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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.

Deborah Colleen Fisher

A Dissertation Submitted to the Faculty of Arts
University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg
for the Degree of Master of Arts

Johannesburg, 1998

TO THE MUSE, PHOEBUS

IN MEMORY OF

IVY GRAHAM McGUINNESS

ABSTRACT

The focus of this dissertation rests on the hypothesis that the Marquis de Sade, Gabriele D'Annunzio and Thomas Mann, in their texts chosen for study, adopt a particular philosophical discourse. This discourse, employing the polarities of art and nature, offers these authors a vehicle for their respective positions on notions of decadence. In addition, this dissertation investigates the hypothesis that literary decadence is a phenomenon not solely confined to the period known as the *fin de siècle,* but rather that problems surrounding different conceptions of nature in different socio-historical periods, lead in similar ways to the phenomenon of decadence.

The introduction provides working definitions of Decadence, Nature, Art and Aesthetics and the moral stance implied by Judeo-Christian theology. These definitions establish the parameters of the study. Chapter one is concerned with the philosophical background against which the problems of art versus nature, and of decadence, can be discussed in the novels. The French philosophers; Voltaire, Diderot and Rousseau are studied for their influence on Sade's Justine, (1791) while the German philosophers; Schopenhauer and Nietzsche are examined for their contribution to the philosophical ideologies espoused by D'Annunzio in Child of Pleasure, (1889) and Mann in Death in Venice, (1912). Darwin's scientific input is also investigated inasmuch as his theories are relevant to the work of D'Annunzio and Mann. Chapter two deals with the philosophical discourse which pervades all three novels and inquires as to the ideas of nature, art and decadence. The moral and existential nature of life and death, and good and evil are studied in relation to the chosen texts. Chapter three investigates

the portrayal of sexual decadence in the three works and establishes that decadent beauty is produced for the sake of destruction without reserve. The notions of sex-as-art and sex-as-nature are explored. Chapter four argues that the creation of specific spaces in which the narrative unfolds represent attempts to create alternative social spaces in which the morality of Judeo-Christianity no longer holds sway.

To conclude, this dissertation argues that the novels chosen for study can be read as offering "Decadence-as-a-Philosophy" as an alternative mode of thought and existence for a society defined by the moral, liberal humanist laws of Judeo-Christianity.

DECLARATION

I declare that this dissertation is my own unaided work.
It is being submitted for the degree of Master of Arts in
the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg.
It has not been submitted before for any degree or
examination in any other university.

C Fisher
(Name of Candidate)

13TH day of JANUARY, 1998

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PREFACE

Justine, (*Justine*, 1791); Child of Pleasure (*Il Piacere*, 1889) [1] and Death in Venice (*Der Tod in Venedig*, 1912) were chosen for this study primarily for the thematic links provided by notions of decadence in their content and the similarity of their philosophical import. All three texts are in some way a reaction against the existing status-quo of their time. Notions of decay and an alternative sexual reality pervade these works. Their philosophical approach is presented through a discourse which examines the relationship of the polarities of art and nature.

Part of the rationale for the choice of these authors is an attempt to show that post-Renaissance European notions of decadence do not emerge at the end of the nineteenth century. Rather, their beginnings are evident in the writings of Sade.

Justine deals with an orphaned girl, who unlike her debauched sister, Juliette, chooses a life based on virtuous conduct, a choice which will place her at the mercy of a host of vicious libertines who subject her to countless unspeakable acts of sexual decadence and violence. Amongst other things, she is raped, sodomised, hanged, forced to work as a slave and imprisoned by the State and libertines alike. When finally rescued by Juliette from wrongful execution, Justine finds herself victimised by nature itself, the governing principle of all those who have abused her. Nature's final word to Justine is a bolt of lightning which strikes her down within the confines of the walls of a château.

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[1] Il Piacere forms part of D'Annunzio's trilogy, "Romanzi della Rosa". The other novels of the trilogy are, L'Innocente (1892) and Il Trionfo della Morte (1984)

Gustav von Aschenbach, in Death in Venice, unlike Justine, willingly and eagerly embraces the decadent behaviour which he had hitherto suppressed until his overwhelming work-load drives him to Venice. His lascivious worship of a beautiful, fourteen year old boy proves to be his undoing. His intellect and soul are so dazzled by the youth, Tadzio, that he neglects nature's warnings and is struck down by Asian cholera.

Aschenbach and Justine disregard nature to their detriment. Andrea Sperelli in Child of Pleasure has a similar disregard for nature's lessons and treats Elena and Maria, the two loves of his life, as *objets* rather than as women. His decadent, unfeeling insincerity is briefly interrupted by a period of convalescence in the countryside. While here, nature soothes and restores Sperelli's debauched psyche. He returns to Rome, refreshed physically and mentally, but nature's dictum is soon forgotten under the influence of the decadence of his social environment. The loss of both Elena and Maria is attributed to Sperelli's scorn for nature and the natural. Like Justine and Aschenbach who pay for their folly against nature and lose their lives, Sperelli dies a spiritual and emotional death.

All three texts revolve around the discourse which pits nature against art. All three texts examine the polarities which follow naturally from this debate : life and death; good and evil; Judeo-Christian morality and classical, pagan morality. Human existence is examined through a parallax in which the societal status-quo is seen as aberration rather than truth. Humanity is viewed from a slant uncommon to literature grounded in the morality of the synagogue or the church. Essentially, all three texts

question the accepted morality of Judeo-Christianity and ask whether, in the face of nature's laws and cycles, this morality is relevant to human behaviour. There is little doubt that these texts, overtly rebellious of the societal status-quo, seek an alternative reality. These three texts transcend literary categorisation in that their message of rebellion is timeless. We would concur with the view held by Erich Fromm that,

> it is well known that the rich throughout history practiced radical hedonism. Those of unlimited means, such as the elite of Rome, of Italian cities of the Renaissance, and of England and France in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, tried to find a meaning to life in unlimited pleasure [...] the theory that the aim of life is the fulfilment of every human desire was clearly voiced, for the first time since Aristippus, by philosophers in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. (Fromm, 1980 : 13,14)

INTRODUCTION

> In every discussion [...] there is one and only one way of beginning if one is to come to a sound conclusion, that is to know what it is that one is discussing; otherwise one is bound entirely to miss the mark. Now most people are unaware that they are ignorant of the essential nature of their subject, whatever it may be. Believing that they know it, they do not begin their discussion by agreeing about the use of terms, with the natural result that as they proceed they fall into self-contradictions and misunderstandings. Do not let us make the mistake for which we find fault with others [...] Let us begin then by agreeing upon a definition [...] and keep this before our eyes to refer to as we debate... (Plato,1995:15-16)

So says Socrates in his first speech in Plato's Phaedrus. This dissertation will proceed from the premise that definitions of the terms decadence, Judeo-Christian principles, nature, art and aesthetics are essential before any meaningful debate can be initiated.

DECADENCE

The Concise Oxford Dictionary defines "decadence" as : "Falling away, decline, deterioration, (esp. Of a period of art or literature after culmination)" and explains "decadent" as; "declining, decaying; self-indulgent; of a period of decadence [...] decadent person; 19th century writer or artist with artificial and obscure style". (Sykes, 1979:263). These definitions are unsurprisingly inadequate for serious study. Moreover, they present a problem inherent in much literary criticism : that of imposing moral and ethical judgement on the term, "decadence".

> The critic is not in the first instance making a value judgement of particular works; his first concern is to describe how the cultural climate of a period affects the production and appreciation of literature. (Daiches, 1971:377)

This assertion will inform the philosophical viewpoint from which this study proceeds. This approach necessitates forging a new framework in which decadence is analysed. To this end, the term "Decadence-as-a-Philosophy" will be employed as a theoretical term of reference.

The need for such a term, as has been stated, is motivated by a plethora of literature on the subject of literary decadence as well as historical decadence which applies a Judeo-Christian morality to so-called decadent works and inevitably passes clouded ethical judgement before employing sound analysis.

According to Brian Stableford, the year 1734 marks the beginning of the evolution of the concept of decadence with the publication of Montesquieu's *Considerations sur les Causes de la Grandeur des Romains et de leur Decadence* (Stableford, 1993 :1) It is clear from the title and the work's content that behaviour antithetical to a Judeo-Christian moral philosophy must be consigned to the realm of immorality. This impression is heightened by the origins of the word "decadent". The latin *cadere,* "to fall", combines with the archaic *decair,* or "decay" in English to form "decadent". (Stableford, 1993 :1) The Christian "Fall" of Satan is evoked, while to decay is to exist in a state that is a reversal of the life process.

Richard Drake defines the 19th century's notion of decadence as a "corrupt, immoral aesthetic sensibility". (Drake, 1982 : 69) M. H. Abrams asserts that the

> thoroughgoing decadent writer cultivates high artifice [...] the bizarre in his subject matter, prefers elaborate dress over the living form and

> sometimes sets out to violate what is natural in human experience by resorting to drugs, depravity, or sexual deviation in an attempt to achieve [...] "the systematic derangement of all the senses". (Abrams, 1985 : 3)

Both critics apply Judeo-Christian standards to works whose authors to a greater or lesser degree eschew these standards.

The pessimism usually ascribed to writers of decadent literature is apparent in R.K.R. Thornton's assertion that not only is decadent literature a "literature of failure" but that "attempts to define Decadence, like Decadence itself, must end in failure". (Thornton, 1983 : 188) Wolfdietrich Rasch exhibits understanding for this critical stance:

> Literary decadence has, of course, always bee:. anathema to extremists of both colours, conservative and progressive [...] literary decadence, however, often arouses suspicion and hostility, incomprehension and rejection even among critics with no such extreme political sympathies. It is suspected of having a corrupting influence on the reader. (Rasch, 1982 : 209)

The reason for this almost wholesale hostility to works of decadence is elucidated by Richard Gilman : "Decadence has, in fact, usually been regarded as a type of evil, a peculiar, limited, ingrowing face of the bad". (Gilman, 1979 : 160) His explanation for this is sound :

> In Catholic doctrine, for example evil is, theologically, the absence or deprivation of the good; decadence, to say it once again, is the absence of or departure from certain norms. Yet there is a crucial difference, which is that the idea of decadence is inseparably bound to one particular value or criterion to which religion, theoretically at least has been hostile or indifferent. (Gilman, 1979 : 160)

That religion should be opposed to the decadent movement or indeed any literature which proposes "Decadence-as-a-Philosophy" is unsurprising. Religion, in particular Christianity, is based on a "cult" of the individual in the sense that it offers, to its adherents, saviour from after-life damnation provided that a set of moral standards are met. Redemption is not offered to the group but to the individual. This emphasis on the individual is also to be found in the literature of the Romantic period. The Decadent period arose, on one level, as a backlash against Romantic literature, and decadent philosophical thought is disinterested in individualism.[1]

This cult of individualism prevents individuals, especially weaker individuals, from an appreciation of a decadent text like Justine since it stands as a reminder that in the decadent reality, the strong dominate the weak. In this sense, decadence can only ever be in opposition to religion because religious morality protects the meek individual.

It appears that a definition of what constitutes the components of decadent literature is elusive, both to the reader as well as the critic. What is clear, however, is that writers of decadent philosophical literature search for an alternative reality to the one proposed by the Romantic movement, the Judeo-Christian tradition and their umbrella philosophy, liberal humanism. Our definition of decadence then is

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[1]In a discussion on Rachilde's *La marquise de Sade* (1887), Rita Felski acknowledges Sade's influence on the *fin-de-siècle* movement : "Rachilde's text bears an obvious debt to the Sadean cult of the *fin-de-siècle*, a cult that was evidenced not just in literature, but also in a growing array of scholarly works which sought to turn the eighteenth-century libertine into an exemplary nineteenth-century pervert." (Felski, 1991 : 188)

necessarily vague at this stage of the analysis of the chosen texts. A clearer picture of decadent thought and the mechanisms used to illustrate this thought will emerge in the course of the study.

Walter Binni's *La poetica del decadentismo* (1936) argues that "*la Decadenza*" is the realm of the moral philosopher, while "*il Decadentismo*" should refer to "the distinctly historical phenomenon of aesthetic decadence". (Drake, 1982 : 72) This distinction is particularly useful, since it further establishes the parameters for this study. Justine, Child of Pleasure and Death in Venice will be critically analysed within a framework of "*il Decadentismo* ".

Historical decadence has been well documented by, among other historians, Suetonius, Montesquieu and Edward Gibbons. As noted by Wolfdietrich Rasch :

> "Decadence" was originally used neither as a literary or artistic term nor as a word to describe a loss of vitality in individuals or whole families; it was actually first applied to the decline and fall of the Roman Empire. (Rasch, 1982 : 201)

The literary history of Decadence, for many critics, begins and is confined to the 1880s in France and the 1890s in England. (Stableford, 1993 : 8) Undoubtedly, there is merit and validity in this delineation. There existed in this period many writers who loosely adhered to a broad-based decadent aesthetic sense and philosophy. However, this dissertation proposes that literary decadence as a phenomenon cannot and should not be confined to a single point or period in literary history. As it stands, critics generally have difficulty in identifying the

characteristics which separate those writers of the late 19th century known as "Decadents" from other writers of the period. Stableford remarks that "Decadent literature overlaps several other genres and movements, and that many of its key works can equally well be discussed under other labels". (Stableford, 1993 : 9)

Moreover, ancient poets and authors including Sappho, Catullus and Petronius were writing works of a philosophically decadent nature centuries before the Decadent movement. Sade is the first writer acknowledged as an adherent of decadent philosophy in the post-Renaissance period. As such, his work cannot be ignored. Indeed, he is the archetypal writer of decadent literature and his influence directly or indirectly provides a basis for an understanding of work in the Decadent period, in particular, Death in Venice and Child of Pleasure.

