the libertines, their assistants, and their subjects form a total society. (Barthes, 1971 : 16,17)

This statement reflects Sade's vision for a new society. This society exists, but its existence falls into the realm of the private, a scenario which Sade believes should be brought into the public arena. However, Barthes omits to observe that the illicit space offers titillation for the libertine. The hunt, the chase would be unnecessary in a society which accepted "Decadence-as-a-Philosophy", and would necessarily lessen the pleasure derived from vice. Taboo is an essential ingredient for decadent behaviour. If taboos are removed from the decadent equation, it is likely that new ones will be created. Sade argues that the libertine should be free to exercise his forbidden activities, yet this would rob pleasure from decadent activity, since decadent behaviour and "Decadence-as-a Philosophy" relies on its inherent nihilistic rebellion for its thrill.

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[4] Thomas Mann's Gustav von Aschenbach is similarly attracted to the delights promised by Venice. T. Tanner remarks : "Venice is not just another European city. It especially raises, as we have seen, questions concerning the relations between culture and nature, art and life, writing and desire," (Tanner, 1992 : 349) It is for these reasons that Venice features so prominently in the decadent literary text. Venice is the city which beckons and bewitches both Mann's Aschenbach and Sade's Justine precisely because by its very nature, Venice provides the perfect location for the questioning of Western society and its accompanying values, situated as it is (physically and metaphysically) between the polarities of Eastern and Western civilisation.

This conundrum applies to Justine with her belief in "Morality-as-a-Philosophy". Should she find herself in an environment solely governed by virtue, her struggle would have no meaning. Her attempt to render virtue public makes her fascinating as a character but this interest in her fight for justice would be nullified should she exist in a just society.

"Decadence-as-a-Philosophy" and its dialectical, philosophical opposition, espoused by Justine, need the antagonistic relationship they share to exist. Sade's views, positioned as they were during the French Revolution, rely on their revolutionary message for impact. Should the decadent move from the private to the public sphere this impact will be lost.

Before Gustav von Aschenbach has even departed for Venice, the fever for change, the desire for excitement of an unknown kind begins to overtake him. The opening of the novel documents his walk through a section of his home-town, Munich. This walk takes him past the English gardens which feel to Aschenbach unseasonably "sultry" (Mann, 1971 : 3) He walks past the North Cemetery, which is deathly quiet and symbolically alludes to his own death which will take place weeks after this. Importantly, the mortuary chapel, seat of Christianity, is "adorned with Greek crosses", (Mann, 1971 : 4) lending the chapel an Eastern, pagan air. Already, at this early stage, the prefigurement of Aschenbach's fatal clash with Eastern and classical pagan influences is given.

Ilsedore B. Jonas remarks on the intersection of pagan and Christian elements :

> He finds the fulfilment of his longing in Venice, which offers this beauty in perfect form, for indeed here Italian and fable-like Oriental elements are blended into a oneness. (Jonas, 1969 : 40)

T. Tanner also acknowledges Venice as a city which melts disparities into a new sense of unity : "Venice is notoriously a site where opposites begin to blur and distinctions fade." (Tanner, 1992 : 356)

Mann tells that Aschenbach's desire

> projected itself visually : his fancy [...] imagined the marvels and terrors of the manifold earth. He saw. He beheld a landscape, a tropical marshland, beneath a reeking sky, steaming, monstrous, rank - a kind of primeval wildness - a world of islands, morasses and alluvial channels. (Mann, 1971 : 5)

This vision is deeply rooted in nature. It is wild, untamed and exotic and seems to Aschenbach to offer refuge from his grinding, disciplined service to his art. We are told that Aschenbach has never ventured far from home, "he had been content to know as much of the earth's surface as he could without stirring far outside his own sphere. " (Mann, 1971 : 6)

So Aschenbach's longing for the exotic seems entirely out of character at first glance. However, as an artist, the beautiful and the exotic cannot be forever ignored. The longing he feels for the dialectical opposition of the reality he has known is inevitable. Indeed, it was probably always there, but suhlimated because of the disciplined nature of his artistic endeavours. This suppression is unleashed by a fatigue, a glut of work which causes serious exhaustion in Aschenbach's physical and temporal make-up. Steeped too long in dry, artistic creativity, his soul cries out for the natural, the

dangerous. He "sees" that,

> among the knotted joints of a bamboo thicket the eyes of a crouching tiger gleamed - and he felt his heart throb with terror, yet with a longing inexplicable. (Mann, 1971 : 6)

Venice is in many ways the ideal destination of Aschenbach's longing. It is not quite the East which would completely overwhelm Aschenbach's conservative sensibilities, yet it is the gateway between East and West, and as such, offers a balance between the two spheres. Had Aschenbach been less naive, this venue would have offered excitement without the extreme danger of the East, where cholera was rife and custom completely at odds with that of the West. However, for the conservative Aschenbach, Venice is to prove the most dangerous place of all.

