

Kostas Boyiopoulos and Mark Sandy, editors.
Decadent Romanticism: 1780–1914

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The book, a collection of twelve essays, focuses on the works of Romanticism and Decadence from 1780 to 1914, containing intriguing insights into traditional views of the Decadents. Furthermore, some theories illustrated in it bring new sensations to the academic world of the research on Romanticism. Discerning readers, therefore, would enjoy their creative theories like music. Indeed, as noted in the introduction, the essays are not only highly reassessing the reactions of Decadent authors to Romanticism, but carefully probing into the distorted and shadowy sides of the Romantic imagination. Under the declining sunlight, the beauty of death and life can shine most fearful and brilliant.

Anna Barton develops her critical perspective of British Decadence in Chapter 1, “Perverse Forms: Reading Blake’s Decadence,” featuring Blake’s poetic innovations and explicating how Swinburne read Blake’s perversity. She concludes that Swinburne achieved the Decadent perversity. In Chapter 2, “Incest on the Romantic Stage: Baillie, Byron, and the Shelleys,” Frederick Burwick covers the incest plays of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. The perverse recognition that sibling incest became ideal rather than shameful is considered a turning point in the incest drama of the Romantic period. Burwick elucidates the objections aroused by *Adelaide of Wulfingen; or, The Dreadful Secret*. Bernard Beatty examines in Chapter 3, “Wordsworth’s and Byron’s Links with British and French Decadence,” the traditional ideas on Wordsworth’s and Byron’s relations with Decadence. He investigates Pater’s relationship with Wordsworth and Baudelaire’s with Byron, adding that to the eyes of French Decadent poets, Byron is largely

“Byron” whereas Pater’s and De Quincey’s “Wordsworth” is almost Wordsworth. In Chapter 4, “‘Enchanted wine’: Symons, Dowson, and Keats’s Intoxications,” Kostas Boyiopoulos discusses Keats’s poetic intoxication, referring to Harry Buxton Forman’s edition of *Letters of John Keats to Fanny Brawn* (1878). He adds that Keats’s poems, such as “Hermoine de Almeida,” worked as a drug, and concludes that Symons, Dowson, and Keats had in common the Decadent “intoxication” through the experience of “*pharmakon*.” Sarah Wootton, in Chapter 5, “Keats’s Visual Legacy in Book Illustration at the Turn of the Century,” quoting a phrase from Oscar Wilde, elucidates Keats as a “priest of Beauty” by way of explaining illustrations. She defines the period of mainly from 1881 to 1911 as Keats’s book age, in which there were ornate illustrations and decorations, and Wootton concludes that the illustrations represented some of the most visually arresting and imaginative response to Keats’s poetry. In Chapter 6, “Enigmatic Intertexts: Decadence, De Quincey, and the Sphinx,” Alex Murray, expounding on the affinities between Wordsworth and G.W. Hegel, discusses De Quincey’s influence on Symons, Wilde, and Machen in reference to the intertextuality between De Quincey and the decadents in the nineteenth century. Describing the Sphinxes respectively, Murray finally maps the inter-textual gaps between Decadence and Romanticism. In Chapter 7, “‘Stars Caught in My Branches’: Swinburne and Shelley,” Michael O’Neill elucidates how Shelley’s poems determined Swinburne’s. Discussing Shelley’s three elegies, he emphasizes Swinburne’s original idea that “death is a predicament for Romantic and Decadent poet.” In the latter part, O’Neill maintains that Shelley’s “invasive influence” caused Swinburne to create an original poetry. T. S. Eliot’s research on the relation with Swinburne is also referred to in detail. In Chapter 8, “Mathilde Blind: A Decadent Shelleyan,” Lisa Vargo explains how much Shelley affected Mathilde Blind. Blind belonged to a literary group that Oscar Wilde, Arthur Symons, Vernon Lee, Mona Caird, and Algernon Swinburne joined. Editing Shelley’s poems, Blind, as Vargo says, created her Shelleyan poems in which the “stillborn” with a touch of Decadence was regarded as a major theme. In Chapter 9, “‘Last Great Romantic’: Nietzsche’s Romanticism Out of the Spirit of Decadence,” Mark Sandy discusses Nietzsche’s complex idea on the relationship between Romanticism and Decadence as philosopher and artist. Mentioning Andrea Gogröf Vorhees’s and Henry Staten’s writings, Sandy reassesses the prime role of Decadence in Nietzsche’s atheistic

philosophy. In that discussion, elements, such as sight, sound, colour, and meaning, were highly estimated by Nietzsche. Finally, Sandy maintains that Nietzsche and his company discovered the Romantic pleasure in the spirit of Decadence. In Chapter 10, “Decadence and the Fate of the Romantic Sublime,” Kate Hext acknowledges the Romantic Sublime in Decadence. Hext asserts that the Decadent Zeitgeist created the Decadent writers, such as Oscar Wilde, who respectively treated sublime in their own ways. Discussing the Romantic sublime, Hext values the nostalgia for the aesthetic Romanticism and the trepidation which was caused by difficult modernity and hopeless transcendence. In Chapter 11, “‘Phantoms of Delight’: Amy Levy and Romantic Men,” Linda K. Hughes carefully treats Levy’s poems and explains how Wordsworth and Beethoven influenced her poems. Suggesting homoeroticism in “Sinfonia Erotica,” Hughes concludes that Levy was inspired by the “Romanticism” to her “most intriguing Decadent verse.” In the last Chapter, “Soldiers of the Queen: The War Poetry of Kipling and Newbolt,” J. R. Watson highly estimates the roles of the European wars in Kipling’s and Newbolt’s poetry. While Watson feels deep sympathy for the defeated soldiers depicted in Kipling’s poems, he values heroism in Newbolt’s poems.

Before concluding the review, we cannot fail to recognize the academic contribution of Durham University. Five of the contributors to this book have some connection to that university.