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CONCLUSORY ESSAY: DECADENCE, DECAY AND INNOVATION

Ro bert B. Pynsent

This conclusory essay attempts to outline the main elements of *fin-de-siécle* culture in Austria-Hungary on the background of contemporaneous English and French culture. The essay ends with a brief comparison between the *Fin de siécle* and the 'Sixties' as phenomena. I have borne that ending in mind while writing the preceding sections and that accounts for the large amount of space I devote to concepts like the decay of language, to images of the serpent, to occultism and the erotic. Those constitute the most evident links between the two periods.

Section II, 'The Historical Background', is also written with that ending in mind; because most of the lands in the Austrian sphere of influence in the 1890s are now socialist countries, I have to devote space, say, to the Balkans in an essay which purports to be concerned with central European urban culture. When I then turn to the three main cultural centres of the Monarchy at the turn of the century, I say little about Vienna, because this essay is concerned with cultural problems more than societies- not only because so much has been published in the last decade or so about Vienna l900 and comparatively little about Prague and Budapest. Similarly, I can add little to our knowledge of the role of the Jews in Viennese culture (Beller makes new contributions in his essay in this volume), but I do try to compare the situations of Vienna Jews with that of Jews in the other two centres.

I devote a long section to a Hungarian who wrote German in Paris, Max Nordau, because he was a typical Monarchy Jew and a typical Monarchy 'artist'. Much has been written about his *Entartung* and so I devote my attention to his earlier and far more influential *Die conventionellen Luegen.* This work also expresses views which were to be central to general Austro-Hungarian cultural thinking at the turn of the century.

After Nordau, I define the term Decadence and then follow Wellek in rejecting the term Modernism except where it means *a fin-de-siécle* perception of the world which not only records the decay of civilisation, but also suggests a cure for that decay. That takes me on to the essential ambivalence of the Decadent mode. The Decadent was horrified at the impending doom of European civilisation, and luxuriated in that horror. That the doom was nigh was allegedly evident in the state of language, which had become bureaucratised and clichéd, and so the Decadents had to provide luxuriant decoration for doom-struck language. The cultivation of 's19le' constituted much of that decoration. Outside language the same cultivation was evident in the concept of the dandy. I devote section X to that largely imaginary phenomenon.

The dandy embodied an attitude to woman which the Decadent strove for, but seldom achieved. Decadent man appeared to be frightened of the emancipation of women and so distorted the conception of the liberation of woman into a conception of the dominance of woman. For the *fin-de-siécle* man female sexuality became more and more an object of revulsion, but also fear. At the same time, however, men supported 'free love', votes for women and degrees for women at the universities. Having dealt briefly with attitudes to women and to love and sexuality, I turn to a central emblem of womanhood and of the superior knowledge which *fin-de-siécle* man strove for, the serpent. I point out how the use of the serpent in the plastic arts and in letters reflects the ambivalence of the Decadence and then go on to describe, in section XIV, the essential structural and linguistic device of Decadent art, the 'intermediate state'. That eventually leads me to a brief discussion of that part of the period's religion of art which is embodied in the idea of the fatal or magic book. That naturally introduces occultism as one of the results of what *fin-de-siécle* man saw as the decay or failure of religion.

The final chapter, the comparison of the *Fin de siécle* with the Sixties, sketches an idea by which Baudelaire's place is taken by Butor, the preRaphaelites' place is taken by the American Beat Generation, and Beardsley's by the political comic strip. This section suggests arguments, but goes into almost no detail about the lands once part of the AustroHungarian sphere of influence. Like the *Fin de siécle* the Sixties produced little or no great art (film buffs may disagree). The *Fin de siécle,* however, gave the impulse to the greatest art of the twentieth century. The Sixties is not yet over everywhere. Even in countries like Britain or Czechoslovakia, where fit has been over for fifteen to twenty years, fit is difficult to state precisely what cultural and social impact fit has had. Certainly, however, moralist critics saw the Sixties as a period of decay and, equally certainly, the Sixties brought innovation.

I. DECAY AND INNOVATION

'Generally speaking,' writes Nietzsche, 'all progress must be preceded by a partial weakening.'[1] The Czech Decadent critic, Arnošt Procházka, takes Nietzsche's thought further and suggests an interpretation of the *Fin de siécle* in Austria-Hungary: 'An important chapter remains to be written on the relationship between progress and decay, about their close interconnections, their inseparability. Once careful research has been carried out into the points of contact between evolution and decadence, fit will be found . . . that they are synonyms.'[2] The fundamental idea of Yeats's essay, 'The Autumn of the Body', is that the Decadent period is a period in which art lies dormant, dreaming of a vivid future: in other words, the Decadence was a period of prefigurings and anticipations. But fit was more than that. The writers and artists of particularly the 1880s to the 1910s (though Baudelaire, Nerval, Poe, Schonenhauer and so forth were perhaps part of the trend), were nervously or exultantly conscious of living in a period of general cultural decay. Verlaine expected his white barbarians to come to destroy European civilisation; Karásek aligned those barbarians with the Americans, and Hlaváček with the inner consciousness of European man. An American critic says of that consciousness, 'The decadent writers

are right. Their society is dying. After the Great War Europe begins to assume the socialistic form foreshadowed in the nineteenth century and hardened into a scheme of values in our own day.'[3] All over turn-of-the-century Europe writers and artists, historians and sociologists, and possibly most of all, politicians, were consumed with the idea of impending catastrophe. Rapid industrialisation, political reform, the emancipation of members of non-established churches and religions, the growth of trade unions and mass political parties left everything in flux. No moral, social, or indeed, aesthetic standards seemed safe any longer. The 1890s were marked by 'a half-hushed uneasiness, a sense of social decline, a foreboding of death'.[4] Darwin and Darwinists had persuaded European man that evolution could lead to extinction and astronomers were claiming that every star and planet had its predetermined course and life-span; writers were claiming that contemporary world-weariness and spiritual nausea signalled the end of a civilisation.[5]