His journey to Venice, is by ship and his wanderings in Venice are often by gondola. Everywhere there is water, which mirrors the sky and the architecture. Nature here, is seen to reflect art, and in many ways offers a confusion of images that disorients Aschenbach and reflects his muddled psyche. Moreover, water in Venice proves deadly, since it carries the dreaded Asian cholera : "there were other spots where these were to be had without the evil concomitants of lagoon and fever-breeding vapours. " (Mann, 1971 : 37)

Indeed, it is the fatal waters[5] of Venice which prompt Aschenbach to leave Venice : "The atmosphere of the city, the faintly rotten scent of swamp and sea, which had

[5] The lagoons are described as "foul-smelling" (Mann, 1971 : 36), "black as nothing else on earth except a coffin - what pictures it calls up of lawless, silent adventures in the plashing night; or even more, what vision of death itself, the bier and solemn rites and last soundless voyage!". (Mann, 1971 : 21)

driven him to leave". (Mann, 1971 : 39) And it is water on which Aschenbach lazily glides, rowed by a gondolier on water whose depths in Death in Venice carry fatal connotations. Aschenbach arrived by sea and dies watching Tadzio on a sand-bank out at sea. The cholera is carried by means of water, and stalks Aschenbach through Venice. A natural element, water is symbolic of life, since without water no creature on earth can exist. However, water for Aschenbach proves fatal. Once in Venice he is surrounded by it. The open sea, the sea-shore, the lagoons[6] - his death, prefigured by water is inescapable. Nature, too long ignored by Aschenbach with his one-sided devotion to art has its revenge. Like Sade's Justine, Aschenbach feels the full force of the natural workings of the universe, to his detriment.

Mann declares that "immeasurable unarticulated space weakens our power to measure time as well". (Mann, 1971 : 19) This is clearly the effect on Aschenbach, since his disorientation from the life he normally leads is characterised by an ever-increasing unconcern with time : the time he allows for his sojourn in Venice is lengthened by him, consciously, even though by this stage of his stay, he has become aware of the threat to his health. Mann writes that Aschenbach's love of the ocean,

> had profound sources : the hard-worked artist's longing for rest, his yearning to seek refuge from the thronging manifold shapes of his fancy in the bosom of the simple and vast; and another yearning, opposed to his art and perhaps for that very reason a lure, for the unorganised, the immeasurable, the eternal - in short, for nothingness (Mann, 1971 : 32)

Clearly, Aschenbach seeks in nature a respite from art, since his devotion to pure art has left him drained, a mere husk. His downfall, though, is brought about by his total

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[6] Mann says the "canals sickened him with their evil exhalations". (Mann, 1971 : 37)

immersion in nature, a force more powerful than the disciplined safety of art.

As we have seen, water in all its forms conspires to teach Aschenbach the realities of nature's laws. Indeed, Tadzio is most beguiling when he is close to the sea (Mann, 1971 : 32;35;46) and Aschenbach is "summoned" to his physical death by Tadzio who has waded out to sea and stands on a sand-bank "calling" to Aschenbach. (Mann, 1971 : 79)

Added to the evil lurking in the waters of Venice, is the menace to be found in the alleys and streets. Mann declares : "There was a hateful sultriness in the narrow streets[7]" (Mann, 1971 : 36). The alleys are described as "unclean" (Mann, 1971 : 57) and Aschenbach is shown to have "hunted feverishly over bridges and in filthy *culs-de-sac*" (Mann, 1971 : 58) Mann tells the reader that, " the labyrinthine little streets, squares, canals and bridges, each one so like the next, at length quite made him lose his bearings." (Mann, 1971 : 75)

Add to this the impact of Tadzio's beauty on Aschenbach and the fact that, "the sun beguiles our attention from things of the intellect to fix it on things of the sense" (Mann, 1971 : 47) and it is small wonder that nature's onslaught fells Aschenbach. His conservatism and naivety cannot withstand nature's engulfing of his spirit.

The city of Venice, itself, is described as a hot-bed of vice, by Mann. It is characterised as having "a predatory commercial spirit"; (Mann, 1971 : 37) of being the "fallen queen

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[7] This description harks back to the prophetic walk past the English gardens in Munich. The atmosphere here was described as "sultry" (Mann, 1971 : 3)

of the seas"; (Mann, 1971 : 37); of having an "evil secret" (Mann, 1971 : 57) and of having "proved that in certain weathers it could be directly inimical to his health". (Mann, 1971 : 37) These descriptive phrases are at odds with the comments of the boat ticket-seller who waxes : " Ah, Venice! What a glorious city! Irresistibly attractive to the cultured man for her past history as well as her pleasant charm". (Mann, 1971 : 17) This assertion justifies Venice's portrayal as a city with "a predatory commercial spirit", (Mann, 1971 : 37) since the ticket-seller is Italian and would welcome the revenue generated by Aschenbach's visit to the city. As noted by Jonas,