JUDEO-CHRISTIANITY

The term, "Judeo-Christianity" is applied so liberally that its status as cliche is secure. Consequently, its meaning has become obscured. In a general sense, it refers to the theological philosophy derived from both Judaism and Christianity. Robert Gordis points out the links between the two,

> the Hebrew patriarchs, prophets, psalmists, and sages have entered the consciousness of Western man not directly through the impact of Judaism, but through the medium of its daughter - religion, Christianity. (Gordis, 1966 : 149)

Historically, the link between Judaism and Christianity is provided by the figure of Jesus of Nazareth, his birth marking a departure from Judaism into a new religious

philosophical movement. As noted by Gordis, much Jewish thought and didactic input was retained, creating inextricable bonds between the two religions.

For the purposes of this study, the moral stance adopted by both religions is of issue. This theological morality, crystallised in the Ten Commandments, which is adhered to by both religions, becomes a focus for questioning by Sade, D'Annunzio and Mann.

The notion that transgression of these moral laws attracts the vengeance of the Creator is contested by writers of decadent literature. Donald Taylor in an essay entitled "Theological thoughts about evil" writes,

> although apocalyptic literature originated in the Hebrew Bible, it was taken over with a vengeance by some Christian writers and eventually did much to influence Christian thought. (Taylor in Parkin, 1985 : 33-4)

Evil, for theologians grounded in this Judeo-Christian ambit, is defined as any thought or action which is seen to be in opposition to the teachings of Judeo-Christianity. Sade, D'Annunzio and Mann, all of whom were raised within the confines of Judeo-Christianity's moral laws, explore and question this morality, often using a neo-paganist or atheist model to discount it.

For Sade, the archetypal atheist, religion must be seen as an art form rather than as a facet of the natural order of things. This notion is one which is explored by D'Annunzio and Mann in their respective texts.

NATURE

Samuel Johnson's Dictionary offers eleven definitions of nature. Most of these serve the wide spectrum of usages for the word, but two are relevant for this study. The first is : "the compass of natural existence", and the second : "sort; species". The first is self-explanatory, while the second anticipates Darwin[2]. These definitions are useful for this study since our aim is to differentiate Art from Nature. One of the definitions of nature as given by the Oxford English Dictionary helps to delineate the boundaries of nature from art :

> The material world, or its collective objects or phenomena, the features and products of the earth itself, as contrasted with those of human civilisation. (Sykes, 1979 : 726)

As observed by Carl Woodring :

> Art, as the antithesis of nature, is whatever nature leaves to be contrived by mankind. Art is human contrivance, the wheel, the ogee arch, steam power [...] Nature is there first, civilisation is erected within it. (Woodring, 1989 : 18)

This study will adopt the above assessment of the dividing line between Nature and its dialectical opposition, Art. Art critics understandably seek a more in-depth definition of what constitutes art and its often perceived close conceptual companion, aesthetics.

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[2] Darwin's theories of evolution and natural selection will be explored in Chapter One.

ART AND AESTHETICS

Art, then, can be seen at its most basic level as a phenomenon distinct from nature. That is, art exists through and by the endeavours of human creation. In many quarters, issues of aesthetics and morality are necessary qualifications for this creation to be considered art. Marcia Muelder Eaton notes that the term "aesthetic" only appeared in the eighteenth century and was coined by the philosopher, Alexander Baumgarten in 1750 from the Greek word *aisthetikos* which translates as "sensory perception". (Eaton, 1988 : 8)

The Concise Oxford Dictionary defines "art" as "Skill, especially human skill as opposed to nature and "aesthetic" as "belonging to the appreciation of the beautiful [...] in accordance with principles of good taste". (Sykes, 1979 : 52)

Consider aesthetics. Richard Kamber adopts a conservative, much-vaunted approach which states that for art to be called art, it must needs be aesthetic :

> What all works of art have in common is that they have been composed, crafted, designed or presented by one or more individuals whose intent was (or appears to have been to cause that work to be used, at least in part, as an object of aesthetic interest of some intensity.) (Kamber, 1993 : 313)

For Kamber, and many others, art is inseparable from aesthetics. This study will, however, seek to discount this supposition. Christopher Janaway more reasonably contends that "not all aesthetic value is beauty" (Janaway, 1993 : 331) and Nietzsche had earlier argued that,

> It is precisely the function of tragic myth to convince us that even the Ugly and Discordant is an artistic game which the will, in the eternal fulness of its joy, plays with itself. (Nietzsche, 1909 : 183)

Carl R. Hausman fully supports this stance : "The possibility that things called *works of art* may function nonaesthetically needs to be emphasised [...] A thing called the work of art can be other than aesthetic." (Hausman, 1989 : 125) Camille Paglia similarly asserts : "Art is order, but order is not necessarily just, kind or beautiful." (Paglia, 1990 : 29)

As we have noted, aesthetic means "sensory perception". That is, our perception of an object or a piece of work which is arrived at through our senses. Thus, for many, Sade's work will be seen as being not beautiful, but for others it will be appreciated as having an unusual or even ugly beauty. Whatever perception is held by the reader, according to the perception and scope of this study, Sade's work must stand as art. So too with the work of Thomas Mann and Gabriele D'Annunzio.

What of the issues of morality that many critics insist be present in a work before it can be called art? In Literature and Moral Understanding, Frank Palmer concludes that :

> It is possible to say that a moral failing in a work of literature counts against it as an artistic creation. This does not commit us to the view that art has a moral or social purpose, but serves rather to remind us of the relation between the author and his creation [...] A work in which it appears that the author expresses an attitude to life that is so objectionable that we cannot even "accept" it, is one we are likely to condemn as an artistic failing. (Palmer, 1992 : 180)

This study will argue that this hesitant commitment to the belief that art and the artist must be seen to encompass morality within an artwork to be seen as successful is grounded in acute subjectivity and should be discounted. There are two reasons for this viewpoint. Firstly, as we have established, the product of human endeavour, as opposed to that created by nature, *is* art. Secondly, the morality spoken of by Palmer is a manifestation of a cultural acceptance of Judeo-Christian principles. This morality is by its nature grounded in religious principles and as such relies on belief and faith for acceptance. Camille Paglia rightly contends that, "Art has nothing to do with morality. Moral themes may be present, but they are incidental, simply grounding an art work in a particular time and place". (Paglia, 1990 : 29)

This dissertation intends to show that writings with decadent moral leanings are an attempt to explore an alternative philosophical reality to the established Western philosophy that informs our cultural experience. The desire to propose a new world order is generally manifest by an overturning of established literary artistic conventions, a desire which can be most clearly seen, in the work of Sade, where established notions of what constitutes the beautiful are overturned : the beautiful is rendered ugly and the ugly beautiful. The common objectives of Sade, Mann and D'Annunzio seem clear : to allow the reader, through their art, to contemplate a reality different from the existing status-quo.

CHAPTER ONE

PHILOSOPHICAL BACKGROUND

The Enlightenment in eighteenth century France produced a vast body of philosophical thought. Reason stood as the ultimate goal and civilisation was widely considered to be at its zenith. Jean-Jacques Rosseau, however, spoke out against what he perceived as the corrupting influence of societal order. "Man is born free, and ev[illegible]where he is in chains" (Rousseau, 1935 : 5) is how chapter one of the Social Contract (1762) begins.

ROUSSEAU

Rousseau argued that humans in their natural state, before the advent of property seizure and ownership, were spared the injustices of inequality. In A Discourse on the Origil

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The virtuous state of humankind, before civilisation, is extolled :

> It would be melancholy, were we forced to admit that this distinctive and almost unlimited faculty (man's *perfectability*) is the source of all human misfortunes; that it is this which, in time, draws man out of his original state, in which he would have spent his days insensibly in peace and innocence; that it is this faculty, which, successively producing in different ages his discoveries and his virtues, makes him at length a tyrant both over himself and nature. (Rousseau, 1935 : 185)

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Rousseau goes on to assert :

> I must now collect and consider the different accidents which may

> have improved the human understanding while depraving the species, and made man wicked while making him sociable. (Rousseau, 1935 : 206)

These "accidents", for Rousseau, began with the first man to claim exclusive rights to a piece of land. (Rousseau, 1935 : 207). The leisure resulting from an "easier" life led to the contrivance of contraptions for convenience : " and this was the first yoke he inadvertently imposed on himself, and the first source of the evils he prepared for his descendants". (Rousseau, 1935 : 211) Avarice, born of comparison, led to vice, of which jealousy and envy stand as the greatest reproach to civil society. (Rousseau, 1935 : 212) Rousseau contends that :

> so many writers have hastily concluded that man is naturally cruel, and requires civil institutions to make him more mild; whereas nothing is more gentle than man in his primitive state, as he is placed by nature at an equal distance from the stupidity of brutes, and the fatal ingenuity of civilised man. (Rousseau, 1935 : 213)

Following this assertion Rousseau arrives at the conclusion that :

> As there is hardly any inequality in the state of nature, all the inequality which now prevails owes its strength and growth to the development of our faculties and the advance of the human mind, and becomes at least permanent and legitimate by the establishment of property and laws. (Rousseau; 1935 : 238)

Clearly, for Rousseau, nature is a benevolent force that provides a conducive environment in which the innocence of humans is able to flourish. He argues that human nature is essentially virtuous and that civil society brings chaos rather than order. Civilisation, or art, is a corrupting influence invented by humans in opposition to "be, eficent nature" (Rousseau, 1935 : 239). Rousseau's optimism is evident in

his unshakeable faith in human goodness : "men are actually wicked, as sad and continual experience of them proves beyond doubt : but, all the same, I think I have shown that man is naturally good". (Rousseau, 1935 : 239) It is precisely this belief in the goodness of humans, despite evidence to the contrary, which Sade seeks to reveal and ultimately disprove.

Like Rousseau, Sade is deeply concerned with the force that is Nature. However, unlike Rousseau, Sade sees Nature as an irresistible impulse affecting human-kind and compelling the individual to act in a "selfish" manner in order to preserve his existence.[1] For Sade, Nature is amoral, knowing no distinction between virtue and vice as these moral values are invented and delineated by human society. This point is elucidated in Sade's Philosophy in the Bedroom (1795) :

> Nature, equally dictating vices and virtues to us, in reason of the need Nature has of the one and the other, what she inspires in us would become a very reliable gauge by which to ajudge exactly what is good and bad. (Sade, 1991 : 307)

The atheist Sade is convinced of the arbitrary manifestations of Nature. He asserts that :

> The certainty in which we must be that no god meddles in our affairs and that, as necessary creatures of Nature, like plants and animals, we are here because it would be impossible for us not to be. (Sade, 1991 : 308)

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[1] A study of scholarly works which focus on the philosophies of Rousseau, including those of : R. Grimsley, R.A. Leigh and H. Williams reveals no mention of Sade in relation to Rousseau. This study, as can be seen, finds ample evidence to suggest that Sade's work can be in many ways read as a reaction to Rousseau's philosophical discourse.

Sade argues that Nature, because of the inherent amorality which constitutes natural activity or existence, is unoffended by an infinite number of cases where men commit murder. Sade asserts that these murderers are " simply exercising a prerogative received from their common mother [i.e. Nature]". (Sade; 1991 : 310) Furthermore: "Man receives his impressions from Nature, who is able to forgive him this act". (Sade, 1991 : 310).

Thus, for Sade, crime is a societal construct based on judgement;inherited from Judeo-Christian religious principles that disregard empirical observations Sade finds in Nature. As noted in the introduction Sade views religion as art, dialectically opposed to Nature : Religion for Sade, is seen as an illusion invented by humans in an attempt to obscure the unpalatable laws of Nature, where religious notions of fairness are unknown. Sade asserts that Nature, by definition and necessity, is destructive and this destructiveness is essential to regeneration and procreation. As such, death is merely a passing from one state to another :

> what we call the end of the living animal is no longer a true *finis*, but a simple transformation, a transmutation of matter, what every modern philosopher acknowledges as one of Nature's fundamental laws. (Sade, 1991 : 330)

In the light of this belief, Sade asks if destruction can ever be a crime : Nature dispatches the weak and since humans are born of Nature and exist within Nature's laws, homicidal impulses, as well as all other perverse, immoral and debauched leanings are gleaned from Nature and inform human actions. How then, demands Sade, should the individual who acts according to his impulses (instilled by Nature,

since Nature is responsible for endowing all living organisms with the behaviour they evince) be punished for acting out his "natural" programming? Essentially, Sade believes that Nature would not endow the human animal with impulses not in accordance with what is conducive to Nature and its various components (i.e. organisms which populate the earth).