The Decadent mood was largely French in origin, though strong elements in fit were Anglo-Saxon (Poe, Pater, Wilde), and fit happened to spread to Austria-Hungary at just the time when the cultures of the Monarchy felt themselves to have 'caught up' with Western Europe. Or: the west-European Decadent mood was so attractive to Austrian Germans, Czechs, Galician Poles and Hungarians that they found themselves suddenly to have caught up with the rest of Europe. Whichever way round one understands the phenomenon, fit still gave birth to one of the great stereotypes of cultural historiography: *fin-de-siécle* Austria-Hungary produced a series of thinkers and artists whose ideas shaped much of the thinking of twentieth-century European man. Freud, Schoenberg, Janáček, Bartók, Mach, Wittgenstein, Klimt, Mucha, Kafka, are the obvious names. Furthermore, the historian must be careful how he draws the cultural boundaries of Austria-Hungary at this time. On the one hand, Austrian German writers published in Munich and Leipzig rather than Vienna. On the other band, the Monarchy was exporting its intelligentsia; Austrians, particularly Czechs, were responsible for setting up many of the grammar schools, breweries and libraries in the newly established Bulgaria in the last quarter of the nineteenth century. A Czech was the Bulgarian Minister of Culture and a Prague-educated Bulgarian was the first vice-chancellor of Sofia University. Alexander Battenberg of Bulgaria, when he lost heart as ruler, became an officer in the Austrian Army. Similarly, 'foxy' Ferdinand Coburg of Bulgaria had large estates in Hungary. Nearly all those areas which now form the non-Soviet socialist states of central and eastern Europe were at the turn of the century part of the Austrian cultural sphere:

The cliché that decaying Austria-Hungary constituted a remarkable centre of intellectual innovation is probably, like most clichés, true, but fit is all too easy to forget that the *Fin de siécle* was a period of innovation over most of Europe. To overemphasise Austria-Hungary's role is to fall prey to the cultural relativism Gombrich warns against: 'the conclusion that cultures or life-forms are not only different, but incommensurable, that is that since there is no common denominator fit is irrational to try to compare people of one country or one age with people of other times or nations.'[6] The first two-volume edition of Frazer's *The Golden Bough* appeared in 1890. Though, to be sure, one of the last products of the Monarchy's intellectual education, the Galician Malinowski's conception of anthropology turned Frazer's upside down, *The Golden Bough* remains the work of art. Frazer is still today the inspirer of amateurs, if Malinowski is the inspirer of scholars. In the same year (1890) Bahr published his ephemeral *Zur Kritik der Moderne* (Towards a criticism of the *Moderne),* but Ibsen published *Hedda Gabler* and Tolstoy *The Kreutzer Sonata.* Similarly in 1892 Hofmannsthal produced his *Der Tod des Tizian* (Titian's death), but Haeckel *Der Monismus* (Monismy and Shaw *Mrs Warren's Profession.* In 1899 Freud published his *Traumdeutung* (The Interpretation of Dreams), as Havelock Ellis in England was publishing the first volume of his *Studies in the Psychology of Sex.* In 1900 Schnitzler published *Reigen* (usually translated as 'La Ronde'), but outside Austria Thomas Mann published *Buddenbrooks* (dated l901, published 1900) and Conrad *Lord Jim.* Finally, in 1914 František Gellner published *Cesta do hor* (A trip into the mountains), but James Joyce belatedly published *Dubliners* and Gide *Les Caves du Vatican.* Such comparisons are selective and possibly arbitrary, but they are instructive for those who have become bewitched by the concept of Vienna 1900.

II. THE HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

In the period all Europe had its share of crisis, but the Monarchy was truly in a state of unusual turmoil. Between 1875 and 1889 the Monarchy was internally fairly stable. External relations were strained because of the reemergence of the Bulgarian Question in 1885, which again emphasised the conflict of interests between Austria-Hungary and Russia. In December 1885 Austria-Hungary warned Bulgaria that if she proceeded any further into Serbia she would have to fight Austro-Hungarian as well as Serbian armies. This was a risky enterprise; indeed, Russian troops did begin to mass on the Galician frontier; the German Empire would not help the Monarchy in the Balkans: Bismarck's statement that Bulgaria was not worth the bones of a single Pomeranian grenadier still rankle in today's Bulgaria. Relationships between Russia and the Monarchy did not settle until the February 1903 programme.