> the Venice of Aschenbach is at the same time sinister and full of danger for the visitor intoxicated by this deluding atmosphere. The city has a conflicting character, for behind a facade of the greatest beauty and magnificence are hidden disease, immorality and crime. (Jonas, 1969 : 40)

This ambivalence of Aschenbach's Venice is a mirror-image of the forces at play in his psyche. Art and nature, although inextricably bound, fight for dominance over Aschenbach's soul as they fight for the soul of Venice. Venice, unlike Aschenbach manages to keep the balance between art and nature, since Venice is in many ways, timeless, and has seen both nature and art come and go. Aschenbach displays less fortitude and is ultimately overwhelmed by nature. Interestingly, this wearing down of Aschenbach's soul and physical entity had begun in Munich under the spell of art, yet art's power did not fell him as does the forces of the senses, alive in the natural world.

T.J. Reed notes that Death in Venice " Is about psychological decay finding in the outside world pretext and occasion for its fulfilment". (Reed, 1996 : 171) This statement achieves import when measured against Mann's assertion that Aschenbach,

> had to struggle against spells of giddiness only half physical in their nature, accompanied by a swiftly mounting dread, a sense of futility and hopelessness -

but whether this referred to himself or the outer world he could not tell. (Mann, 1971 : 77)

Aschenbach might not be able to navigate the tortuous pathways of his soul, indeed his death is evidence that he cannot. But we, the readers, are made aware that the characters in the *novella* and the landscape they inhabit, all reflect aspects of Aschenbach, himself. Admittedly, the outside world exhibits the internal workings of Aschenbach's make-up and like all individuals, others can see what the Self cannot.

Aschenbach's degradation reaches a low point when he adopts bright clothes and make-up. His physical appearance has begun to resemble the back streets of Venice, whose architecture is described as consisting of "garish, badly built houses". (Mann, 1971 : 19). Aschenbach creates a new physical image for himself that is as improbable as "this most improbable of cities". (Mann, 1971 : 20)

Aschenbach has taken on the seedy side of the city's character. The parallel does not end here. Christian morality is shown to be largely defunct in this city where East meets West. Mann describes : " the marble steps of a church descended into the canal". (Mann, 1971 : 58) We have already seen that the canals are foul-smelling, stagnant and carry disease. Philosophically, then, the church's morality descends into this morass and describes its hypocrisy. This description also refers to Aschenbach's descent from governance by Christian morality into the seediness of moral bankruptcy.

Aschenbach's sojourn in Venice illustrates his struggle with Art and Nature, a debate that is extended to the tension between Christianity and Paganism. It is a battle that Aschenbach must lose, since he is ill-equipped to cope with the forces at play. Strength of purpose, and solidity of the soul is required to strike the balance between good and evil, and in this war, Aschenbach must necessarily lose.

As pointed out by Umberto Franzoni, " For most of the Decadents the landscape as a state of mind is a concept strictly linked to the notion of analogy". (Franzoni, 1991 : 129). This statement is particularly true in relation to Child of Pleasure. The beauty of Rome mirrors the artistic sensibilities of both Andrea and Elena and the meeting of ancient and modern Roman architecture reflects the conflict between the almost defunct aristocracy and the wave of democracy which D'Annunzio felt threatened to overwhelm Roman society.

The Rome of Andrea Sperelli excludes the Rome of the commoner. Rome, for Andrea, is an artistic spatial setting which comprises the interiors of gracious buildings, both private and public. Similarly, the exterior spatial environment occupied by Andrea is characterised by the artistic stylisation of nature. Nature is transformed into art by the creation of parks and gardens, public and private. Andrea's love affair with Elena Muti is reflected in this spatial configuration, characterised as this love is by its artistic ritual and delight in the creatively beautiful. D'Annunzio relates that "All the patrician villas, the crowning glory of Rome became well acquainted with their love". (D'Annunzio, 1991 : 52) Importantly, Andrea's relationship with Elena is conducted in Rome, the urban, sophisticated space which accurately describes the nature of their love. This

love leaves its mark on Rome: "Wherever their footsteps strayed they left a memory of love". (D'Annunzio, 1991 : 52)

City life is portrayed as a series of pleasurable festivities, where fashion is dictated by a few and slavishly imitated by the rest. The Marchesa d' Ateleta, cousin of Andrea, occupies the realm of trend-setter: " This winter, for instance she had introduced the fashion of hanging garlands of flowers from one end of the table to the other". (D'Annunzio, 1991 : 7) The frivolity of this setting, and others like it, create the spatial setting which correctly mirrors the individuals who populate this environment. Seriousness and discipline are eschewed in favour of pleasure-inducing (in)activity. The artificiality of the cordon which encloses Andrea's society reflects the artificiality of the characters which inhabit this spatial demarcation. The enclosed site of Andrea's existence in Rome is marked by sojourns at the sales; (D'Annunzio, 1991 : 32) the salons and the theatre; (D'Annunzio, 1991 : 3) the galleries (D'Annunzio, 1991 : 10) and the races (D'Annunzio, 1991 : 71).