This reasoning allows Sade to conclude that the desires of humans which are considered perverse, including sodomy, incest, rape, paedophilia (and a legion of sexual practices documented by Sade in Justine and other works) are not to be considered immoral or evil, but should rather be regarded as a consequence of Nature's grand design. While Sade considers most crime to be cruel, with murder rated as the cruellest crime of all (Sade, 1991 ; 329) he rationalises that Nature and her human offspring are, in essence "naturally" cruel. He believes that cruelty exists in human thought through imagination or artistic construct. In Sade's view, Nature's cruelty is natural, neither good nor bad, virtuous nor vice-ridden.

Rousseau and Sade both acknowledge Nature's force on humankind but differ vastly on its effects on human behaviour. Rousseau speaks of the Creator and of the natural world as a benevolent environment in which humans are innocent and free from the social evils of slavery, crime and inequality and exploitation. Sade's position is diametrically opposed to this view. His philosophical thought is informed by the empirical observation that humans create laws to stifle natural impulses which lie outside the moral boundaries of the Judeo-Christian religious ambit. Like Rousseau, he has observed human wickedness and cruelty but unlike Rousseau,

this does not alarm him. Sade proposes a society which does not punish instinctual behaviour but rather sets laws which do not create a class of criminals from individuals who act within the sphere of human nature. Rousseau posits the attainability of a civil order where the Judeo-Christian notion of virtue is law and accords with his vision of humankind as one with Nature and which abhors evil[2]. Rousseau informs the thought of the philosophical underpinning of the Romantic literary movement, while Sade's influence can be observed in the *fin-de-siècle* movement which incorporates Aesthetisicm, Symbolism and Decadence. The philosophical opposition of thought between Sade and Rousseau is reproduced in the opposition of philosophical discourse between the Decadents and Romantics.

The inevitability of a rebellious backlash against Rousseau's advancement of nature's power over the power of art is remarked upon by Brian Stableford :

> It is entirely reasonable, therefore, that there should have grown up in opposition to the cult of the natural a cult of the artificial, which set out to denigrate everything which Rousseau's followers revered. The adherents of that cult of artificiality were prepared to accept that the luxuries of civilisation were indeed enervating, but argued that such luxuries were nevertheless very succulent, and must be savoured rather than denied. In that proposition can be found the underlying philosophy of literary Decadence. (Stableford, 1993 : 5-6)

DIDEROT

In Denis Diderot's Conversations on the Natural Son (1757), the character Dorval,

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[2] The English poet, Wordsworth, adheres to this world-view where Nature is kind to the meek and aesthetic beauty abounds. As a representative of the school of Romanticism, Wordsworth illustrates principles espoused by Rousseau.

remarks ; "There are no lasting forms of beauty save those which are founded on relationships with the phenomena of nature". (Diderot, 1994 : 66). This comment forms part of a lengthy discourse elaborating on the conviction that all art forms, including poetry, dance and the fine arts, should imitate nature since beauty, it is argued, is "the conformity of the image with the thing itself". (Diderot, 1994 : 66). This philosophical stance regarding nature and its beauty appears to be shared by Diderot's contemporary, Rousseau[3]. Bremner points out that Diderot's vision for artistic endeavour, including the novel, was based on the belief that art should be morally uplifting. (Bremner in Diderot, 1994 : xi) Diderot considered contemporary comedy and opera to be frivolous and corrupting. Imitating life as it was naturally, seemed the answer to this perceived excess. "Nature and "natural existence", or life as it really was, was considered by Diderot as a remedy for academicism and decadence." (Bremner in Diderot, 1994 : xviii)

Diderot's views are quite obviously in opposition to those of Sade's, who believed, as we have seen, that nature evinced qualities which were neither good nor evil and that since humans were part of nature, their actions should be seen in the same light. Destruction and rejuvenation, for Sade, were based on empirical observation of nature's way, and for him, the notion of corruption was obsolete.

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[3] This viewpoint is discounted by Donal O'Gorman who contends that Diderot never doubted that social reform might be possible but could only be achieved through enlightenment and that Diederot : "had no illusions about the goodness of nature, which was neither good nor bad but merely necessary. Both personal self-interest and sociability were natural and necessary to man, but so also was reason" (O'Gorman, 1971 : 114)

Diderot's essay, In Praise of Richardson (1761) extols Richardson's sense of virtue and morality which permeates his novels. Diderot says of these novels : " the works of Richardson, which raise the spirit, touch the heart, are permeated with a love for what is good". (Diderot, 1994 : 82) Diderot comments further,

> This author does not send blood flowing down the walls, he does not expose you to being eaten by savages, he does not confine himself within the secret haunts of debauchery, he never wanders off into the world of fantasy. (Diderot, 1994 : 83)

These comments could be accusations directed at Sade's novels[4]. Indeed, one might speculate that Justine and Juliette are a reply to Richardson's Pamela (translated into French in 1742) and Clarissa Harlowe (translated into French in 1751). It is difficult and even dangerous to assume that a particular writer has read specific works by other authors and is commenting on their thoughts in his own work. Nevertheless it seems reasonable to assume that Sade did indeed read Rousseau and Diderot since he was the owner of a considerable library during his incarceration. (Lever, 1993 : 332-3). Maurice Lever shows that although Rousseau's Confessions was denied him (the authorities may have been justifiably concerned that he might model his own memoirs on this text), Rousseau's works were known to him. Lever contends that Sade wrote not for material comfort but for the realisation of a philosophical ideal. Moreover, says Lever, "he borrowed his model from Rousseau". (Lever, 1993 : 382). Lever sees evidence of this in Sade's proposal for a new constitution which was in Lever's view influenced by Rousseau's

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[4] A perusal of scholarly discourse relating to Diderot's influence on Sade revealed no mention of the relationship between the two. J. Mehlman, C. Sherman and A.M. Wilson make no mention at all of Sade in their work on Diderot.

Social Contract. (Lever, 1993 : 428).

VOLTAIRE

In addition to reading widely on subjects as diverse as historical works, scientific journals and philosophical tracts, Sade read Homer, Virgil, Lucretius and others. He also read the latest novels of the time and took particular pleasure in the *novellas* of Voltaire which he knew "by heart". (Lever, 1993 : 334). Lever quotes Sade as saying of these works :

> The works of such a man cannot be reread too often. I urge you to read them, even if you have already done so a thousand times, for they are always new and always delightful. (Lever, 1993 : 334)

A close study of the trials endured by Cunégonde[5] and the old woman in Candide (1758) allows for some speculation that these characters with their attendant reactions to their misfortunes in some way influenced Sade's writings. In particular, Justine. This is not to suggest that the protagonist Justine is modelled on Cunégonde or the old woman, but rather that the reaction of Justine to her hardship is in some way a philosophical rejoinder to Voltairè's outlook which informs the actions and reactions of his character.

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[5] Paul Sawyer argues that Voltaire had in mind St Cunégonde as the model for Cunégonde in Candide. St Cunégonde "was the daughter of the first Count of Luxembourg and the wife of Henry II, Emperor of Bavaria, who had taken a vow of chastity." (Sawyer in Waldinger, 1987 : 106) Justine, too, had sought a life that was chaste, and had renamed herself after a saint : St Thérèse

Justine is orphaned at age twelve, (Sade, 1991 : 459) and Cunégonde at seventeen. (Voltaire, 1979 : 19). Justine is raped and beaten by Saint Floret (Sade, 1991 : 502) who had posed as her rescuer. Cunégonde is also raped by a soldier who wounds her. (Voltaire, 1979 : 41). Both women are reduced to slavery. Justine is forced to "turn a wheel like an animal" (Sade, 1991 : 737) by Roland and Cunégonde is forced to iron and cook by the Bulgar captain "as a prisoner of War" (Voltaire, 1979 : 41).

The old woman in Candide is similarly maltreated : She endures an anal search by pirates and is gang-raped (Voltaire, 1979 : 51). She is betrayed by her Italian rescuer and sold into slavery (Voltaire, 1979 : 54). She is savagely and routinely beaten and has one buttock devoured (Voltaire, 1979 : 54-55). Like Cunégonde, the old woman prevails and is not cowed by her experiences : traumatised perhaps, but not destroyed.

Of interest to Sade in the two women's recounting of their misfortunes must have been a comment, from the narrative point of view, made by Cunégonde in reference to her refusal to submit to the sexual advances of Don Issachar and the Grand Inquisitor. She claims that, " A woman of honour can be ravished once, but the experience is a tonic for her virtue". (Voltaire, 1979 : 41)

This attitude displays a prudent, pragmatic response to a set of circumstances forced upon an individual : it shows acute awareness of cause and effect and demonstrates a healthy resolve to avoid similar situations. This response is lacking

in Justine who fails to prevent her wholesale abuse at the hands of her various persecutors. In many ways she stands as the archetypal victim, as she consistently fails to defend herself. When viewed as a foil for Cunégonde, Justine appears wanting in responsibility and accountability for her personal safety. Indeed, her debilitating melancholy when she is finally freed from persecution by Juliette, seems to indicate that Justine suffers from a form of masochism[6].

Sade, appears to be in accord with Voltaire's abhorrence of those who claimed that humans were destined for their god-apportioned fates. This impression is heightened by Voltaire's belief that humans, as part of nature,

> must be unchanging. Whatever is totally contrary to the moral sense of the patterns of behaviour of eighteenth-century man can never have formed a permanent part of the moral doctrines or the way of life of man in any age. (Brumfilt, 1966 : xxi)

This concurrence of thought is not sustained, however. Sade was an atheist while Voltaire championed deism. This difference is fundamental to their respective philosophies and can be seen when Voltaire claims in A Treatise on Toleration (1763) :

> The supposed right of tolerance is absurd and barbaric. It is the right of the tiger[7] ; nay it is far worse, for tigers do but tear in order to have food, while we rend each other for paragraphs. (Voltaire, 1921 : 89-90)

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[6] This contention will be explored in greater depth in Chapter Three, where Justine's role as sexually abused victim will be studied.

[7] The symbol of the tiger is to be found in Death in Venice and Child of Pleasure with similar predatory connections.

Voltaire also warns against fanaticism, a prophetic reproach to Sade[8]:

> For a government to have the right to punish the errors of men it is necessary that their errors must take the form of crime unless they disturb society; they disturb society when they engender fanaticism; hence men must avoid fanaticism in order to deserve toleration. (Voltaire, 1921 :108)

Sade's reliance on Voltaire's work is made clear in Philosophy in the Bedroom (1795)[9] :

> The adroit Voltaire never used any other arm, and among all writers he is the one who may congratulate himself upon having the greatest number of proselytes. (Sade, 1991 : 214)

Moreover, in the second paragraph of Justine, reference is made to a character in Voltaire's Zadig :

> Abusing the knowledge they have acquired, will they not say, as did the angel Jesrad in Zadig, that there is no evil whereof some good is not born? (Sade, 1991 : 457)

It would appear that Sade, acutely aware of prevalent intellectual discourse, sought to challenge the core of Enlightenment thought. It seems, however, that Sade, in Justine, (as well as in other texts) points and scoffs at what he would indubitably call

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[8] Sade claimed that the death penalty should be outlawed : "The second reason why the death penalty must be done away with is that it has never repressed crime; for crime is every day committed at the foot of the scaffold". (Sade, 1991 : 311)

[9] None of the scholarly work consulted on Voltaire mentions Voltaire's influence on Sade. An examination of the work of A. Noyes, J. Besterman, A.O. Aldridge and G. Brandes shows no interest in this line of enquiry.

his peer's misguided naivety. Closest in thought to Voltaire, furtherest in philosophical belief from Rousseau, Sade sought to dispel the notion of humans as civilised beings distinct from the wildness and cruel barbarism of Nature.

To read Sade's work as nothing more than an orgiastic fantasy of sexual violence is surely to miss the point. Close analysis of Justine and other philosophical novels penned by Sade reveal a preoccupation with the notion of power : human relationships, for Sade, are seen to be governed by the intersection of the dominant and the dominated. In Philosophy in the Bedroom (1795), Sade exhorts his post-revolutionary countrymen not to be content with merely ousting the monarchy, but to strive for an entirely new society free of religious superstition :

> Frenchmen, I repeat it to you : Europe awaits her deliverance from scepter and censer alike. Know well that you cannot possibly liberate her from royal tyranny without at the same time breaking for her the fetters of religious superstition. (Sade, 1991 : 298)

Essentially, Sade calls for a new set of societal, power-driven dynamics. By the removal of the first and second estate, the way would be clear for a truly democratic society with power vested in the people. As Colin Wilson points out : "As he calls for the reign of Reason, de Sade sounds like some idealistic social philosopher, a disciple of Rousseau and Voltaire." (Wilson, 1988 : 62) Unlike Rousseau and Voltaire, as we have seen, Sade does not envisage a society created upon principals of liberal humanism. For him, such a society is the illusion of civilisation : it is art - pleasant in contemplation but ludicrous in practical application given Sade's perception of the true nature of human beings. Sade would have been in

accord with Francis X.J. Coleman who contends :

> It is well and good if a man likes the great outdoors, as Rousseau did, and even better if a man derives some therapeutic or moral benefit from it. But it is not at all clear what it means to set one over the other as Rousseau does, and insist upon the moral preeminence of nature. (Coleman, 1971 : 145)

SCHOPENHAUER

Schopenhauer, in the essay entitled, On Aesthetics (1851) makes this distinction between art and natural reality :

> As we know, the world as *will* is the primary *(ordine prior)* and the world as *idea* the secondary world *(ordine posterior)*. The former is the world of desire and consequently that of pain and thousandfold misery. The latter, however, is in itself intrinsically painless. (Schopenhauer, 1979 : 156)

Reduced to essence, this supposition implies that art is the antidote to the pain of natural existence. This mode of thought seems to inform the philosophical background implicit in Death in Venice and Child of Pleasure. Aschenbach, in Death in Venice moves from the relatively painless and safe haven of artistic endeavour which he inhabits in his native Germany (the world of *idea*) to Italy, a country associated by many with decadent earthiness (the world as *will*)[10].