The Great Defence Debate of 1889 weakened the Dualist system, which was further weakened by the crisis engendered by the language ordinances promulgated in May 1897 by the Galician premier of Cisleithania, Casimir Badeni, who clearly had little idea of the enmity obtaining between the Germans and Czechs of Bohemia, particularly of Prague. (For some years now Prague had ceased to be a German city; in the census of 1880, 120,000 Pragers declared themselves Czech and only 36,000 German.) Badeni's ordinances, which gave equal rights to Czech and German in internal governmental matters in Bohemia, apparently justified the Germans' worst fears. Bohemian Germans held mass demonstrations, also attended by citizens of Germany proper, in Aussig (now Ústí nad Labem) and Eger (now Cheb). The parliamentary conflict the ordinances inspired threatened the passing of the measures confirming the economic *Ausgleich* of 1867. One Moravian deputy, Lecher, stood up

and delivered a twelve-hour speech against the *Ausgleich* and on 3 November 1897 the *Reichsrat* sitting turned into a common-or-garden brawl. Behaviour did not improve greatly in subsequent days and on 28 November Badeni resigned. Czech and German riots erupted in Prague, especially amongst students, and on 2 December martial law was declared for Prague and its surroundings. These were actually race riots. The Czechs were no longer concerned for the survival of their language as a vehicle of culture; the Charles-Ferdinand University in Prague had been Split into German and Czech parts in 1882; a Bohemian Academy of Science and Arts had been founded in 1890 (a Hungarian Academy had been founded in Buda in 1830, a South Slav in Zagreb in 1867 and a Polish in Cracow in 18y) and most members of the young Czech intelligentsia were organised in various utterly cosmopolitan cultural groupings by the mid 1890s. The Austrian German intelligentsia was equally cosmopolitan. Of the period just before 1900 Robert Musil wrote, 'In those days one was international; one summarily rejected notions like state, nation, race, family, religion, for one was wary of all ready-forged links.'[7]

Between January and March 1900 there was a mass miners' strike in Cisleithania, but military matters were more important than industrial. 1903 saw the Army Crisis, when the military authorities were keeping in barracks a large number of men who should not have been there. A law had to be passed every year to allow Army units to be called up in Hungary. The military authorities kept, or threatened to keep, men in the Army for longer than the allotted period to keep numbers up, whenever the law was delayed. Sometimes they also called up men who had been enlistable in previous years but for some reason or other had not been called up. The military expected the deputies to pass the bill any moment, so that everything would settle down. Between the autumn of 1903 and October 1907 the Austrian and Hungarian chambers were in a state of bitter conflict. In Cisleithania, the premier Korber governed practically without parliament from January, 1903 to the end of December, 1904. On 15 September 1905 a large working-class and socialist demonstration in favour of universal suffrage was staged before the parliament building in Budapest, and similar demonstrations and strikes took place in Cisleithania in November. Finally a bill on electoral reform was passed by the lower house on r December 1906, by the upper house on 21 December, and it obtained the imperial and royal assent on 26 January 1907. By this law all men over twenty-four years of age had the right to vote in *Reichsrat* elections. The first general election under the new rules took place on 14 May and the result was an easy victory for the Social Democrats and Christian Socials. The Slav Congress in Prague of July 1908 led nowhere, as became clear when the Congress was re-convened in Sofia in 1910.

The Austro-Hungarian annexation of Bosnia and Herzegovina in October 1908 was a peaceful affair, which provoked an acute, prolonged international crisis. Foreign governments saw Austria disturbing the status quo, where Count Aehrenthal saw himself preserving the status quo in the Balkans. That status quo was further disturbed in l912 when the Balkan League (Bulgaria, Serbia and Greece supported by Montenegro) defeated the Turks and succeeded in driving them out of all Europe except a small piece of eastern Thrace and the Gallipoli peninsula. But the Bulgarians were dissatisfied and on 30 June 1913 they opened the Second Balkan War with the Serbs and the Greeks. They lost, for Macedonia was split between Serbia and Greece and she had to return Adrianople to Turkey. After his victory over the Bulgarians at Kukush in July 1913 the Greek king, Constantine, was welcomed by his subjects in Athens with the sobriquet 'Bulgaroktonos' (killer of Bulgars), the name given to the Byzantine Emperor Basil, who had defeated the Bulgarians in 1014.

Apart from crises and disturbances and squabbles and racist court trials, the *Fin de siécle* in Austria Hungary felt the same *maladie du siécle* as the rest of Europe. It is easy to argue that it was felt all the more intensely in the Monarchy because of the racial and social tensions there and because of a feeling that the Empire was doomed to dissolution which was steadily growing through the first decade and a half of the twentieth century. Precious little by way of administrative or journalistic or literary documents would support that any such strong feeling existed – at least before 1915 and 1916.

The term *maladie du siécle* was coined by Musset (1836), and he gives it two partial delineations. (In this essay I retain Musset's term; I do not use the now more conventional *mal du siécle.)* The term is applied to a prostitute in a night-club:

> I suddenly realised that this wretched girl's face bore a fatal resemblance to my mistress's. The sight chilled me. There is a particular sort of shivering which takes a man by the roots of his hair; the common people say it is Death passing over your head but this was not Death passing over mine.
>
> It was the *maladie du siécle,* or rather this whore was the *maladie du siécle* and it was she who, with her pale, mocking features and husky voice, had just sat down before me.[8]

That establishes the seedy side to Decadent world-weariness, but more important for this conclusory essay is the political side:

> The whole present *maladie du siécle* has two causes; the people who has been through 1793 and 1814 bears two wounds in its heart. Everything there used to be is no longer; everything there will be is not yet. Do not search for the secret of our ills anywhere else.[9]

That expresses that sense of living in a transitional age which is essential to Decadent sensibility. According to Musset political and military defeat, the guillotining of Louis XVI and the abdication and banishment to Elba of Napoleon I, the fall of absolutism and the fall of empire, constituted the mainspring of that world-weariness, nihilistic scepticism and potentially destructive solipsism which make up the Decadent rejection of the notion of progress and the achievements of civilisation. Leaving aside

Byron and Musset, Baudelaire is generally regarded as the first Decadent and after the failure of the 1848 revolution Baudelaire lost all his political enthusiasm and became the epitome of Decadence – especially of the Decadent approach to the two central means of male communication, women and language. The Decadent movement proper does not begin in France, however, until the 1880s, after the French defeat in the Franco-Prussian War and after the Commune.