For the most part, walks are undertaken within the confines of this closed, largely interiorised society. Elena says to Andrea : "give me your arm and let us take a turn through the rooms". (D'Annunzio, 1991 : 17) The street outside forms the space allocated to the less fortunate, and when Andrea uncharacteristically ventures into this sphere, he finds the evening "chill and grey" (D'Annunzio, 1991 : 45) and the effect of coming into contact with "weather-beaten" workers contrives to upset him and we are made aware that "his mental depression increased". (D'Annunzio, 1991 : 45)

To avoid the street and its occupant, the commoner, the carriage is employed : "The carriage was standing at the foot of the great stairway". (D'Annunzio, 1991 : 21) From this description we are alerted to the fact that great effort is made to ensure that those of Andrea's circle need not encounter the "rabble" in the street. The rich are able to leave the safety of their abodes and be transported to another venue without contact with the street, moving directly from the mansion to the carriage.

For Andrea, "Rome was his passion [...] the Rome of the Villas, the Fountains, the Churches". (D'Annunzio, 1991 : 25) Interestingly, Andrea's passion includes a love of churches. However, it appears that it is the facade that the church presents which is attractive to Andrea, rather than the religious morality which it encourages. His insincerity of being is evidence of this hypothesis.

The spatial surround which encloses Andrea's sector of society corresponds with and creates analogies, as noted earlier by Franzoni, with the characters who inhabit this designated space. Often, characters are so at one with the landscape in which they are situated that the mirror-effect is confused to the extent that it is difficult to tell whether the landscape reflects the character or *vice-versa*. We see this with Elena : "the whole room seemed on the alert for the arrival of the woman he loved". (D'Annunzio, 1991 : 192) Andrea also notices that "his own dire distress (was) reflected in the aspects of the objects surrounding him". (D'Annunzio, 1991 : 193)

Andrea is influenced by nature in his pursuit of Maria : "The beauty of the night filled him with a vague but desperate yearning towards some unknown good. The image of

Maria Ferrès flashed across his mind". (D'Annunzio, 1991 : 211)

Indeed, the landscape of Andrea's existence is essential to his capacity for feeling, albeit a superficial contrivance of emotion. D'Annunzio scathingly remarks that "to this fastidious actor the comedy of love was nothing without the scenery". (D'Annunzio, 1991 : 193) This "scenery" is both artificial and natural, but the natural is rendered artificial by conscious and determined effort : parks are created by the transformation of open, wild spaces into areas of human creativity and control; water is channelled via channels unnatural to nature with the creation of fountains; and gardens are styled out of the raw materials provided by nature. For the edification of high-society, nature is kept at bay by art. The "taming" of nature by Roman civilisation extends to the African continent where Italy's colonial policy is seen to find favour in the novel. Publicly, D'Annunzio was to air these views as well, as noted by Becker. (Becker, 1990 : 93,94) Seemingly, D'Annunzio perceives Africa, often referred to as "the dark continent", as being equally threatening to Italian high-culture as is the new spirit of democracy so abhorred by him.

The confusion which the superimposition of art over nature creates is shown as labyrinthine-like, both real and imagined. Andrea daydreams, "aimlessly, as if wandering through a fantastic labyrinth[8]". (D'Annunzio, 1991 : 37) D'Annunzio asserts also, that "Andrea lost himself in a maze of conjecture". (D'Annunzio, 1991 : 37) During his convalescence, "the landscape became to him a symbol, an emblem, a sign to

[8] This behaviour reminds the reader of Justine, who with little or no definite purpose or goal, other than escaping from her persecutors, wanders aimlessly through Sade's labyrinthine landscape.

guide him through the labyrinthine passes of his own soul." (D'Annunzio, 1991 : 97)

Significantly, the relatively untamed environment of the scene of Andrea's convalescence, situated as it is in the country, inspires Andrea to creativity, and a certain peace within his soul. This peace is shattered when he returns to the city and the trope of the labyrinth is resurrected, but in a more sinister way : "the absolute immobility of all things suggested the idea of a petrified labyrinth". (D'Annunzio, 1991 : 264). The transformation of the trope of the labyrinth into a state of "petrification" signals the author's intentions of creating a parallax in which the standard order of things real and philosophical are displaced. The implications of this overturning of the accepted meaning for labyrinth suggest an environment which is in some way diseased, where the moral sphere is transmutated into one which is no longer moral in terms of common understanding.