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[10] This general impression seems to stem from perceptions of the decadence of the Roman Empire, but more importantly, from the location of much of the action portrayed in the Gothic novel. Brian Stableford, in a discussion of Edward Gibbon's The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire (1776) argues : "For Gibbon, Rome had briefly achieved an altogether admirable ideal, and his account of its decline is redolent with a special sense of tragedy; for all its cynicism his was essentially a Jeremiad : a book of Lamentations. Thus was the myth of Rome's decadence amplified and set in stone". (Stableford, 1990 : 3) Leslie Fiedler, in a study of the Gothic novel makes mention of Italy as the popular seat of the European decadent tradition : "It is Italy, the Mediterranean South with its overtones of papistry and lust [...]" (Fiedler in Sage, 1990 : 131)

Andrea Sperelli, in Child of Pleasure converts everything from the natural world into the service of art. This can be seen when he compares Elena to a painting[11]. (D'Annunzio, 1991 : 7). This is not an isolated instance since Sperelli cannot absorb the essence of those around him without recourse to artistic reference. According to Schopehauer, then, Sperelli is perpetually engaged in an attempt to render the world as "*will*" into the world of "*idea*". Schopenhauer goes on to assert :

> I therefore know of no greater absurdity than that absurdity which characterises almost all metaphysical systems : that of explaining will as something negative. For evil is precisely that which is positive, that which makes itself palpable; and good, on the other hand, i.e. all happiness and all gratification, is that which is negative, the mere abolition of a desire and extinction of a pain. (Schopenhauer, 1970 : 41-2)

This philosophical supposition appears to be at play in Death in Venice and Child of Pleasure[12]: Aschenbach lives most of his life steeped in the service of aesthetic

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[11] With reference to this technique *ekphrasis*, Abigail S. Rischin remarks : "A knowledge of the work of art in question or of the tradition the work evokes allows the reader to fill in the significant details that language elides and, as it were, to complete the picture. An ekphrastic moment can also give presence to eroticism and desire through the thematics of another narrative it calls to mind. In other words, ekphrasis can evoke a story of erotic desire (or presumably, of virtually anything - sacrifice, heroism, ambition, and so on) by referring to a work of art based on such a story". (Rischin, 1996 : 1129)

[12] A survey on the works on Schopenhauer shows overwhelming support for the assertion that Mann was heavily influenced by Schopenhauer. F. Copleston remarks : "One can also mention the writer Thomas Mann as one who owed a debt to Schopenhauer" (Copleston, 1965 : 56) M. Fox agrees with this assessment : "Schopenhauer [...] was also a formative influence on [...] Mann." (Fox, 1980 : xvii) B. Magee shares these views, claiming that, " the imaginative writer most influenced of all by Schopenhauer should be the one [Mann] who shares his mother tongue and the same specific cultural tradition" (Magee, 1983 : 386). Thomas Mann's indebtedness to Schopenhauer is well established, then, but this is not so in the case of D'Annunzio's apparent acceptance of Schopenhauer's philosophical stance. Indeed, not one of the scholars consulted write of any connection between D'Annunzio and Schopenhauer, even though this study has found parallels between the two.

endeavour which he acknowledges as virtuous. He avoids and suppresses the traditionally evil side of existence. Although successful and acclaimed as an artistic genius[13], his best work is created in the presence of Tadzio, when he has succumbed to a latent urge to abandon his persona, that of the virtuous, upright burgher. (Mann, 1971 : 49). His downfall is precipitated by his eventual and absolute surrender to what Sade would call his "natural instincts".

Andrea Sperelli, in Child of Pleasure, conducts his life in a manner conducive to Schopenhauer's insistence that "all happiness and all gratification is that which is negative" (Schopenhauer, 1970 : 41-2). For Sperelli, life is to be lived surrounded by *luxe*, which should not only be aesthetically acknowledged as beautiful but be steeped in history and so authenticated by past connoisseurs of art. Instant gratification is sought by him at all costs and the natural world is not invited into his reality. In the light of Schopenhauer's thought, both Aschenbach and Sperelli fail in the goals of their existence because they back moderation.

NIETZSCHE

The inherent philosophy of Friedrich Nietzsche's The Birth of Tragedy (1871) is encapsulated by the following theory :

> We shall have gained much for the science of aesthetics, when once we have perceived not only by logical inference, but by the immediate certainty of intuition, that the continuous development of art is bound up with the duplexity of the *Apollonian* and the *Dionysian* : in like manner as procreation is dependent on the duality of the sexes, involving perpetual conflicts with only periodically intervening

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[13] "serious critics" ranked one of his discourses on a par with Schiller's Simple and Sentimental Poetry. (Mann, 1971 : 9)

reconciliations. (Nietzsche, 1909 : 21)

Nietzsche goes on to assert that the ancient Greek deities, Apollo and Dionysus represented, for their worshippers, the duality of art. Dionysus and Apollo, according to Nietzsche represented, specifically :

> a wide antithesis in origin and aims, between the art of the shaper, the Apollonian, and the non-plastic art of music, that of Dionysus : both these so heterogeneous tendencies run parallel to each other, for the most part openly at variance, and continually inciting each other to new and more powerful births. (Nietzsche, 1909 : 21)

The final "pairing" of the deities, says Nietzsche, resulted in the equally Dionysian and Apollonian art-work of Attic tragedy (Nietzsche, 1909 : 22)[14]. Death in Venice is indubitably informed by these distinctions. As noted by many scholars, including R. Hinton Thomas, Mann was influenced heavily by Nietzsche's theory. Thomas claims that Mann focuses attention on a dualism roughly corresponding to Nietzsche's theory of the Apollonian and the Dionysiac. To this Mann is heavily indebted in Death in Venice. (Thomas, 1956 : 61)

Aschenbach, too long under the Apollonian spell creates work which is technically sound and rates with the finest Western literature, but it is work lacking in the vibrancy born of artistic inspiration. The trip to Venice unlocks this latent, repressed urge to indulge in a life dictated by Dionysian influence. The acceptance of the Dionysian force by Aschenbach leads to a piece of writing so pure, that Aschenbach

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[14] That this "pairing" of the deities should result in Greek tragedy is significant in that this art-form is considered by many scholars, past and present, as being the epitome of all art i.e. art in its purest form in a literary sense.

considers it the best he has produced. (Mann, 1971 : 49)

Tadzio, whose very speech evokes music : "Thus the lad's foreign birth raised his speech to music" (Mann, 1971 : 45) stands as a symbol of Dionysus in Aschenbach's Venice. According to the Nietzschean model, music belongs to the realm of Dionysus. That Mann adheres to this model is clear. Tadzio has the sculptural form of the Appoline component of art - he resembles, for Aschenbach, Greek sculpture : "Aschenbach noticed with astonishment the lad's perfect beauty. His face recalled the noblest moment of Greek sculpture [...] the expression of pure and godlike serenity." (Mann, 1971 : 27) And, as has been noted (Mann, 1971 : 45), his voice resembles music, as does the sound of his name. Essentially, then, Tadzio represents Nietzsche's perfect art-form; an intersection of the Dionysian and Apollonian. This use of a third party as a symbol of the perfection which results from a coupling of the manifestations of the Dionysian and Apollonian spirit can be seen in Child of Pleasure : the constant conflation of Elena and Maria in Sperelli's consciousness is crystallised in D'Annunzio's pronouncement on Sperelli's thought : " And again he let his two loves melt into one and form the third - the Ideal". (D'Annunzio, 1991 : 246) Maria, the noble woman with honorable intentions and virtuous conduct stands as a symbol of Apollonian creation, while Elena, the *femme fatale* with predatory instincts belongs to the Dionysian aspect of art[15].

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[15] These women also show evidence of being represented as symbolic of the traditional, (Christian) polarities of Mary and Eve. The implications of this parallel will be made apparent in Chapter Three.

Nietzsche contended that "life is something essentially immoral". (Nietzsche, 1909 : 10). This belief hints at an acceptance of Sade's belief in the feral-like nature of humans[16]. Nietzsche then proposes an antithesis to the belief that immorality or decadent behaviour is a symptom of decline and decay :

> May not morality be a "will to disown life", a secret instinct for annihilation, a principle of decay, of depreciation, of slander, a beginning of the end. (Nietzsche, 1909 : 10)

Like Sade, Nietzsche questions Christianity's role in issues of morality :

> The unconditional will of Christianity to recognise *only* moral values, has always appeared to me as the most dangerous and ominous of all possible forms of a "will to perish". (Nietzsche, 1909 : 10)

The application and exploration of this philosophy in Death in Venice seems obvious : Aschenbach, after a brief period of (Christian)[17] restraint, plunges headlong into his own Dionysian revel, an excursion which proves destructive and ultimately, fatal. He is so controlled by Dionysian influence that he willingly and knowingly abandons a life-time of Apollonian restraint and so hastens his own

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[16] D. B. Allison agrees on Sade's influence on Nietzsche's work : "Nicholas of Cusa and Sade among others would stand as Nietzsche's most recognizable precursors". (Allison, 1985 : xxvii) Of the scholarly works devoted to Nietzsche (which were consulted for this study), Allison is the only writer who notes Nietzsche's indebtedness to Sade. L. H. Hunt, L. Lampert and K. Jaspers, who were consulted for their views as to a possible philosophical connection between Nietzsche and Sade, D'Annunzio and Mann showed no interest in this facet of enquiry, However, F. Copleston notes Thomas Mann's reliance on Nietzsche's application of myth to art : "others, such as Thomas Mann have been influenced by his distinction between the Dionysian and Apollonian outlooks or attitudes". (Copleston, 1965 : 192)

[17] This study will maintain that the notion of Nietzsche's "Appoline" sphere of art corresponds with the concept of Christianity's set of moral norms, while the "Dionysian" sphere corresponds with a neo-pagan or atheist set of moral codes.

demise. This is evinced by his refusal to leave Venice after he is made aware of the threat of cholera in the city and his consumption of over-ripe strawberries, a sure carrier of the disease.

Aschenbach is rendered powerless in the prevention of his own destruction, since he has lived a life securely in the grasp of Apollonian restraint. This one-sided existence has left him ill-equipped to cope with his foray into the reality of the Dionysian sphere. His Christian, moral existence before his sojourn to Venice has, as Nietzsche, and indeed, Schopenhauer, contends, left him defenceless and naive in the face of the sustained and relentless Dionysian impulse.

Similarly, Andrea Sperelli, in Child of Pleasure, owes his personal suffering to a helplessness induced by an inability to exist without a framework of artistic creation. He is unable to successfully navigate his existence through the natural world where art does not mediate. Like Aschenbach, Sperelli's one-sided philosophical approach to life is responsible for his self-destruction.

Unlike Aschenbach, Sperelli is intimately acquainted with the Dionysian reality. This is a world he reveres and by which his existence is governed. The entrance of the Apollonian reality is not given welcome by Sperelli and his incapacity to deal with its manifestations of pragmatism and sobriety cost him the love of both Elena and Maria. Aristotle's "golden mean" is ignored by both Aschenbach and Sperelli and the consequences in each case are dire.

In Thus Spake Zarathustra (1883), Nietzsche proposes the concept of the Übermensch : "I teach you the superman. Man is a thing to be surmounted". (Nietzsche, 1950 : 5) Speaking in neo-Darwinian terms, Nietzsche addresses humankind :

> Ye have trod the way from worm to man, and much in you is yet worm. Once were ye apes, and even yet man is more ape than any ape. But he that is wisest amongst you is but a discord, a hybrid of plant and ghost. But so I bid you become either ghosts or plants? Behold, I teach you the Superman! (Nietzsche, 1950 : 5)

This concept is neither original nor new. It proposes a resurrection of the "Renaissance-man", that is, the human being disposed to action and excellence in endeavour, both intellectually and physically. Perhaps Nietzsche also had in mind the blueprint for "Superman" in the persona of Aristotle, acclaimed in his own time and ours for his excellence in many fields from botany to philosophical discourse, or in the figure of Leonardo Da Vinci, archetypal "Renaissance-man".

Nietzsche's "Übermensch" or "Superman" informs the philosophical background to Child of Pleasure. In his private life, D'Annunzio subscribed to this ideal and his protagonists, including Andrea Sperelli, are motivated by an exploration of this state of being. Sperelli is a man of good taste, a connoisseur of artistic creation, a poet and an artist. His skill as a lover is ironically undermined by a single word, "Elena", the name he utters at an inappropriate moment to Maria (D'Annunzio, 1991 : 306), and an inscription, "*Iche lebe*!" (D'Annunzio, 1991 : 282) written for Elena but observed by Maria. As a poet, that is, a master of the Word, such *faux pas* seem unforgivable. D'Annunzio appears to ascribe Sperelli's downfall to a lack of

excellence, or inattention to the principles of Nietzsche's "Übermensch".