The *Ausgleich* of 1867 appeared to leave the Austrians the losers. However unsatisfied some Hungarians may have been by the *Ausgleich,* on the whole they gained. It is true that their literature was left a little disconcerted by the *Ausgleich,* for writers had suddenly lost their major political target, the domination of Vienna. Thus, it seems, the Hungarians have almost no Decadent literature and those full-bloodedly Decadent works of such as Csáth or Balázs come too late to be called anything but derived. The same goes for the literature of the British Isles. Although Wilde had a considerable influence on late French Decadents and thence on Austrian Germans, Czechs and so forth, much of Wilde is derived. Nearly all English Decadent verse is derived (from the French) – unless one considers early Swinburne and Meredith Decadent, which one might . . . but then one would have to begin to think of the Indian Mutiny and even, possibly, the first two series of Reform Laws.

The imperial glamour of Vienna appeared to be diminished after the *Ausgleich* and certainly Germanness had lost to Magyarness. Moreover Vienna had suffered greatly in prestige as a result of the Austro-Prussian Warand particularly the loss of most of the Habsburg Italian territory. Notably, just as towards the end of the century French nationalism began to revive, so did German nationalism in Cisleithania. After 1867 German families had stopped sending their children to Czech schools in Prague and, as Prague became more and more Czech, so German nationalism there grew. On the whole, however, in Prague that nationalism remained below the surface until 1897. The Czechs lost far more than the Austrian Germans by the *Ausgleich,* for they had honed and worked for a 'Trialism' rather than a Dualism, but their attempts had failed definitively in 1871. Still the Czechs, as inhabitants of the prosperous industrial centre of the Monarchy, initially appeared more or less to sit back and enjoy that prosperity. The political soil for the Czech Decadents was given manure by Gebauer and Masaryk's well-displayed demonstration that the Dvůr Králové (Koeniginhof) and Zelená Hora (Grueneberg) Manuscripts were early nineteenth-century forgeries and thus did not testify to a highly develoned mid-mediaeval Czech culture. Their articles appeared in their own periodical, *Athertaeum,* in February 1886. The soil was further prepared by the Old Czechs' loss of their role as the leading Czech political force in the first two months of 1890; they were then thoroughly defeated in the *Reichsrat* elections of March 1891. The Young Czechs set themselves up in opposition to the government – and that is probably why they themselves eventually failed so miserably with the electorate. Also in 1891 the Czechs mounted their own Jubilee Exhibition where they showed off their technological advancedness. As a nationalist act it failed, however; the Emperor Francis Joseph visited it. The organ of the Czech Decadents, *Moderní revue,* was not founded until 1894, but by that time Decadent writing dominated the young literary scene (mainly in Moravian periodicals, but also in one or two well-established Prague periodicals). It may be sheer coincidence that the rise of Decadent literature and art in Europe appears to have a direct connection with political events, particularly with a sense of defeat, or with the need to ascertain new values after a defeat, but it may not.

III. VIENNA, PRAGUE, BUDAPEST

The urban intelligentsias of Austria-Hungary considered the Monarchy t-o be in a stale of chaos and decadence. At the beginning of his first book, *The Future of Austria-Hungary* (1907), R. W. Seton-Watson writes that most Brítish wrongly consider that the Monarchy is about to collapse. Nordau writes in 1883:

> In Austria-Hungary ten nationalities face each other in pitched battle and attempt to do as much harm to their opponents as they possibly can. In every Crown Land, indeed in almost every village, the majorities have their boots on the minorities' breasts and the minorities, when they can resist no longer, feign a submission against which in their innermost hearts they furiously rebel. Indeed, against this submission they invoke the destruction of the Monarchy itself as their only possible salvation from an insufferable situation. [10]

The Czech Nineties critic, Šalda, gives a not unbiased, but lively picture of 1890s Vienna in his novel, *Loutky i dělníci boží* (Puppets and God's workers), although many of the critical pictures of Vienna were excised by the censor in the first and second (1918) editions. Vienna is a city in flux and a city which belongs nowhere: 'on the dividing lines between North and South, East and West, so that the forms of every type . . . had rubbed off on it, and it had never had the chance to crystallise'.[11] Vienna is a perverted city, and in the following Šalda appears to be flabbily emulating Schnitzler:

> the ages of man were somehow inverted here: young men imitated old with their tiredness, wornness, *blague* and cynicism, whereas aged Fauns, Satyrs and Silenuses either sentimentally winked their paled eyes through their monocles or tried to invigorate their creased faces with a patronly understanding smile . . . hoping that paint had smoothed out their wrinkles and that their blackened moustaches and whiskers were set off to advantage by the well-placed rouge on their carefully tended, elderly complexions. [12]