Immersion in the urban landscape is inimical to Andrea's mental health, while the country proves to offer rejuvenation. However, the cypress, symbolic of death is shown to dominate both the city and the country. (D'Annunzio, 1991 : 110, 107, 132, 170, 182, 256, 144) Andrea is not alone in his artist's sensitivity to the surrounds and the influence of the environment on his soul. Maria Ferrès speaks of her "fascination" for Andrea in terms of the landscape :

> I felt as if I were under the influence of some nameless fascination, as if the landscape, the light, this incident, the whole combination of circumstances were not new to me. (D'Annunzio, 1991 : 161)

Maria's spatial interpretation of her feelings for Andrea are echoed by Andrea's

contention that,

> the hour, the place, the sunshine, everything about them suggested love-from the extreme limits of the sea to the humble, little forms of the fountains. (D'Annunzio, 1991 : 133)

Clearly, both Maria and Andrea are deluded by the natural and artificial spatial settings which surround them. Both characters are out of their natural urban spatial setting and are moved by the vastness of nature's "natural" environment. Their love is given root in the beauty of the landscape, and stems from this, rather than through a sincerity of feeling; the Other is romanticised through the filter of the spatial setting and deemed fulfilling on the basis of the magnificence of that setting.

For Andrea, art, rather than nature is the reality. Early in the novel it is written :

> All this languor of atmosphere amid light, in which things seemed to lose their substance and reality, oppressed the young man with an infinite weariness. (D'Annunzio, 1991 : 26)

Andrea's "weariness" is brought on by the inevitable presence of nature within his society which attempts to ignore it, by the creation of artifice. Artistic pursuit staves off nature, albeit temporarily. But the fleeting power of art must necessarily abate, since nature's purpose exists independently of art, and in spite of art. Andrea is made aware of this when he occupies new rooms:

> The whole of October was devoted to furnishing them. When the rooms were finished and decorated to his taste, he passed some days of invincible melancholy and loneliness in his new abode. (D'Annunzio, 1991 : 26)

What D'Annunzio perceives as the death of art and artistic society brought about by the

swarming of the masses demanding democracy, is illustrated in the following passage[8].

> His lavishly furnished apartment had a peculiar musty odour arising from clamminess of the atmosphere and this collection of ancient things pervaded the air. (D'Annunzio, 1991 : 29)

"Art is dead" is D'Annunzio's lament. The stagnation and decadence of Andrea and his peers illustrates the point, reflected as this scenario is in the landscape. Salvation is offered Andrea by his duel-induced injury. His convalescence is nature's lesson to art, characterised as it is by Andrea's (temporary) rejuvenation. Andrea had, "returned to the bosom of Mother Nature and he felt her r einforce him maternally with goodness and with strength." (D'Annunzio, 1991 : 95) Not uncoincidentally, the scene of Andrea and Maria's love is sited in this rural, natural landscape, since Maria offers Andrea a love less bound up in artifice than does Elena. But Andrea treats Maria's love carelessly because connected with nature as she is, she is less valuable in Andrea's world-view than is Elena, whose connection to art is more pronounced. As D'Annunzio asserts : "impassive nature endless source of pain to solitary souls". (D'Annunzio, 1991 : 99)

Maria, reflection of the rural, of the healing powers of nature, lacks the capacity to excite. Elena, in many ways, the personification of decadence, offers excitement for Andrea, grounded as he is in the cult of the Beautiful and the Artificial. Maria is

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[9] See for example, Jared Becker, 1990 : 94 : "the aesthete D'Annunzio of the mid 1880's, *Il Piacere's* hero moves among rare *objets d'art* that are the antithesis of the popular and the public"

associated with the sea[10]:

> the sea was not only a delight to his eyes but also an inexhaustible well-spring of peace, a magic font of youth wherein his body regained health, and his spirit nobility. (D'Annunzio, 1991 : 97)

Elena, though, is associated with the sky: " The whole firmament glittered with stars, veiled here and there by long trailing strips of clouds like tresses of pale hair". (D'Annunzio, 1991 : 50)

Both women symbolise the vastness of nature, but in different, opposing spheres. Maria's metaphysical association with the earth lends her the nurturing qualities associated with this sphere, while Elena is compared with the ethereal, surreal nature of the unexplored sky. Between these elements, is situated Andrea. The impossible nature of his choice is illustrated by Elena and Maria's polarities. Charles Klopp quotes D'Annunzio :

> For D'Annunzio, the exercise of power, however mediated by more immediate considerations, has a single goal. "In sexual desire, heroism, and art," he declares, " I wield the same victorious energy that made and makes Life and Death into a single ideal space". (Klopp, 1988 : 122)