This principle of the human all-rounder appears to be similarly at play in Death in Venice. Gustav von Aschenbach is awarded honours by the literary establishment, yet his existence is characterised by an unhealthy one-sidedness. His efforts at excellence are thwarted because of a concentration and immersion in the Apollonian component of art, and as we have seen, his most beautiful and accomplished piece of work is written at a moment when his instinctual being balances the influences of both Apollo and Dionysus.

DARWIN

The influence of Charles Darwin's theory of evolution on Western philosophical thought has been immense. The Nietzschean cry : "God is dead!" (Nietzsche, 1950 : 5) gains stature and credibility, published, as it was, twenty-five years after the appearance of Darwin's The Origin of the Species (1858). The steady erosion of Christianity's hold on leading thinkers must have gained momentum in the face of scientific evidence that humans, rather than having been created in the image of God, were evolved from primates. Darwin concludes :

> Finally, it may not be a logical deduction, but to my imagination it is far more satisfactory to look at such instincts as the young cuckoo ejecting its foster-brothers, - ants making slaves, - the larvae of ichneumonidal feeding within the live bodies of caterpillars, - not as specially endowed or created instincts, but as small consequences of one general law leading to the advancement of all organic beings, - namely multiply, vary, let the strongest live and the weakest die. (Darwin, 1959 : 284)

Jared M. Becker remarks that D'Annunzio's use of Darwin will cast the whole population of Italy as the triumphant conquerors in the struggle for survival. (Becker, 1990 : 190). Given the evidence gained from the natural sciences, Sade's insistence on human behaviour as being situated within the predator-prey relationship seems justified and contributes to the philosophies inherent in Death in Venice and Child of Pleasure, In both works, God is conspicuously absent and even pagan deities are defined in terms of their contribution to the world of art. The inevitable recurrence of existential enquiry, in the light of Sade's philosophy and Darwin's scientific empiricism, sees a shift from the notion of an omnipotent being in control of human existence to a philosophical debate as to human endeavour within and between the polarities of Art and Nature. The task of Nietzsche's "Übermensch" is to discard the belief of a here-after and to walk the rope between art and nature :

"Man is a rope stretched betwixt beast and Superman - a rope over an abyss".

(Nietzsche, 1950 : 7)

Becker notes the influence that Darwinism had on D'Annunzio's work and sees this influence at play in Child of Pleasure :

> those who prove weak in the struggle for life are cast aside, even obliterated. Thus the protagonists of the "*Romanzi Della Rosa*" Andrea Sperelli, Jullio Hermil, and Giorgio Aurispa, are all debilitated products of their genetic lines and follow the downward course prescribed for *Verismo's* defeated. (Becker, 1990 : 188)

Becker also contends that Darwinism was in many ways responsible for

D'Annunzio's xenophobia and elitism[18] : "Henceforth in his Darwinian schemes D'Annunzio will speak of both dominant individuals and a dominant species or race". (Becker, 1990 : 189)

It is clear that Sade, Mann and D'Annunzio were heavily influenced by the philosophical discourse of their own times, as well as by philosophers of the past, including pagan philosophy inherited from classical antiquity. Rousseau, Diderot, Voltaire, Nietzsche, Schopenhauer and Darwin to a greater or lesser degree were instrumental in the shaping of philosophies espoused by Mann, Sade and D'Annunzio. And as we have seen, these influences dictate the inherent philosophies of Justine, Death in Venice and Child of Pleasure. Pure philosophical discourse is harnessed by these authors in their works to create works of philosophically inspired fiction, a transformation indicative of a desire to institute change within the wider sphere of Western culture.

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[18] This hypothesis finds justification in Child of Pleasure in particular in the scenes where Orientals are portrayed (D'Annunzio, 1991 : 18) and Jews are mentioned (D'Annunzio, 1991 : 58)

CHAPTER TWO

PHILOSOPHICAL DISCOURSE IN JUSTINE, CHILD OF PLEASURE AND DEATH IN VENICE

There can be little doubt that Justine, Child of Pleasure and Death in Venice hold a wealth of philosophical discourse for the careful reader. While each author approaches the issue of what constitutes reality and the truth which is underscored by traditional Western notions of morality, their respective approaches differ in places and converge in others. What is markedly similar among their texts is the desire to expose and question what human society, in particular Western society, accepts as being universal truth.

The following sentiments are expressed by the narrator of the prologue of Justine and set the tone for the novel[1]:

> It makes no difference to the general plan whether such-and-such a one is by preference good or bad, that if misery persecutes virtue and prosperity accompanies crime, those things being as one in Nature's view, far better to join company with the wicked who flourish, than to be counted amongst the virtuous who flounder. (Sade, 1991 : 457)

Sade provides the reader with a glimpse of an alternative philosophical attitude to the reality of the world around us. In a letter addressed to M. de Rousset, (26 January, 1782) Sade wrote : "if my situation is not free of thorns, it often prompts, I must admit, thoughts of an extremely diverting kind of philosophy" (Sade, 1965 : 98). This admission is important for two reasons. Firstly, it shows that Sade's circumstances (i.e. imprisonment and "persecution") have led him to seek out an alternative reality and secondly that this reality is indeed an *alternative*

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[1] That the narrator is disingenuous (presumably as Sade's insurance against the censors) is not in doubt. However, the view expressed here is an entrée into the philosophical stance which pervades the novel.

reality. That is, it is a reality in dialectical opposition to the prevailing reality founded and propagated by Judeo-Christianity. Sade's view of Nature[2] closely resembles Darwin's scientific deductions regarding nature : humans, like all other species are subject to and are governed by a rule of law which dictates that the fittest survive, while the weak must necessarily be at the disposal of the strong, even if this relationship results in hardship, misfortune or death. Angela Carter argues that Justine is on the receiving end "of the pure and impersonal hatred of the strong for the weak" (Carter, 1978 : 39) a deductive, inescapable conclusion also expounded by Maurice Blanchot :

> This philosophy is one of self-interest of absolute egoism : each of us must do exactly as he pleases, each of us is bound by one law alone, that of his own pleasure [...] Nature wills that we be born alone, there is no real contact or relationship possible between one person and another. (Blanchot in Sade, 1991 : 40)

In the same letter dated 26th January 1782, addressed to Mme de Rousset, Sade, with barely concealed contempt, declares : "It well becomes a puny individual of your species to undertake to set limits to nature, decide what it shall tolerate and announce what it forbids!" (Sade, 1965 : 100) Michel Foucault sums up this aspect of Sade's philosophy : "There is nothing that the madness of men invents which is not wither nature made manifest or nature restored". (Foucault, 1966 : 283) That Sade and Foucault share the belief that nature is inseparable from human existence is obvious. Both agree that as part of nature, humans are subject to nature's laws,

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[2] The importance of nature to Sade's discourse is implicit in that nature is given stature by being elevated to those groups of words, including "God", which begin with a capital letter to indicate the importance of the word ; nature is exclusively referred to as Nature.

even if civilisation sees aspects of nature (or humans) as "madness".

Within the bounds of nature, Sade appears to position women in a subordinate role to that of men. Gernande's comments seem to enhance this assertion[3] : " Why! Were it not Nature's intention that one of the sexes tyrannize the other, would she not have created them equally strong?" (Sade, 1991 : 647)

However, like much Sadean thought, what appears dogmatic and self-explanatory is often not so. In this case, Sade sees nature as being a feminine force[4], for him the supreme force governing the universe. Moreover, Dubois[5] and Juliette are characterised as being among the "fittest" even though they are women. Apparently, Sade sees two classes of women. On the one hand the strong, like Dubois and Juliette, and on the other hand Justine and the hordes of women who are abused throughout the novel. Roland Barthes emphasises the dual role of women in Sade's works :

> Women must contrive to represent a paradigmatic area, with two sites, one of which the libertine, a linguistic respectful of the sign, will mark, and the other which he will neutralise. (Barthes, 1971 : 124)

It is to the "weak" women that Sade's brigand philosophers refer when they claim nature's right of the strong to persecute the weak. *Coeur-de-fer*[6] dismisses the

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[3] Count Gernande, one of Justine's persecutors, is described in Justine as "a solitary man, a philosopher" (Sade, 1991 : 628)

[4] The use of the word "she" for "nature" illustrates the point

[5] Dubois, the forty-year old female libertine and criminal in Justine is described by Justine : "as celebrated for her beauty as for the variety and number of her villainies" (Sade, 1991 : 479)

[6] *Coeur-de-fer*, the leader of a "band of thieves" in Justine is characterised by his "bearing the face of a satyr" with the strength of a bull. (Sade, 1991 : 484)

rights of these "weak" women thus :

> It being the intention of Nature that each individual fulfill on this earth all of the purposes for which he has been formed, and women existing only to provide pleasure for men. (Sade, 1991 : 487)

Germande concurs :

> I can agree not to employ force against him whose strength makes him to be feared; but what could motivate me to moderate the effects of my strength upon the being (i.e. *woman*) Nature subordinates to me? (Sade, 1991 : 645)

This is not to say that the Sadean world is one where men are all strong and women all weak. Crime, inspired by the Sadean view of nature, is asexual and only the supremely strong are immune to its effects. Indeed, as Barthes notes,

> In Sadean practice, there is a positive amusement to be gained from sodomising the daughter of a Parliamentary counsellor, or a young Knight of Malta. (Barthes, 1971 : 23)

There is a plethora of comment and justification offered by the Sadean philosophers on the subject of crime. Clément[7] asserts that the magnitude of a crime does not detract from its adherence to the laws of nature :

> Let him then cease to be in a fright, he who meditates a crime or he who has just committed one : the vaster his crime, the better it will serve Nature. (Sade, 1991 : 610)

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[7] Clément, one of the clergyman who metes out abuse to Justine, is described as "fierce" and as being "a satyric personage indeed, a tyrant's exterior" (Sade, 1991 : 561)

Dubois reiterates those sentiments regarding guilt over crime :

> By convincing yourself of crime's nullity, of its necessity with what regards Nature's universal scheme, it would therefore be as possible to vanquish the guilt one would sense after having committed it as it would be to throttle that which would be born from your leaving this room after having received the illegal order to stay here. (Sade, 1991 : 696)

Both characters (i.e. Clemént and Dubois) are used by Sade to advance his theory that crime is a notion invented by Judeo-Christian, civilised society and crime is a set of actions frowned upon by this philosophical position. Guilt, the consequence of sin, in the context of theological thought, is for Sade, a wasted exercise in futility, a point vividly illustrated by both Clemént and Dubois.

Clemént provides the reason why the criminal or libertine should not entertain guilt : crime is a result of the natural forces exerted upon humans by nature, forces which humans are relatively powerless to oppose. He asserts :

> Have we any control over our tastes? Must we not yield to the dominion of those Nature has inserted in us as when before the tempest's force the proud oak bends it head? Were Nature offended by these proclivities, she would not have inspired them in us. (Sade, 1991 : 607)

Rodin[8] similarly claims inertia is at play in human behaviour when confronted by overwhelming impulses instilled by nature :

> There are, furthermore, such virtues as are impossible to certain men,

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[8] Rodin, surgeon and teacher in Justine, is described as having an air that "bespoke ... strength and health but, at the same time, libertinage" (Sade, 1991 : 533)

> now 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)

Even Justine, paragon of virtue, acknowledges nature's hand in human transgression :

> It is then true that there are human creatures Nature reduces to the level of wild beasts! Lurking in this forest, like them flying the sight of man, what difference now exists between them and me? [...] but who can define the spirit of libertinage? For a long time we have realised this to be an enigma of Nature; she has not yet pronounced the magic word. (Sade, 1991 : 503,619)

Pierre Klossowski concludes that "Sade feels quite clearly that transgression is bound up with censorship" (Klossowski, 1986 : 17) That is to say that society, which through laws restricts the behaviour of individuals, is responsible for criminalising behaviour instilled in humans by nature. M. de Bressac justifies crime, specifically murder as being in tune with nature :

> O Thérèse, it is man's pride alone erects murder as a crime. This vain creature, imagining himself the most sublime of the globe's inhabitants, its most essential, takes his departure from this false principle in order to affirm that the deed which results in his undoing can be nothing but an infamy, but his vanity, his lunacy alter the laws of Nature not one jot. Nature does not leave in our hands the possibility of committing crimes which would conflict with her economy. (Sade, 1991 : 519,520)

He affirms this view :

> Equilibrium must be preserved; it can only be preserved by crimes; therefore, crimes serve Nature; if they serve her, if she demands them, if she desires them, can they offend her? And who else can be offended if she is not? (Sade, 1991 : 521)

All the above characters, as can be seen, are at pains to justify their actions to Justine and indeed, the reader. Their comments regarding nature's indifference to their deeds serve to forward rationalisation for Sade's philosophical stance on crime. All of these comments either precede or follow criminal actions enacted by the relevant characters. In a sense, Sade, through these characters' explanations for their crimes, is employing a literary, philosophical device used by Voltaire in his discourses: that is, a proposition followed by an exemplum. In this manner, Sade elevates his theories to the heightened realm of established, respected, philosophical discourse. In addition to this practice, Sade puts in the mouths of his libertine characters the same argument over and over again. This reiteration[9] serves to reinforce Sade's philosophical doctrines concerning human behaviour.