The evocation of the general atmosphere is a trifle pat, and constitutes what a Czech of the time would expect to read: 'the *Alt-Wien* ditty of Girardi and the neurasthenic *Jung-Wien* poem by Hofmannsthal, the Jewishly witty column in a Liberal daily and the coarse geniality of an antisemitic election pamphlet . . . the last swing or

slide in the "Wurstelprater" . . . all this fawned and flattered one.[13] And:

Art and poetry were valid here as long as they were exhibitionism: a poem was a biographical riddle; a novel had to have *clefs* to its characters; a statue had to rouse interest because of who had modelled for it. Most important of all in Vienna were the actors . . . anyone who wanted any success had to learn from them, lover like husband, statesman like diplomat, writer like politician, the better class of whore like the *grande dame.*

They were all acting . . . they were not, however, acting a today but a dying image of the past, a shimmering reflection of the past on the stagnant, melancholic surface of dusk, while from the east was surging a night which extinguishes all colours and blurs all nuances.'[14]

In this Vienna the Czech language is a subject of 'contemptuous songs' in the *cafés chantants* and a sensitive Czech walking through Viennese streets feels 'the wretchedness and humiliation of past ages gnawing at his body and burning on his breast'.'[15] But an adoptive Vienesse like the Moravian German Schaukal felt much the same as Šalda; Vienna contained for him much of 'the irredeemable barbarism of this, the vulgarest of all historical epochs'.[16] (Still the pet19 official Schaukal allowed himself to be ennobled in the last year of the Monarchy.) The population types recruited for the dream realm of the Bohemian German Alfred Kubin's *Die andere Seite* (1909) constitute a satirical representation of Viennese *fin-de-siécle* 19pes:

The better among them were people of exaggeratedly refined sensitivity Not yet rampant *idées fixes* like a mania for collecting, bibliophagy, possession by the demon of play, hyperreligiosity and all the thousand forms the more refined types of neurasthenia assumed were perfect for the dream state. Hysteria proved to be the most frequent manifestation in women. The masses were also chosen on the basis of abnormality or one-sided developments . . . hypochondriacs, spiritists, brash ruffians, blasé men in search of excitement, old adventurers in search of peace, conjurers, acrobats, political refugees, indeed even murderers who were being sought by foreign police, forgers and thieves. . . . In certain circumstances a particularly remarkable physical characteristic qualified a person to be called into the dream realm. Thus the many hundred-weight goitres, button noses, gigantic humps.[17]

This Vienna, which had grown from about 700,000 in 1880 to around two million in 1910, had lost its stability. More than half these two million were not Viennese by birth, and many of these were Czechs or Jews. According to Timms the instability of Vienna 'was caused by dynamic new forces which were undermining the traditional social order'.[18] The new Viennese non-Jewish middle-classes did not on the whole merge with the aristocracy, but remained as much outsiders as the Jews and so, as a 'substitute for the life of action, art became almost a religion; moreover, as the bourgeois sensed the slipping away of the world, he became increasingly occupied with his own psychic life'.[19] Hauser sees the same phenomena as Timms and Spector emerging for slightly different reasons. The culture of Vienna itself was old and tired and a lack of narrowly Austrian nationalism combined with the Jewish element in the new population to give Viennese art its 'subtle, passive character'. This art, created by 'rich sons of the bourgeoisie [who] are nervous and sad, tired and aimless, sceptical and self-ironie, evokes 'a feeling of passing away, of having missed something, and a consciousness of being unfit for life'.[20] Trakl's slightly Oriental sense of guilt seems to have something to do with that: 'Great is the guilt of the born. Woe, you golden tremblings of death, for the soul dreams cooler blossoms.'[21]

In a study of *fin-de-siécle* culture in Budapest, Prague and Vienna, Cohen asserts that 'public affairs and culture in Prague tended to be less innovative and less cosmopolitan than in Vienna or Budapest', that 'the Czech-German conflict tended not only to pervade much of the intellectual life [of Prague] but often to inhibit it as well' and that the 'many areas of Czech cultural life in Prague, as well as the German, were stodgier and more conservative' than in 'many other major European cities'.[22] At the turn of the century Prague may have been less innovative than Vienna in painting, but it hardly was in sculpture, graphic art or literature. Czech artists populated Paris, Munich and Dresden quite as much as Viennese or Hungarian. The main Prague literary periodical of the 1890s, *Moderní revue,* published in French and German as well as Czech and published translations from most European literatures and reproductions of works by artists of most European nationalities. Most serious literature in German or Czech virtually ignored the Czech-German conflict. Still, I would find it difficult to go quite to the lengths of Franz Kuna, who writes:

Rooted in this kind of reactionary progressivism is the central paradox of the Vienna of these years: that whilst the city produced one of the most lively and important movements in modem art, music, and literature, it did not come up with a single major work of art. Works like *Ulysses, The Magic Mountain* and *The Waste Land* were not written there. The major, and truly modem, writers of the old Austria came from the less metropolitan city of Prague, which made far less noise about 'Modernism' than did Vienna.[23]