This course of action is adopted by Andrea. Unable to choose between Elena and Maria; death or life; or art and nature, he elects to fuse the two dialectical oppositions to form the Ideal. Andrea asks,

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[10] In many ways, Tadzio in Death in Venice is also associated with the sea, in that many of the portrayed scenes which feature Tadzio's presence are enacted at the beach, and Aschenbach is "summoned" to his death by the lone figure of Tadzio beckoning to him from a sandbank out at sea : Tadzio "paced there, divided by an expanse of water from the shore, from his mates by his moody pride; a remote and isolated figure with floating locks, out there in sea and wind, against the misty inane" (Mann, 1971 : 79)

> Which do you consider to be the truest, noblest way of love - to imagine you have discovered every aspect of the eternal Feminine combined in one woman, or to run rapidly over the lives of woman as you run your fingers over the keys of a piano, till, at last, you find the sublime chord of harmony. (D'Annunzio, 1991 : 15)

Andrea's attempt at palimpsest is doomed to fail because nature, unlike art, resists superimposition. Andrea's fancy that art can be imposed on nature proves impossible : Art is civilisation's creation, but all of art is the product of nature. Andrea's eye, attuned to the artistic, might imagine that "the outlines of the surrounding objects melted into one vague form", (D'Annunzio, 1991 : 288) but the realities of existence are quite different, as we see by Andrea's resultant lonely procession behind the cabinet he has "scavenged" from the misfortune of another. (D'Annunzio, 1991 : 311) Andrea attends his own spiritual funeral as the close of the novel describes[11]. The choice made by Andrea displays ineptitude and impracticality. It is an artistic choice, one that ignores nature's realities. The insight gained at the natural site of his convalescence, where " In every aspect of the things around him he beheld some analogy to his own inner life" (D'Annunzio, 1991 : 97) is lost upon his return to Rome, where he is drawn back into a decadent existence and frame of mind[12]. In Rome, " fairest Rome - that city of cities, immense, imperial, unique - like the sea, for ever young, for ever new, for ever mysterious." (D'Annunzio, 1991 : 175)

Andrea is thrown back into the confusion of his mind's application of reality. Here,

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[11] The motif of the coffin had been given early in the text with the description of Andrea's dressing table. (D'Annunzio, 1991 : 37)

[12] See, for example, D'Annunzio, 1991 : 178 where a "private little supper" is described in a setting in his home that is permeated by a sumptuous, decadent atmosphere largely owing to the seven wall panels representing "episodes of Bacchic love".

> the houses, the churches, the spires and turrets, all the confusion and intermingling of Christian and Pagan architecture, resolved itself into one unbroken forest [...] reminding one of a lunar landscape. (D'Annunzio, 1991 : 264)

This "confusion" is reflected in Andrea's soul. The improbable co-existence in Rome of opposing elements teaches Andrea that life can be similarly shaped, a supposition which proves fallacious.

CONCLUSION

In a general sense, Richard Drake arrives at the essence of what constitutes the term "decadence". He argues that, "Decadence was a matter of moral philosophy". (Drake, 1982 : 85). This statement coheres with the findings of this dissertation in that as has been argued; Sade, D'Annunzio and Mann react against the established, institutionalised moral status-quo in Western society. This status-quo relied for its inception on the teachings of Judaism and Christianity, and so is a religion-informed philosophy. The three authors question the general acceptance of this philosophy and through their work, ask for a hearing for an alternative world-view. Because this proposed parallax is really an inverse shift of perception, it is necessarily positioned in dialectical opposition to established norms of accepted morality. The term "Decadence-as-a-philosophy" was coined for this study to show that the texts under discussion embrace the medium of fiction in which a forum is established wherein the forces of art and nature are employed as a symbolic depiction of the binary opposites of morality and immorality.

Brian Stableford concludes that :

> Decadence is not a happy state, and the Decadent does not bother to seek the trivial goal of contentment, whose price is wilful blindness to the true state of the world. Instead, he must become a connoisseur of his own psychic malaise (which mirrors, of course, the malaise of his society). He is the victim of various ills, whose labels become the key terms of the Decadent rhetoric : *ennui* (world-weariness); *spleen* (an angry subspecies of melancholy); *impuissance* (powerlessness). (Stableford, 1990 : 7)

The arbiters of "Decadence-as-a-philosophy" would argue that Stableford's ill-veiled flippancy is precisely the attitude they seek to challenge and expose. They would

assert that the Decadent or the libertine (in Sade's scheme) is "unhappy", not through *ennui, spleen* or *impuissance*, but because the individual is forced to exist in a society which outlaws behaviour incompatible with institutionalized morality. Sade has incessantly forwarded the belief that society creates criminals of citizens whose "natural" leanings fall foul of Judeo-Christian morality. He, and others informed by a philosophy which champions the right of the individual to act as his wont, with impugnity and without regard for the welfare of the Other, contends that the establishment of taboos imposed upon civil society by the religious establishment, are imposed upon false premises[1].