Justine questions Sade's representative philosophers on the issue of crime and its proponents' use of nature to justify their philosophical rationalisation. She asks : "Were there no crimes against Nature, whence would come that insurmountable loathing we experience for certain misdeeds?" (Sade, 1991 : 609) She is answered by Clément and Rodin. Clément retorts :

> That loathing is not dictated by Nature [...] its one source is in the total lack of habit, does not the same hold true for certain foods? Although they are excellent, is not our repugnance merely caused by our being unaccustomed to them? (Sade, 1991 : 609)

This explanation echoes an earlier comment by Rodin who had stated : "It is the law,

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[9] This literary device, also known as "repetition" will be discussed more fully in Chapter Three.

through the fear it inspires, which lessens the pleasure Nature has seen to it v take in crime". (Sade, 1991 : 546)

Clearly, Sade's "philosophers" believe that humans, and the civilisation invented and erected because of a misplaced belief in the justice of the natural world, are misguided. Roland[10] warns against what for him and his ilk is a false belief : civilisation and its created laws ca.. ot ov · de the forces of nature : "Learn that though Civilisation may overthrow the principles of Nature, it cannot however divest her of her rights." (Sade, 1991 : 668)

Saint-Florent [11]reiterates these views on Civilisation in that he establishes nature as an opposing force to human culture :

> Civilisation, by weeding certain individuals out of society, by establishing rank and class [...] immediately puts the desire into his head to relieve the poor in order that he may be helped in his turn should he chance to lose his wealth; and thus was benevolence born, the fruit of civilisation and fear : hence it is merely a circumstantial virtue, but nowise a sentiment originating in Nature. (Sade, 1991 : 661)

Barthes interprets these sentiments as an indication of the inherent cruelty of the Sadean wo"ld-view:

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[10] Roland is rescued by Justine in the novel. Her kindness is repaid by Roland's enslavement of her in a remote retreat where he engages in counterfeiting activities (Sade, 1991 : 667)

[11] Saint-Florent, libertine and paedophile, is called "my butcher" by Justine (Sade, 1991 : 656)

> Sadean society is not cynical, it is cruel; it does not say : there must be poor in order that there be rich; it says the opposite : there must be rich in order that there be poor; wealth is necessary because it contrasts with misfortune. (Barthes, 1971 : 23-4)

However, as argued by Saint-Florent, benevolence is insurance against poverty, it is a "circumstantial virtue". In this light, Barthes sees the cruelty of nature at play in the Sadean world, a reality where virtue is art and evil is nature. Man's cruelty to the poor is consistent with Nature's laws and benevolence is merely the product of wishful thinking. Saint-Florent adds that human benevolence is a subversion of nature: "There is no roguery the wolf will not invent to draw the lamb into his clutches : these are natural ruses, while benevolence has nothing to do with Nature." (Sade, 1991 : 660)

In the same vein, Roland claims that despite civilisation, nature triumphs, since even within the parameters of human culture, nature's hand can be seen in the designation of resources :

> Poverty is part of the natural order; by creating men of dissimilar strength, Nature has convinced us of her desire that inequality be preserved even in those modifications our culture might bring to Nature's laws. (Sade, 1991 : 689)

Sade's point is clearly made : philosophically he asserts that human civilisation is an aberration of nature ; that human desire for equality is based on a naivety born of a culture which vainly challenges the natural order of the universe. Sade focuses on religion, in particular, Christianity, as the cultural institution most at fault for instilling "mistaken" beliefs in human thought. He contends that God is a human construct that has nothing to do with nature. Indeed, both God and Christianity are seen as

nothing more than the fruits of human artistic endeavour. Coeur-de-fer explains :

> Primitive man, terrified by the phenomena which harmed him, had necessarily to believe that a sublime being unknown to him had the direction of their operation and influence [...] the human mind, then too much in its infancy to explore, to discover in Nature's depths the laws of motion, the unique springs of the entire mechanism that struck him with awe, found it simpler to fancy a motor in this nature than to view Nature as her own mover, and without considering that he would have to go to much more trouble to edify, to define this gigantic master, than through the study of Nature to find the cause of what amazed him, he acknowledged this sovereign being [...] first fruit of human blindness. (Sade, 1991 : 496)

M. de Bressac[12] scoffingly adheres to this view :

> If all Nature's productions are the resultant effects of the laws whereof she is a captive; if her perpetual action and reaction suppose the motion necessary to her essence, what becomes of the sovereign master fools gratuitously give her? (Sade, 1991 : 515)

Clemént joins his voice to the debate : "The doctrine of brotherly love is a fiction we owe to Christianity and not to Nature." (Sade, 1991 : 607) It is left to Rodin to articulate Sade's dream of a society where nature's laws hold sway and the intellectual powers of humans are in tune with the predator-prey relationship inherent in nature : "Now I visualise another society neighbouring the first (i.e. Christian society) in this one incest is no crime at all." (Sade, 1991 : 546)[13]

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[12] M. de Bressac, effeminate libertine, is characterised by his extreme adherence to vice : "All the vices which characterise the villain's genius were to be encountered in his". (Sade, 1991 : 510)

[13] Otto Rank notes that in certain historical periods a "shocking" increase in incestuous unions can be noted and cites the French rococo period as an example. He quotes Bloch (1909) who pointed out that in the supplement to "Journey of Bougainville", Diderot declared incest an inconsequential matter (Rank, 1992 : 123). This lends weight to Sade's view of civilisation as a hypocritical institution as it demonstrates that even the learned are unconvinced of the allegedly fixed morals of civilisation.

While Rodin mentions incest as being part of his vision for a society which permits practices now forbidden, his example stands for the whole. All of Sade's "philosophers" envisage the same society - one which allows for instant gratification of desire, regardless of consequence. These "philosophers", as can be seen, articulate Sade's vision of a society which accommodates those with aberrant tastes. Sade's use of repetition as a literary and philosophical device is evident in that *Coeur-de-fer*, M.de Bressac, Clemént and Rodin all propose the same scenario for a certain aspect of society. The effect is to reinforce Sade's point. Through persistent repetition of a salient view-point, Sade achieves a degree of urbane ordinariness to his radical proposals. The reader, after exposure to the same view over and over again is de-sensitised to the horror of Sade's proposals. This technique is used effectively, on a constant basis throughout Justine.

Sade uses the laws of nature as justification for the libertine way of life and proposes an alternative "natural" society that is conducive to the principles of libertinage. This society is necessarily in dialectical opposition to civilisation and Christianity or Art. This proposed society cannot escape being art, but it is art in a different context to the prevailing definitions of art.

For Sade, sex is power with the libertine as supreme ruler and artist. Indeed, it becomes apparent from all of Sade's texts that sexual dominance is a manifestation of nature's instruction ; the lust instilled in all creatures is the surest sign that the idea of a benevolent God is fallacious and that society should renounce God, or art,

an [illegible]e a society where humans act out their nature-given impulses and form

[illegible] where nature-inspired crime and perversion are not punishable.

It is evident that for Sade, art is a by-product of nature. This hypothesis finds resonance in Thomas Mann's Death in Venice, but in a manner more obscure. For Mann, art is a human, creative endeavour which makes sense of the natural universe. Mann declares:

> Art heightens life. She gives deeper joy, she consumes more swiftly. She engraves adventures of the spirit and the mind in the faces of her votaries; let them lead outwardly a life of the most cloistered calm, she will in the end produce in them a fastidiousness, an over-refinement, a nervous fever and exhaustion, such as a career of extravagant passions and pleasures can hardly show. (Mann, 1971 : 15)

The first sentence of this passage in many ways reveals not only Mann's pronouncements on art, but shows his attitude towards nature : if "Art heightens life", and life is necessarily the product of nature, then nature, for Mann is the given reality, a reality incomplete without artistic and aesthetic embellishment. Art, in this sense becomes a spiritual and intellectual entity that enlivens and gives meaning and purpose to the life which nature has bequeathed to human-kind.

In this context, the artist becomes the prophet. Speaking of Aschenbach, Mann clearly articulates this hypothesis : "he sacrificed to art, in two or three hours of almost religious fervour, the powers he had assembled in sleep." (Mann, 1971 : 10)

Joseph Gerard Brennan highlights Mann's hypothesis that the artist mediates between art and nature :

> The task of the artist is revealed [by Mann] as a hermetic mission between nature and spirit, the metaphysical function of art as its joining of the two realms. (Brennan, 1942 : xiii)

The artist/prophet, then, exists between art and nature. He mediates and presumably tempers what might be called the volatile relationship between the two. The religion which the artist/prophet upholds is necessarily art, since that is the business of the artist. How then can he mediate between nature and art since his intellectual bias is rooted in art? Mann is indebted to Nietzsche's theory of art which he represents through the pagan deities, Apollo and Dionysus. This deduction is articulated by T.J. Reed who notes :

> He [i.e. Mann] distinguishes between the 'Dionysiac spirit of irresponsible individualistic lyric effusion' and the 'Apolline spirit of epic with its moral and social responsibilities and objective limitations'. (Reed, 1996 : 151)

Mann himself says of Aschenbach : "The union of dry, conscientious officialdom and ardent, obscure impulse, produced an artist". (Mann, 1971 : 8) Clearly, Aschenbach is a product of the "Apollonian" and "Dionysian" spirits, born as he was of a staid bourgeois father and a bohemian, free-spirited mother. Little wonder that the greatest and final drama of his life is acted out in Venice, the city which most aptly epitomises the blending of East and West, not only in architecture and geographic location, but in culture and religion. Venice is indubitably the meeting point of Western Christianity and Eastern paganism. Aschenbach, as a citizen of Germany, was necessarily grounded in Christian morality and Christian culture. He is largely content with the status-quo of his existence, characterised by Christian virtues of diligence, hard-work and austerity, but it proves to be inhibiting : "he had

confined himself to close range, had hardly stepped outside the charming city". (Mann, 1971 : 6) This confinement is literal, but serves as a metaphysical discontent with the austerity of his life, steeped as it is within the enclosure of Christian thought, and in particular, of Christian morality. Up until his departure for Venice, Aschenbach had lived within the parameters of art and knowledge circumscribed by the restrictions of Judeo-Christian culture, a reality he has never really questioned. However, as an artist, his search for truth ultimately leads to a curiosity of such intensity that his entire existence is disrupted. He consciously seeks a new philosophical reality because his success, his artistic labour, has begun to overwhelm him with a weariness for things known, an *ennui* which will lead to his search for an alternative philosophical reality. Mann expressly conveys this in the following passage :

> This yearning for new and distant scenes, this craving for freedom, release, forgetfulness - they were he admitted flight, flight from the spot which was the daily theatre of a rigid, cold and passionate service. (Mann, 1971 : 7)

More telling is the comment that Aschenbach's work, grounded as it is in the Christian philosophical framework, affords him no pleasure :

> But he got no joy of it - not though a nation paid it homage [...] What sapped his strength was distaste for the task, betrayed by a fastidiousness he could no longer satisfy. (Mann, 1971 : 7)

Everything to which Aschenbach has subscribed has become meaningless. His life, his culture, his art, has become redundant, and his reality has been found wanting. It is the artist's thirst for truth which instinctively propels him towards

Venice, where an alternative reality does indeed present itself to him. This reality is concretised in the form of Tadzio and symbolised by the ethereal tiger which is cholera, the natural force which fells him because of his unquestionable thirst for the visual beauty presented by Tadzio.

It is a reality where sexual taboos are forgotten. It is a reality, where the morality of Aschenbach's Judeo-Christian upbringing no longer applies, and it is a reality where the sexual culture of paganism finds expression. The homo-erotic institution of the *pagan Greek eràstes* and *eramènos* is re-enacted; a relationship which paired young boys and adult males. The role of the mature male was overtly one of mentor and teacher but was covertly one where homosexual activity, albeit without penetration, was countenanced.

Mann must have intended the reader to notice the parallel between this homo-erotic practice acceptable to Greek antiquity and the "relationship" that forms between Aschenbach and Tadzio, since he devotes considerable space to a portion of a speech from Plato's Phaedrus (Mann, 1971 : 76-7). The contents of Phaedrus contain the discourse on beauty between Socrates and Phaedrus. The relationship between Socrates (the mature male) and Phaedrus (the youth) is implicit in the text and is well-documented by classicists. The nature of this relationship conformed to the practice of acceptable pederasty.

Aschenbach and Tadzio mirror this relationship and together with the example of Socrates and Phaedrus offer humanity an alternative cultural stance to the prevalent

status-quo. That this man-boy relationship is pointing to the contemplation of a dialectically opposed way of seeing life is implied in the text by the journey Aschenbach makes from Germany to Italy. His journey is physical as well as intellectual. Exhausted and "with his heavy discontent. What he needed was a break, an interim existence". (Mann, 1971 : 8) Aschenbach cannot find peace within his own philosophical ambit and his intellectual journey has at its primary motive the pursuit of a more meaningful reality than he feels the present one affords him.