Kuna appears to be thinking mainly of Kafka, but he may also be thinking of Rilke. He points out that Rilke left Prague as early as 1896 and that by 1906 Meyrink and Camill Hoffmann had left; Werfel left in 1912 (as did Albert Einstein, who spent a year teaching at Prague University). The reason for the Prague German writers' leaving, Kuna suggests, was the 'drab atomization of life in their city'.[24] Like Cohen, Kuna does not know the Czech literature of the time, which certainly still in the 1890s and 1900s had old-fashioned historical and social novelists, but it also had Symbolist poets and novelists, attempts at Symbolist drama, full-blown Decadent and Naturalist works of considerable originality – as well as the Decadent, anarchist, more or less Existentialist philosopher, Ladislav Klíma. Some writers had turned from Decadence, Satanism and Symbolism to Expressionism or Vitalism before the Great

War (S. K. Neumann, Šrámek). In art decorative Art Nouveau was being replaced by esoteric Symbolist art and Cubism and Expressionism. Indeed Czech literature and art were never to be as lively as from c.1890 to 1914 again. The better known Avant-Garde from between the two World Wars relied a great deal on the art of the *Fin de siécle*. And the Czech intelligentsia of the period were far from taking themselves too seriously. One thinks of ironical poets like Hlaváček or Opolský or the sarcastic, satirical novelist, K. M. Čapek-Chod. Even the perhaps slightly too earnest Viennese professor of surgery and minor Czech poet, Eduard Albert, could write resignedly, but also ironically, 'In Bohemia we're immured in our fate. Czech art is understanding that.'[25] S. K. Neumann writes despairingly of Bohemia, *'capat regni* [Prague] is rotten, the whole *regnum* is rotten through,'[27] and Arnošt Procházka condemns the Czechs for a willingness always to search for compromise ever since the putting down of the Estates' Rebellion at the Battle of the White Mountain (1620): 'we have always tried to fuse noise and silence, battle and peace, morning and evening, work and laziness into a single whole, into some bastard harmony.'[27] The picture of Prague and the Czechs which one obtains from contemporaneous English writers (if uninformed) is probably typical of the period and of the English. Thus, for example, the English Decadent Arthur Symons writes that the only worthwhile piece of Czech art is Comenius's *Labyrint světa a Ráj srdce:*

> The Bohemians have produced nothing beautiful in any of the plastic arts; but in literature, for the most part given up to histories of piety and savagery, they have produced one book of genius, in whose hardness, quaintness, crudity, and vigorous, unbeautiful detail, I find alt the characteristic qualities of the race, illuminated, here only, by that light which is imagination. The full title of the book is: 'The Labyrinth of the World and the Paradise of the Heart' . . . Like Rabelais, but with less intentional extravagance, Komensky will use ten synonyms for one statement; he writes alt in verbs and nouns, which hammer on our ears with the clatter of the fighting peasants' fiails.[28]

In the music of Smetana and Dvořák Symons sees a mixture of barbarism and conventionality; Czech music lacks passion for him. On Czech women he is rapturous; they manifest little of the *maladie du siécle:*

> They are often very blonde, at times very dark, and there is something a little wild, even in the soft beauty of blonde women, a fiery sweetness, a certain strangeness as of unfamiliar lights amid the shadows of still water; a little of the soft, unconscious savagery of the animals man has tamed, but which have never quite forgotten the forest. But they are not perilous, like the Hungarians; sly, sometimes, but simple. Children and young girls are often delicious, with their white skin and pale gold hair, which in some lights takes a faint shade of green, like the hair of a certain portrait of Palma Vecchio . . . in the gallery at Vienna.[29]

Symons has also heard that Czech-German rivalries are much in evidence. If a Czech actress dares act in a German play, Czechs and Germans will brawl over her in the street. Symons's assessment of contemporary Czech patriotism reads like the writing of a Czech like Julius Zeyer in the 1880s. He comments on the Czechs' blend of historicism and dreaminess (dreaminess is something one normally links with a Slovak or Bulgarian rather than a Czech):

> this new outbreak of national life is fed upon memories. The Bohemian still sees a phantom city, behind this city in which electric trams take him to the foot of the Vyšehrad, a city more real to him than even what remains of his national monuments: His memory is a memory of martyrs, of executions, of the savageries of religion and of political conflict, Catholics against Protestants, Germans against Czechs . . . to the Bohemian no stone that has been violently cast down is forgotten. Prague is still the epitome of this history of his country; he sees fit as a man sees the woman whom he loves, with her first beauty, and he loves fit as a man loves a woman, more for what she has suffered.[30]

Symons set down his impressions as a result of visits in the summer of 1897 and 1899. G. S. Street was there ten years later and he begins by describing Bohemia in terms which vaguely recall Symons's, though Street has a witty and Decadent tongue: 'she is less well known among us than she ought to be and like a woman may not be, inevitably, best pleased by an entirely secret devotion.'[31] Symons spoke about the Czechs' memories of their martyrs (and the Czech politician, T. G. Masaryk, had inveighed against their martyr complex in 1895), where Street speaks of their heroic sacrifice and patience. Street is impressed by the brooding spirit of Prague and, like Symons, he feels her history as he gazes at her:

> Prague is a very beautiful city, and would be still, though you took away its ancient glories; but the impression I had even then, and far more deeply when late at night I stood alone on Karlov Most [*sic*], was first of alt, first and last, the sense of 'old, unhappy, far-off things'. The quotation is somewhat hackneyed, but fit must be used of Prague if fit is never used again . . . , dimly clairvoyant, I knew myself among the ghosts of the unhappy dead.[32]

Street mentions the fact that recently alt German street names had been banished from Prague and he also speaks of the Czechs' apparently passionate love for their native language. He tells a typical story of a Prager's pleasure at his few Czech words and at his not being a German or speaking German. But this is an ordinary Prager, not a member of the intelligentsia. Street compares Bohemia with Ireland, an old idea, but his comparison is original:

> It is a rarely stimulating experience to be in a country which has a strong national

feeling in fit. In this Bohemia has been compared with Ireland; but the comparison is unjust, for the national feeling is far more thoroughly pervading in Bohemia, and- I would say fit without offence – more profound and more sincere. It touches alt classes, for one thing; fit is based on a genuine racial difference. . . . The difference between England and Ireland is chiefly one of climate; a large class [of Irish] is indifferent, to say the least of it, to national feeling . . . There is, no doubt, a pro-German party in Bohemia, but it is a small and diminishing minority, and I am told that the Jews, who were of the German party, are now significantly inclined to fall into line.[33]

By the 1860s there was an established Czech as well as German middle class in Prague. Prague was essentially a bourgeois city. That is the major feature distinguishing Prague from Vienna and Budapest. After the *Ausgleich* a middle class was only beginning to be formed in Pest, and its members were 'Greeks', Jews and Germans from the old mining and trading towns of Hungary. Between 1867 and 1900, however, the population of Pest-Buda, then Budapest, trebled and the Jews joined the Magyar nationalist cause. The Millenium Exhibition of 1896 (a thousand years since the arrival of the Magyars in the area) represented the public manifestation of Hungary's (or at least Budapest's) cultural and technological adulthood. Remnants of the strong anti-Magyar feeling the Exhibition roused in the non-Magyar intellectuals of Hungary is still occasionally perceptible today, among the Slovaks. Most of the Hungarian intelligentsia of the time were magyarised; there was no grammar schooling in Slovak or Roumanian or Ukrainian or Serbian. The discontent of the nationalities on the whole, however, remained gently bubbling under the surface before 1905. Thenceforth it frequently boiled over as in Černová in October 1907, when a Magyar, or magyarised, priest was sent to consecrate a church rather than the Slovak, Andrej Hlinka, who had collected the money for the building. (To be sure Hlinka was a trouble-maker.) The villagers started throwing stones and the gendarmerie became frightened and began shooting into the Slovak crowd; nine were killed on the spot and another six were fatally wounded. Hungary saw considerable organised social unrest during the *finde-siécle* period, especially the agricultural labourers' strike which began in the 1880s; then there was the five-week metal-workers' strike in May and June 1905, or Bloody Thursday, 23 May 1912, when nine socialism and workers were killed 'at the barricades' in Budapest.

Although signs of Decadent art were evident in Hungarian literature beforehand, in writers like Justh[34] and Komjáthy, Hungarian culture did not really enter the *Fin de siécle* until the 1900s, although József Kiss's periodical, *A Hét* (the week) which was founded in 1890, prepared the ground for Hungarian Modernism. *A Hét* was particularly important for its publication of translations of French verse, but nearly all the poets chosen between 1890 and 1901 were old fashioned, Hugo, Leconte de Lisle, Vigny, or conventional, Coppée, Ratisbonne; nevertheless Baudelaire and Bourget were each represented by four poems and the eccentric Decadent-cum-social poet Jean Richepin, who had a considerable impact on the Hungarian Ady and on the Czech Hlaváček, was represented by eight pieces. Karátson considers the publication in 1901 of a sizable anthology of nineteenth-century French verse in Hungarian a turning point in the Hungarian literary development.[35] (Similar anthologies in the 1880s had some impact in Bohemia.)

For non-Magyars Hungary outside Budapest was considered somewhat barbaric. Zeyer frequently referred to the Asiatic hordes who were oppressing the gentle Slavs. And Alfred Kubin writes ironically that 'from Budapest on a slight Asiatic element made itself felt. How? In the interests of this book I do not wish to insult Hungary.'[36] Arthur Symons also visited Budapest and also saw Hungary as the beginning of the Orient. What is most useful to us in his description is the comparison with Vienna:

In Budapest there is nothing but what the people and a natural brightness in the air make of it. Here things are what they seem; atmosphere is everything, and the atmosphere is almost one of illusion. . . . Coming from Austria, you seem, since you have left Vienna, to have crossed more than a frontier. You are in another world, in which people live with a more vivid and a quite incalculable life: the East has begun. . . . Some charm is in the air, and a scarcely definable sense of pleasure, which maker one glad to be there. One has been suddenly released from the broad spaces, empty heights, and tiring movement of Vienna, in which, to the stranger, there is only the mechanical part of gaiety and only the pretentious part of seriousness. Here, in Budapest, . . . idleness becomes active; there is no need for thought, and no inclination to think beyond the passing moment.[37]

The major Hungarian Symbolist, Endre Ady, certainly conceived of Hungary as in a state of decay *(Új versek,* New verse, 1906), 'The sad Hungarian Plain with its odour of death', but generally he regarded Hungary as fallow or scrub land – an uncultured desert.[38] In the figure of Ady one sees another difference between the Hungarian and the Austrian-German and Czech cultural functions of the *Fin de siécle*. Ady felt the need to shock his audience out of apathy with his 'unpoetic' language and Decadent poses. Schnitzler and Hofmannsthal expressed the interests of their own classes and, especially the former, analysed their mental state. Hofmannsthal's pose was not to shock, but to be aloof. The Czech Decadents around *Moderní revue* were an aggressive élite, who adopted the pose of not caring what anyone said about them or what impact they might have. The Viennese and the Hungarians and the Czechs did not like each other and knew very little about what was going on culturally in each other's territories. The artists of the three nations were more likely to meet each other in Munich or Paris than on Austro-Hungarian soil.