There can be little doubt that "Decadence-as-a-philosophy" is inherent to the philosophical positions of the authors of Justine, Child of Pleasure and Death in Venice. Together and separately these texts rebel against Western society's taboos. Invariably, these are sexual taboos, although in the case of Sade, any restriction on human impulse; good or evil constitutes a taboo. Erich Fromm notes : "taboos create sexual obsessiveness and perversions, but sexual obsessiveness and perversions do not create freedom" (Fromm, 1980 : 15) This supposition, reduced to essence, asserts that the key to normality within the spectrum of human sexual relations lies within the boundaries of moderation, an idea not supported by Sade, but acknowledged by both Thomas Mann and Gabriele D'Annunzio to a lesser or greater degree. What these texts seek to show, with various degrees of intensity, is that civilisation has been grounded in an atmosphere of religion-based morality

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[1] The most obvious premise being the belief in the existence of a supreme being, a god.

which is depicted in the texts as being philosophically redundant. Civilisation , these texts declare, has relied too heavily on this morality, a morality which excludes the lessons of nature, often to the detrimental effect of art. Suzanne Gearhart notes:

> a long tradition maintains that aesthetics and morality are in the last instance separate and distinct. Moreover, this tradition has almost always maintained that morality, rooted in metaphysics and theology, should in fact be privileged over aesthetics and ultimately determine its status. (Gearhart, 1980-1 : 31)

It is precisely this tradition which writers of decadent literature seek to dispel. Decadent literature maintains that the Beautiful encompasses good *and* evil, that life is marked by the dichotomy of positive and negative and that to ignore the negative in favour of the positive is to discard half of what constitutes human existence. As our three texts attempt to show, beauty is indeed to be found in the negation of life.

Indeed, Sade's belief that life is reconstituted dead matter, implies that the accepted binary oppositions of life and beauty, and death and ugliness, can not be seen in this way, but must be viewed as occupying equal share in the universe. Life and death occupy one spatial locus and are separated only by philosophical division, according to Sade. D'Annunzio's personal, political and philosophical beliefs are ideally positioned to show the negative beauty of the universe, and Mann, the artist caught between morality and the desire for the forbidden finds a unique vision for Aschenbach who is overwhelmed by the implicit pagan decadence of Tadzio's beauty.

Perceived pagan decadence is illustrated in all three texts, inevitable since

decadent literary thought looks to alternative civilisations for justification for its opposition to Judeo-Christian morality. Richard Drake remarks on the prevalence of "Decadence-as-a-philosophy" in philosophical thought throughout Western civilisation:

> As a philosophical concept decadence is very old : there are echoes of it in Thucydides, and numerous historians from Vico's time on have used it as a dialectical device in explaining the evolution of civilisation. For them decadence is an ineluctable stage in history, a cyclical phenomenon indicating a decline in social vitality and in the artistic creativity of an age. (Drake, 1982 : 69)

Drake correctly sees that historians find decadence to be an indication of degeneration. This is the point which Sade finds difficult to accept. For him, decadence is natural behaviour, since nothing within the confines of the natural universe is degenerate. Theology, for Sade, has imposed unnatural constraints on human behaviour and has divided behaviour into moral and immoral categories. This division, for Sade, and other writers of decadent literature, creates a class of sinners who are persecuted for acting on natural impulse.

Scholars, as pointed out by Gearhart, are wont to describe decadence as a phenomenon which surfaces when society is seen by the philosopher or historian to be on the moral decline. This study has shown, however, that decadence is harnessed by the novelist or philosopher to alert civilisation to its own moral degeneration, brought about by a too rigid adherence to theological thought, thought which owes its underlying weakness to a wilful discarding of nature's laws. Decadence, for many, is unpalatable precisely because it exposes life as being less

perfect than the utopia which Judeo-Christianity asserts is attainable through virtuous activity of being. Sade, D'Annunzio and Mann deliberately peel back the veneer of respectability which sheaths civilisation's activities, to expose the vulgar, the quasi-sinful and the outrageous in human behaviour in order to show the hypocrisy of Judeo-Christian morality. This exposure is vividly illustrated by Sade's portrayal of the clergy as vice-ridden and morally bankrupt. D'Annunzio's point is the same : he shows a Catholic society fascinated with pagan philosophy and leading debauched lives, disdainful of the poor in a world where hedonism is entrenched. Mann similarly exposes the latent homo-erotic lust in his protagonist, Aschenbach, he of the formerly staid, upright existence, now turned debauched voyeur with immoral longings.