Essentially, Aschenbach moves from the cerebral to the manifest. His life has been characterised by a sober regard for his work and neglect of his private life[14]. There are no great passions in his past, no great loves. He has no defences with which to counter the onslaught of beauty. And it is here that the answer to the question posed earlier in the chapter lies : how can Aschenbach as artist/prophet mediate between nature and art when his roots lie in art? The "new" reality requires beauty as its divine force. The discourse between Socrates and Phaedrus alerts the reader to this unequivocal conclusion but throughout the *novella*, the reader is told this. In particular, the descriptions of Tadzio on whom the concept of beauty is centred, tell of the divinity inherent in the beautiful and the aesthetic :

> What he [i.e. Aschenbach] saw was beauty's very essence; from as divine thought, the single and pure perfection which resides in the mind, of which an image and likeness, rare and holy, was here raised up for adoration. (Mann, 1971 : 46)

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[14] The description of his wife and family occupies only four lines in the book (Mann, 1971 : 15)

Here, the figure of Tadzio is raised, in its form, to a god-like creation. But it is not a god from the Judeo-Christian religion. Tadzio recalls the greatest moments of pagan civilisation[15] : "Aschenbach noticed with astonishment the lad's perfect beauty. His face recalled the noblest moment of Greek sculpture". (Mann, 1971 : 26) However, it is not that Tadzio is a creation purely of art. We are expressly told that :

> With all this chaste perfection of form it was of such unique personal charm that the observer thought he had never seen, either in nature or art, anything so utterly happy and consummate[16] (Mann, 1971 : 27)

Paraphrasing Mann, Brennan supports the view articulated by Mann in the *novella* that beauty and its artist/prophet mediate between art and nature :

> No artist has all the characteristics of nature and none of spirit, nor has any artist all the characteristics of spirit and none of nature. Every artist, since he is a human being, has a double alliance with nature and spirit. Through art comes a union of the two kingdoms. (Brennan, 1942 : 179, 180)

Similarly, Vernon Venable asserts :

> The dualism or polarity which always characterises Mann's subject-matter. Such large antitheses as life and death, time and individuality, fertility and decay, flesh and spirit, invariably constitute the themes of

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[15] This impression is strengthened by Tadzio's Eastern heritage - he is Polish. In addition, his exotic home-language creates a furthering of the artistic impression his personage creates : "thus the lad's foreign birth raised his speech to music" (Mann, 1971 : 45)

[16] And later : "the figure of the half grown lad, a masterpiece from nature's own hand" (Mann, 1971 :33) : that is, that Tadzio is a product of nature, but ambivalently also the progeny of art : art is born of nature and art owes its existence to nature.

his novels[17]. ((Venable in Neider, 1947 : 129)

This duality can be found in the form of Tadzio. While he is described in terms of god-like divinity and sculptural perfection, he nevertheless exhibits a certain degree of impurity. We are told that :

> Tadzio's teeth were imperfect, rather jagged and bluish, without a healthy glaze, and of that peculiar brittle transparency which the teeth of chlorotic people often show. (Mann, 1971 : 36)

In addition, his personality is not without flaw. He is described as Jaschiu's "victim" and is called the "vanquished" to Jaschiu's "victor" (Mann, 1971 : 78). That he is petulant at having his supremacy physically questioned, is obvious : " The others called him, at first gaily, then imploringly : he would not hear". (Mann, 1971 : 78) So, not even the ideal beauty of Socrates' discourse and the cause of Aschenbach's degeneration is perfect. Since beauty is the meeting point of nature and art, it necessarily reflects the duality of its progenitors. Similarly, the artist evinces this duality :

> Who shall unriddle the puzzle of the artist nature? Who understands that mingling of discipline and licence in which it stands so deeply rooted? (Mann, 1971 : 50)

This rhetorical question is implicitly answered during the course of the text : the artist, in the search for perfection and truth must strike a balance between the

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[17] While this statement correctly applies to Death in Venice, it is equally applicable to both Justine and Child of Pleasure. All three novels make use of polarities, justifiably so, since all three texts examine the existing reality in relation to an alternative moral and philosophical reality. In this particular instance, the tropes of literary decadence are highlighted by Venable, pointing out Mann's use of elements characteristic of literary decadence.

acceptable and the forbidden. No ordinary mortal, the artist must mediate between art and nature, and in this role of prophet, should not be subject to the restrictions imposed on the average citizen. To deprive the artist of freedom of thought or action is to deprive humanity of excellence in artistic creativity, according to Mann. Duality is inherent in Venice, city of beauty, a symbol of art's mastery over nature in that it is largely constructed on water. Venice is at once a triumph of architecture and ingenious engineering but conceals a deadly disease, cholera. Beneath the aesthetic facade of Venice lies the Asian tiger-cholera, threat to the human body. The Venice of human artistic endeavour is mirrored by nature in the canals and lagoons which form its base; Aschenbach's calm, sober, reflective nature hides the Dionysian madness of nature which is released by the mystery of Tadzio and Venice and Tadzio's beauty is symbolic of these dualities : he is perfect beauty that cannot escape imperfection.

What then is the nature of beauty of which Mann speaks? We have established that it is characterised by the opposites of perfection and imperfection and that it is spawned by both nature and art, and that the artist/prophet mediates these dialectical polarities. Roy Pascal describes the artist which re-occurs throughout Mann's earlier works :

> Art, his joy, is also his torture, for his delight in expression and his consciousness of spiritual distinction are attended by a painful recognition that he is unfit for life, even that his art is sheer pretence. These are the normal terms for the "decadents" of the turn of the century. But Thomas Mann's attitude differed from theirs. He described himself in 1918 as "coming from decadence, but with the emancipatory will to repudiate it". (Pascal, 1956 : 260)

This appears to be valid, since decay, sickness and most importantly, beauty, which is in some way tainted are prevalent in his work. However, to argue that this decadence of expression is repudiated by Mann, even if Mann himself admits to this, is surely not substantiated by Death in Venice. All the elements of decadent philosophy and literary application are present. Disease, death, homo-eroticism, abandonment of rational thought and behaviour in favour of immoral pursuit are evident in the text. As further noted by Pascal :

> 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)

That Aschenbach, the artist, begins to adopt "criminal" behaviour, cannot be in doubt. He adopts what can only be described as a disguise when he visits the barber and has his hair dyed and his face painted (Mann, 1971 : 74); he consciously stalks Tadzio through Venice, hiding in alleyways when he believes he has been spotted by Tadzio's minders (Mann, 1971 : 58) and he purposefully declines to alert the object of his worship to the cholera which threatens those unaware : "'It must be kept quiet', he whispered fiercely. 'I will not speak!'" (Mann, 1971 : 70)

Even worse, Aschenbach revels in his decision not to speak, even though the consequences of his silence could easily result in death :

> The knowledge that he shared the city's secret, the city's guilt - it put him beside himself, intoxicated him as a small quantity of wine will a man suffering from brain-fag (Mann, 1971 : 70)

Aschenbach has degenerated swiftly from the upstanding burgher, a man respected

by a nation, because he has forsaken the Apolline influence and accepted the Dionysian impulse too wholeheartedly : "His art, his moral sense, what were they in the balance beside the boons that chaos might confer? He kept silence, he stopped on". (Mann, 1971 : 70) This, from a man who :

> was the poet-spokesman of all those who labour at the edge of exhaustion; of the over-burdened, of those who are already worn out but still hold themselves upright; of all our modern moralisers of accomplishment, with stunted growth and scanty resources, who yet contrive by skilful husbanding and prodigious spasms of will to produce, at least for a while, the effect of greatness. (Mann, 1971 : 12)

J.M. Lindsay remarks : "This story is about unwholesome things, but no moral judgement is passed and the effect is enhanced by this procedure". (Lindsay, 1954 : 42) The lack of moral judgement is precisely the ingredient which lends the text its uneasy mystery. Admittedly, Aschenbach is the stalker, who is himself stalked and annihilated by the tiger cholera, but T.J. Reed quotes Mann : " As Mann later said, the death of a character is not in itself a judgement on what he stands for". (Reed, 1996 : 162) Brennan eloquently concludes, that for Mann:

> Beauty, therefore, cannot be fulfilled through either nature or spirit alone. There must be a journey of the two kingdoms. In man, *homo humanus* and *homo Dei*, nature and spirit find their point of contact. In the artist and in his work they achieve their highest interpenetration. (Brennan, 1942 : 187)

Mann, in Death in Venice, offers two definitions of Aschenbach's art. He says : "And art was war - a grilling, exhausting struggle that nowadays wore one out before one could grow old". (Mann, 1971 : 60) Mann also deduces that,

> Men do not know why they award fame to one work of art rather than

> another. Without being in the faintest connoisseurs, they think to justify the warmth of their commendations by discovering in it a hundred virtues, whereas the real ground of their applause is inexplicable - it is *sympathy.* (Mann, 1971 : 11)

This is later re-inforced by the description of Tadzio as art :

> The figure of the half-grown lad, a masterpiece from nature's own hand, had been significant enough when it gratified the eye alone; and now it evoked *sympathy* as well. (Mann, 1971 : 33)

Sympathy, then, is the emotion evoked by a great work of art, and Tadzio evokes this feeling in Aschenbach, as the above quotation shows. Significantly, this feeling is accompanied by Aschenbach's assertion that nature, (the same force which in the form of the cholera personified in the tiger, a product of nature) has formed Tadzio. In short, nature gives birth to art and the fable inherent in Death in Venice must surely be that neither art nor nature should be trifled with, in the sense that both are powerful and both create a beauty so strong that the naive and weak are subjected to its dominion.

Aschenbach's intellectual and spiritual journey to Venice ends in death because his attitude to perfect beauty is one of surrender rather than contemplation. Moderation has always been alien to his life and will contribute to his death, a death which is largely suicidal : he knows that death lurks in Venice, yet he knowingly, even reverently embraces a fate which need not necessarily be his. He has embraced "Decadence-as-a-Philosophy" too literally and must face the consequences - the ultimate penalty - Death.

D'Annunzio's Child of Pleasure, like Mann's Death in Venice highlights the role of the artist within the confines of the society in which he lives and creates. According to D'Annunzio's interpretation of Darwinism, discarding "humility" and "Christian" sentiments is the best way to get ahead as an artist, and the best way to make a reputation for oneself. Moreover, D'Annunzio obviously takes zestful enjoyment in this Darwinian challenge : "to be bold, to struggle furiously, to claim a place in the sun are just what he relishes most." (Becker, 1990 : 184)

The impact of the infusion of Darwinism into D'Annunzio's work has been established[18]. Becker speaks of a certain philosophical thought prevalent in certain societies which used Darwin's scientific theories as justification for elitist thought and practice. D'Annunzio's private and public lifestyle, flamboyant as it was, adds credence to this assertion. The text, similarly, shows evidence for this viewpoint : D'Annunzio deals almost exclusively with the elite of society and Andrea Sperelli, the protagonist of Child of Pleasure, is himself an aristocrat living a life of leisure, where currency is pleasure to be gleaned from artistic appreciation and participation.

D'Annunzio's public persona was characterised by military involvement and political aspiration. These activities in some way, owed their origins to a belief in the superiority of Italian society over other races, a view enhanced for D'Annunzio by Darwin's findings and Nietzschean philosophy. His support of the fascist, Mussolini, is telling of his own personal philosophy, a philosophy incorporated into his art, in

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[18] See Chapter One

particular in Child of Pleasure. Elements of this philosophy are apparent in the portrayal of the oriental character, Cavaliere Sakumi in Child of Pleasure. He is described as being "very small and yellow"; he blinks incessantly, his body is too large for his "spindly" legs; his attire is creased and unfashionable; his language is described as "barbarous jargon"; his ungainliness is owed partly to the fact that he is "pigeon-toed" and most tellingly, he resembles a "monstrous crustacean" thrust into the clothes of a "European waiter". (D'Annunzio, 1991 : 5) The feral-like qualities apportioned him by nature via the pen of D'Annunzio, alert the reader to the philosophical discourse inherent in the text : all the Italian characters are described in terms of art, that is, they are compared favourably with revered works of art, using the technique of ekphrasis[19], while the oriental, Sakumi, is described in terms of nature. There can be no doubt as to the importance of artistic creation and aesthetics to D'Annunzio's work, while it is also clear that nature serves art. In D'Annunzio's world-view, art supersedes nature. This point is vividly illustrated by the description of Sakumi as a "crustacean" who is in the service of others. Jews are similarly marginalised by D'Annunzio in the text :

> They were on their way to the Jewish cemetery. It was a grim and silent funeral. The men with their hooked noses and rapacious eyes were all as like one another as brothers. (D'Annunzio, 1991 : 58)

It is apparent that Jews are not part of the society which D'Annunzio sees as the elite in civilisation. They are here given stereotypical features and their

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[19] Refer to page 26 for a more detailed explanation of this technique.

separateness is enhanced by the fact that they bury their dead in a place different from that of Italian Christians : they live and die away from mainstream society. In Becker's words :

> In his Darwinian schemes D'Annunzio will speak of both dominant individuals and a dominant species or race [...] D'Annunzio turns to the social context as the playing field for Darwinian conflict. (Becker, 1990 : 189, 185)

