

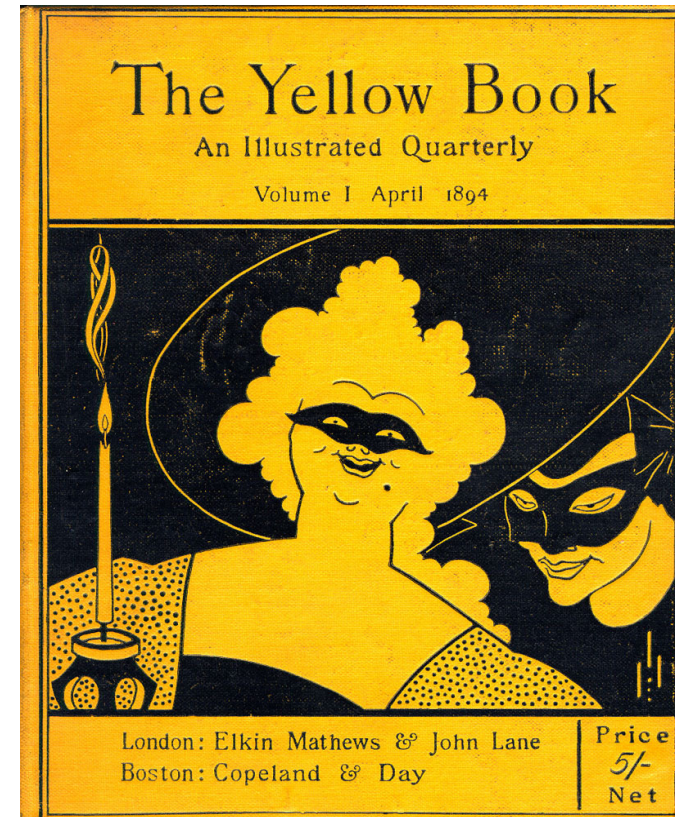
# Decadence and Modernity

COLT 335, 22025R, Fall 2015, Monday, Wednesday, & Friday 1:00 - 1:50 pm, THH 121

"Decadence" is a term specifically used to designate literature and art of the final quarter of the nineteenth century that excessively, hyperbolically, called the dominant values of progress, rationality, bourgeois morality, moral improvement, and the infallibility of science into question in ways calculated to startle and shock an audience of good bourgeois readers or spectators. To the world of empiricism, family values, and the supremacy of science, decadent artists and writers opposed a realm of pure artifice and imagination. It's not surprising, then, that this period produces an extraordinary body of writing and imagery that continues to inform (obliquely or directly) contemporary genres such as horror and fantasy. In this course, we will explore the period by concentrating on decadence and monstrosity. Since decadence as a notion derives from social understandings of Darwinism, decadent monsters lurk and loom at the crossroads of anxieties about genders, sexuality, race, class, nationality. We will read a range of selected texts, with a concentration on shorter forms, from the poet Charles Baudelaire's *Flowers of Evil* (*Les fleurs du mal*, 1856), to R.L. Stevenson's *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*, Oscar Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray* and a selection of Wilde's shorter fiction, and H. G. Wells' *The Time Machine*. We will end by examining the continued influence of decadence on "pulp" horror writers of the 1920s and 1930s such as H.P. Lovecraft and Clark Ashton Smith. In addition, we will also read less well-known writers from the end of the nineteenth century such as Machen Villiers de l'Isle Adam, Vernon Lee, Chambers, Renée Vivien, and Jean Lorrain.

We will work comparatively with texts from English, French and German traditions (all read in translation) and examine visual arts as well--graphic design, the illustrations of Aubrey Beardsley, the universality of art nouveau as "new style" that signified both the modern and its attendant insecurities in its signature "whiplash" style.

Students will write two shorter (3-page) papers, give a class presentation, and complete a longer (8-page) final project. Students will be encouraged to explore their own interests within the framework of the course. In short, this class should be of interest to anyone who is curious about the history of horror and fantasy in literature and the other arts, LGBTQ literature and history, and questions of art and aesthetics.



Aubrey Beardsley "The Yellow Book" April 1894

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