Reality, it is argued, cannot be changed by the imposition of moral laws on an unwilling, thinking populace. Nature's laws, it is argued, transcend the pettiness of taboo. To illustrate the point, the ugliness of humanity is laid bare for the reader to see. The bourgeois morality of Western civilisation is exposed as being a veneer for a society which privately corresponds to nature's laws, while publicly appearing to live by the tenets of Judeo-Christianity's moral codes. As we have seen, Sade, Mann and D'Annunzio were influenced by the philosophy of others, and all three appear to challenge the philosophical discourse which maintains that human behaviour should be governed by what appears to be a largely arbitrary moral code. "Decadence-as-a-philosophy" purports to offer a fresh look at the universe, since it approaches civilisation's dilemmas from an alternative perspective. "Decadence-as-a-philosophy", like its counterfoil, "Theology-as-a-philosophy" is a reaction against

the realities of constructed human society. The former rebels against the latter's disregard for nature, while the latter rebels against the former's subscription to nature's laws at the expense of art.

Since the three authors under discussion have a similar aim : to expose the hypocrisy of Judeo-Christian morality and to forward an alternative philosophy based on decadent thought, it is unsurprising that there is a similarity of approach in their respective literary strategies. All three rely on the element of shock in their narrative, to a greater or lesser degree : Sade's Justine is witness to an array of debauched human practice, while she herself is often on the receiving end of such practice; D'Annunzio's Sperelli is surrounded by devotees of decadence, a situation he welcomes, since this atmosphere is conducive to his own set of amoral behavioural patterns; and Aschenbach flees his restless psyche to holiday in exotic Venice where his repressed sexual longings are released on a fourteen year old boy.

All three authors discuss pagan theology as an antidote to Judeo-Christianity : Sade, the atheist, forwards paganism as justification for his libertine characters in similar fashion to Mann who devotes a significant portion of his *novella* to scenes of pagan revelry and part of the discourse between the pagan philosopher, Socrates and his beloved, the youth, Phaedrus. D'Annunzio's Sperelli lives in Rome, site of pagan decadence and surrounds himself with the symbols of this era.

All three authors use the journey as symbolic of the philosophic journey they urge

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All three authors use the journey as symbolic of the philosophic journey they urge

their readers to embark upon : Justine journeys through France (city and country) only to find that there is no geographical spatial sphere where the libertine decadent prophet, does not exist. Sperelli journeys from the city to the country and back again, as the country's powers of healing, while beneficial to his health, lack the debauched excitement his soul craves. And Aschenbach leaves his city of birth to seek the exotic excitement which Venice promises, and does, afford.

Patently obvious, is that all three authors use the medium of fiction with which to cloak their philosophical discourse. Sade, given his fascination with the philosophers of his time, goes one step further and uses the device favoured by Voltaire for his philosophical discourse : an hypothesis followed by an exemplum. In addition, Sade employs the device of repetition, a ploy which seeks to hypnotise the reader until the alternative philosophies which Sade proposes take on the mantle of normality. This technique is emulated, in a sense by D'Annunzio and Mann, both of whom immerse their texts in a saturation of luxurious imagery, which serves to make the acceptance of the alternative a viable proposition.

The role of the artist is given considerable prominence in all three texts. Sade's libertine-artists, philosophers all, commit heinous crimes in the name of nature, while D'Annunzio's Sperelli, the artist whose crimes of insincerity and debauchery waste his creative energy despite his abundant talent. Mann's Aschenbach, the artist whose life is characterised by a conservative service to art, writes his perfect piece of prose under the Dionysian spell invoked in the person of Tadzio, but consciously plots his own demise because moderation is alien to his nature. What is

noticeably different about the authors' depiction of their artists is Sade's insistence that moderation of the natural impulses felt by humans is pointless while D'Annunzio and Mann argue for a balance between art and nature. While each approach to the same issue is slightly different, the message of all three authors is clear : morality, as it is understood within the confines of Western civilisation, stifles the creativity and *joie de vivre* of all people, but most specially the artist whose unique skills are ideally positioned to mediate between the polarities of art and nature.

Clearly, decadence is a rebellion against a philosophical discourse which seemingly offers no evidence of taking nature's laws and cycles into account when forming its conclusions. Jean Pierrot is correct when he sees "boredom, melancholy, disillusion and discouragement" (Pierrot, 1981 : 60) as the reason for the decadent, literary text. These emotional responses to the philosophical status-quo indicate for Sade, D'Annunzio and Mann the redundancy of Judeo-Christian morality and the need to modify perspective to create a universe free of moral prejudice and hypocrisy.

Decadent literature harnesses the extreme dialectical oppositions of good and evil, moral and immoral, Christian and pagan and art and nature, to expose the bankruptcy of unaltered theological thought, in order to propose a new order. What it succeeds in doing is to propose to the sensitive reader a new "reality" where both nature and art can claim equal share over human civilisation.

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