It is not only foreigners who are relegated to the periphery of society. The poor and the weak are treated disdainfully. When Sperelli encounters a crowd of protestors engaged in a political march, his annoyance and disdain are evident : "And all this for four hundred brutes who died the death of brutes! Murmured Andrea, withdrawing his head from the carriage window." (D'Annunzio, 1991 : 224) This same distaste for the reality of poverty can also be seen in his treatment of the peasant's sick child (D'Annunzio, 1991 : 63). Sperelli's refusal to feel compassion or empathy for those less fortunate has its roots in neo-Sadean philosophy :

> The substratum of primitive ferocity which exists at the bottom of most of us rushes to the surface, on occasion, with curious vehemence, and under the skin-deep varnish of modern civilisation, our hearts swell sometimes with a nameless sanguinary fury, and visions of carnage rise up before us. (D'Annunzio, 1991 : 79)

This assertion forms the basis for D'Annunzio's stance on nature, art and their effect on human nature : humans cannot escape their origins in nature. For D'Annunzio and Andrea Sperelli, the "brute" is in all of us, given that we are from, and are part of nature. But it is art and the beautiful which offers salvation from an existence that is in essence, one of cruelty and barbarism. The protagonists in the novel embrace

and surround themselves with art in an attempt to banish the uncertainties of nature. For example, Andrea "was, so to speak, thoroughly impregnated with art" (D'Annunzio, 1991 : 23) and Maria, in her diary declares : "I am as if intoxicated with art" (D'Annunzio, 1991 : 148). Both characters, in their respective ways, are doomed. Maria's husband is disgraced and reduced to poverty, while Andrea loses both Maria and Elena and faces a bleak future. If art is the redeemer of nature, and both Andrea and Maria are steeped in its "worship", why then are their lives not exalted? The answer appears to be that both are too emphatically grounded in artistic endeavour and pursuit to the detriment of the other facets of their lives. Like Thomas Mann's Aschenbach and Sade's Justine, Maria and Andrea live in a lop-sided world of their own making. Aschenbach, Andrea and Maria embrace Nietzsche's Dionysian perspective of art too fully, while Justine refuses to acknowledge its role in existence. D'Annunzio writes :

> Andrea Sperelli came back to life renewed in body and spirit - like another man, like a creature risen out of the icy waters of death, with a mind swept bare of all that has gone before. The past had receded into the dim perspective, the troubled waters had calmed, the mud sunk to the bottom; his soul was cleansed. (D'Annunzio, 1991 : 95)

Darwinism is evident in this description of Sperelli's rebirth and recalls the crustacean associations attached to Cavaliere Sakumi, although here, Sperelli rises above this state, since he belongs to the elitist, aristocratic, civilised sector of society. D'Annunzio makes it clear that it is nature which restores Sperelli's body and spirit : "He returned to the bosom of Mother Nature, and he felt her re-inforce him maternally with goodness and with strength". (D'Annunzio, 1991 : 95)

Evidently, for D'Annunzio, nature is at the core of human existence; she nourishes and nurtures her creations. This is not to say that she is a force of certainty. After the lessons of convalescence are long-forgotten and Sperelli has returned to a decadent existence with renewed vigour, in a moment of lucidity, he acknowledges, "I am unstable as water, incoherent, inconsistent, a very chameleon". (D'Annunzio, 1991 : 247)

His recognition that nature is capricious, in many ways explains his service to art : in art, there is a certain fixity. Time and space are re-created without regard to nature. Beauty, once expounded by the artist is static. And for D'Annunzio the artist, a new society must inevitably rest on the premises set by nature, which can nevertheless be created by applying the human-set rules of art to civilisation. As Sperelli ignores the world outside of his social ambit (with a certain amount of success) so society can create a new philosophical reality which focuses on the beauty to be found in nature, a beauty which is shaped and controlled by humans.

This ability of humans to re-shape nature and for artistic endeavour to "re-create" the natural environment for human consumption is vividly illustrated in the commentary on two women's attire given by Elena :

> She had on a dress of yellow tulle covered with humming-birds with ruby eyes - a gorgeous dancing bird-cage? And Lady Ouless - did you notice her? - in a white gauze skirt draped with sea-weed and little red fishes, and under the sea-weed and fish another skirt of sea-green gauze - did you see it? - a most effective aquarium. (D'Annunzio, 1991 : 8)

Couture renders nature in a palatable form for the appreciation of human nature : "Mary Dyce, in a red dress, slender and undulating as a tongue of fire"[20]. (D'Annunzio, 1991 : 20) Nature is clearly in the service of art and in a manner of speaking, supersedes, overwhelms and colonises nature. Even furniture has nature's hand : " A tall bronze crane held in his beak a tray". (D'Annunzio, 1991 : 15)

D'Annunzio speaks of art's ability to create order, to in some way negate the chaos of nature which surrounds civilisation :

> Men of intellect, educated in the cult of the beautiful, preserve a certain sense of order even in their worst depravities. The conception of the beautiful is, so to speak, the axis of their being, round which all their passions revolve. (D'Annunzio, 1991 : 27)

Indeed, art for D'Annunzio can circumvent the natural processes of reality : "A perfect line of verse is absolute, immutable, deathless". (D'Annunzio, 1991 : 103) The use of nature as a source of inspiration for the artist is not confined to the elements, plants and animals. Andrea Sperelli is urged by his father not to accept

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[20] This description appears to allude to the prevailing artistic movement of the time : Art Nouveau. Maria Constantino asserts that the term " is applied to a style of architecture, figurative and applied arts that flourished in the last decades of the nineteenth century and the early years of the twentieth." (Constantino, 1989 : 16). Pertinent to this study, Constantino describes the *leitmotifs* of Art Nouveau as being characterised by "the whiplash curve" and "curving biomorphic forms" and declares that "Art Nouveau shows the last vestiges of a unity in European culture and the continuous interchange of ideas within it." (Constantino, 1989 : 16). This sentiment pervades Child of Pleasure, where D'Annunzio constantly refers to Italian culture as occupying a position of rapid decay. Mary Dyce's dress, reminiscent of fire, articulates his belief that Italian civilisation is approaching "burn-out".

nature's gifts without metamorphosising them into his life :

> His father had given him the following : you must *make* your own life as you would any other work of art. The life of a man of intellect should be of his own designing : herein lies the only true superiority. (D'Annunzio, 1991: 24)

A too literal interpretation of this maximum, or at least an oblique understanding of this advice leads Sperelli to personal, spiritual ruin. He chooses to steep his life in sensual experience and ignores the power his talents have given him. However, he is not entirely to blame for this excessive delving into pleasure. He is surrounded by like-minded people; members of the upper-classes who glorify art to the *nth* degree. Maria, the object of shallow desire for Andrea speaks of her attraction for him in terms of art : " and that enthusiasm for art which is one of his most potent attractions". (D'Annunzio, 1991 : 157)

Andrea's aesthetic sensibilities render him attractive to Maria, although it is precisely this over-enthusiasm for the beautiful which will prove his undoing. Others, in the novel, are given approval for the artistic implementation of mundane, natural activities : " Very few women could compete with the Marchesa d' Ateleta in the art of dinner giving". (D'Annunzio, 1991 : 7)

Even the washing of hands is elevated by Elena into an art : "She dipped her fingers into warm water in a pale blue finger-glass rimmed with silver". (D'Annunzio, 1991 : 14) So too, is drinking : "He [Andrea] had a vision of the May bazaar, and the

men drinking champagne out of those [Elena's] hollowed palms". (D'Annunzio, 1991 : 19)

Umberto Franzoni rightly contends that this decadent conversion of the mundane to the sensually sublime is sparked by a need to nullify the effects of naturalism or *verismo* prevalent in Italian literature of the time. D'Annunzio,

> tries to react polemically against that image of the grey and anonymous life usually showed by Naturalist writers. He tries to replace it by means of his verbal power which can, so to speak, translate the normal appearance of reality into new over-refined forms. (Franzoni, 1981 : 53)

Franzoni sees evidence of this attempt to create a new reality in the behaviour of Andrea Sperelli who is "Oriented towards an aesthetic ideal of life; existence has a value only in so far as can be translated into a series of over-refined moments (aesthetic experiences)". (D'Annunzio, 1991 : 61) G.L. Lucente concurs with this view :

> D'Annunzio's self-proclaimed turn-of-the-century hero becomes, in Fredric Jameson's terms, a "post-individual" subject who finally refuses to acknowledge either the present nature of the material world of the bourgeoisie in *fin-de-siécle* Italy or his position in that world. (Lucente, 1986 : 114)

Andrea Sperelli and the society which he inhabits displays a tendency to look backwards in history. This assertion is borne out by the many sales to which the elite flock to buy *objets d'arts* from an era not of their own. Sperelli equates paintings of acknowledged masters with the real-life people he meets. Everything

for him, and others of his social milieu, is consumed in terms of artistic creation, especially that art which speaks through history. This feeling for the past which Andrea embraces begins in the Roman Empire, a period of voluptuous decadence. The many racial allusions, oblique and overt, alert the reader to the fact that D'Annunzio is enamoured of a vision of Italy as a race of conquering, superior people, to whom others acquiesce and show admiration.

As has been mentioned earlier, there is ample evidence to suggest that D'Annunzio formulated his particular approach to literature in an attempt to counter a plethora of Naturalist literary practice [21]. D'Annunzio obviously saw the portrayal, in literature, of commoners as a sign of the disintegration and dilution of the Italian spirit of greatness. Becker argues :

> D'Annunzio unfolds the political meaning he attributes to contemporary degeneracy. It is socialism [...] that, in his eyes, has led to the current decline. For him, the levelling politics of the socialist is directed against all nobility. (Becker, 1990 : 99)

Charles Klopp emphasises this aspect of D'Annunzio's political philosophy in Child of Pleasure :

> The 1880s that serve as background for *Il Piacere* were a time of political and social crisis for the still-fledgling Italian state. Although it treats them only in passing, the novel contains several references to such critical issues of the day as public demonstrations by the increasingly organised Italian workers, the failure of Italy's colonial

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[21] The most prominent proponents of this style of literature were Emile Zola in France and Giovanni Verga in Italy, who although also influenced by Darwinism, chose to interpret its premises as a socialist struggle, where the plight of the poor and unfortunate was aired.

> adventures in Africa, and - in the episode of the sickly baby whom the protagonists Elena and Andrea encounter in its first chapter - the country's lamentable public health conditions. (Klopp, 1988 : 37)

These assertions by Klopp and Becker are given import when one considers D'Annunzio's comments in Child of Pleasure :

> The grey deluge of democratic mud, which swallows up so many beautiful and rare things, is likewise gradually engulfing that particular class of the old Italian nobility in which from generation to generation were kept alive certain family traditions of eminent culture, refinement and art. (D'Annunzio, 1991 :22)

Clearly, for D'Annunzio, the untrammelled wave of humanity, previously disadvantaged by a class system in place for centuries, represented a threat to Italian traditions, culture and art. D'Annunzio sees himself as responsible for providing a world view which philosophically aims to alert the reader to ensure that a halt to the "degeneracy" of Italy can be achieved by a return to elitism, a state in which he believes art can be saved from the hordes demanding their democratic rights.

Art, it seems, in D'Annunzio's scheme, will be the victim of these rights and the philosophy of Nietzsche and the scientific discoveries of Darwin inform his quest to bring to civilisation a reality that acknowledges nature, but transforms its "baseness" into greatness through art.

What becomes apparent is that Sade, D'Annunzio and Mann draw from the work of philosophers of their time and before, and use theoretical ideology to enhance their

own philosophical view-points. The use of established philosophers' work (as well as Darwin's scientific findings) appears to be an attempt to lend substantiation and credence to their own literary endeavours. However, it would be incorrect to surmise that this borrowing is literal. On the contrary, the work of philosophers is often used in a subversive way in order to show their advancement of an alternative world reality.

CHAPTER THREE

SEXUAL DECADENCE

Sexual decadence in Justine, Child of Pleasure and Death in Venice is pervasive. Indeed, *all* sexual encounters experienced by the characters in these works are of an extremely decadent nature. This behaviour is in large measure ascribed to the "natural" leanings of the artist's nature. Aschenbach and Sperelli are portrayed as artists and their right to amoral behaviour is asserted by their creators (Mann and D'Annunzio, respectively) by virtue of their artistic leanings.

Similarly, Sade's libertines, as they are portrayed in Justine, are all artists in that they are philosophers, devoting much of their intellectual energy as spokespeople for Sade's amoral ideology. In addition to artistic, philosophical pursuit, Sade's libertine/artists are sexually creative, inventing ever new scenarios to appease their appetites for decadent, sexual relations. While Mann's character, Aschenbach is devoted to the written word and D'Annunzio's protagonist, Sperelli dabbles in fine art and poetry, Sade's characters with libertine leanings explore sexuality as an art-form, albeit art in its most decadent manifestation.

Elaine Showalter says of the "decadent aesthetic" that his aim was to reject "all that was natural and biological in favour of the inner life of art, artifice, sensation and imagination" (Showalter, 1991 : 170) This pronouncement clearly reflects the behaviour and attitudes of the "sexual artists" in all three works under discussion. Clément, Sade's libertine clergyman, exhorts:

> Let us accustom ourselves to evil and it will not be long before we find it charming; this momentary revulsion is certainly a shrewdness, a kind of coquetry on the part of Nature. (Sade, 1991 : 609)

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