NOTES

1. Friedrich Nietzsche, *Menschliches, Allzumenschliches. Ein Buch fiir freie Geister* (1878-9), Vol. I, Munich, 1960, p. 190.

2. Arnošt Procházka, *Francouzští autoři a jiné studie,* Prague, 1912, p. 109.

3. George Ross Ridge, *The Hero in French Decadent Literature,* Athens, Georgia, 1961, p. 176.

4. Jerome Hamilton Buckley, *The Victorian Temper. A Study in Literary Culture,* 2nd ed., Cambridge, Mass., 1969, p. 228.

5. Cf. Jean Pierrot, *The Decadent Imagination, 1880-1900,* translated by Derek Coltman, Chicago and London, 1981, p. 477

6. Sir Ernst Gombrich,' "Sind eben alles Menschen gewesen." Zum Kulturrelativismus in den Geisteswissenschaften'. A lecture given to the International Association for Germanic Language and Literature Studies at G6ttingen in August, 1985, TS, p. 2.

7. In 'Der deutsche Mensch als Symptom' (1923), quoted by Edelgard Hajek, *Literarischer Jugendstil. Vergleichende Studien zur* Dichtung *und Malerei um* 1900, Dtisseldorf, 1971, p. 18. 8. Alfred de Musset, *La Confession d'un enfant du siécle,* Paris, 1973, pp. 82-3.

9. Ibid., P. 36.

10. Max Nordau, *Die conventionellen Liigen der Kulrurmenschheit,* 14th ed., Leipzig, 1889, PP 2-3.

11. F. X. Šalda, *Loutky i dělníci boží. Román* milostný o *dvou dílech, 1*917, 3rd ed., Prague, 1920, Vol. II, p. 34.

12. Ibid., II, pp. 35-6.

13. Ibid., II, PP7 36-7

14. Ibid., II, PP7 42-3.

15. Ibid., II, P. 56.

16. Richard Schaukal, *Leben und Meinungen des Herrn Andreas* von *Balrhesser, eines Dandy' und Dilettanten,* Munich and Leipzig, 1907, p. 166.

17. Alfred Kubin, *Die andere Seite. Phantastischer Roman,* Munich, 1962, p. 40.

18. Edward Timms, 'Peter Altenberg- Authenticity or Pose?' in G. J. Carr and Eda Sagarra (Eds.), *Fin-de-Siécle Vienna. Proceedings of the Second Irish Symposium* in *Austrian Studies,* Dublin, 1985, p. 129.

19. Jack J. Spector, *The Aesthetics of Freud. A Study in Psychoanalysis and Art,* London, 1972, pp. 20-1.

20. Arnold Hauser, *Sozialgeschichte der Kunst und Literatur* [1953], Munich, 1967, p. 971.

21. Georg Trakl, 'Anif', *Gedichte* (ed. Hans Szklenar), Frankfurt on Main and Hamburg, 1964, P. 56.

22. Gary B. Cohen, 'Society and Culture in Prague, Vienna and Budapest in the Late Nineteenth Century', East *European Quarterly,* XX, 4 (January 1987), pp. 468, 479, 480.

23. Franz Kuna, 'Vienna and Prague 18y0-1928', Malcolm Bradbury and James McFarlane (Eds.), *Modernim 1890-1930,* Harmondsworth, 1976, p. 124.

24. Ibid., p. 130.

25. 'Jsme v Čechách do osudu zazděni. / To pochopit – je české umění.' 'České umění' in the posthumous collection of verse edited by the leading Czech Parnassist, a poet without whom the Czech Decadence would probably not have thrived so well, Jaroslav Vrchlický, *Na zemi a* na *nebi,* Prague, 1900, p. 16.

26. 'Píseň nenárodní', *Apostrofy hrdé a vášnivé* [1896], *Básně l,* Prague, 1962, p. 127.

27. *Literární silhouety a studie.* Vinohrady, 19122, p. 16.

28. *Cities,* London and New York, 1903, pp. 140-2.

29. Ibid., p. 150.

30. Ibid., pp. t53-4. Describing Prague as a woman: a queen or a whore, was a frequent topos of Czech *fin-de-siěcle* literature.

31. G. S. Street, *People and Questions,* London, 1910, p. 276.

32. Ibid., p. 286.

33. Ibid., pp. 299-300.

34. Cf. Viola Finn, 'Zsigmond Justh: In Search of a New Nobility', in László Péter and Robert B. Pynsent (Eds.), *Intellectuals and the Future in the Habsburg Monarchy 1890-1914,* Basingstoke and London, 1988, p. 129 ff.

35. André Karátson, *Le Symbolisme en Hongrie. L'influence des poétigues francaises sur la poésie hongroise dans le premier quart du XXiěme siécle,* Paris, 1969, pp. 39-41.

36. *Die andere Seite, p.* 24.

37. *Cities,* PP. 189-91.

38. Cf. Karátson*, Le Symbolisme en Hongrie,* pp. 55, 68, 69.

In : Pynsent, Robert B. (ed.) "Conclusory Essay: Decadence, Decay and Innovation." In: *Decadence and Innovation. Austro-Hungarian Life and Art at the Turn of the Century.* London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1989. 111-125.