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Late-Victorian Decadent Song Literature[1]

Jane Desmarais

> [A] song, for him, was music first, and then whatever you please afterwards, so long as it suggested, never told, some delicate sentiment, a sigh or a caress; . . . the song seems to have been made by some fastidious amateur of grief, and it has all the sighs and tremors of the mood, wrought into a faultless strain of music.
>
> — Arthur Symons, *Studies in Prose and Verse* (1904)

Contemporary academic interest in the culture of late-Victorian decadence focuses almost entirely on literature, but literature is only one of the forms whereby decadence finds cultural expression. It is known experientially through the senses—through smell, taste, touch, sight, and hearing, and manifests in a variety of blended and traversed, or, we might say, *translational* cultural forms. One of these blendings / traversings / translations—of poetry, music and song into late-Victorian decadent song literature—is the subject of this article.

Up until about a decade ago, there was very little research into decadent song literature. There were separate studies of Victorian music and decadent style in music—of Wagnerism mainly, and of the musical aesthetics of selected decadent poets and artists who professed an interest in music and musical form (Arthur Symons and Aubrey Beardsley, in particular), and there were studies of the impact of music and musical performance on Victorian social and cultural life and the relationship between literature and classical music. But up until Michael Craske began working on the musical legacy of Algernon Swinburne's verse, little was written specifically on translations of decadent poetry by musicians and the translation and adaptation of *fin-de-siècle* decadent literature into music and song.[2] As Bryan N. S. Gooch bemoaned

as far back as 1974, the lacuna in research on Ernest Dowson in particular was of "lamentable regret."[3]

Quite recently a whole new field of research has emerged, much facilitated by technologies in the digital humanities which have inspired large collaborative multidisciplinary projects, like the *Sounding Victorian* project directed by Phyllis Weliver and Sophie Fuller, which brings together a group of digital projects that "use sound as an experiential way of conceptually thinking through archives that document lived experiences of literature and music in nineteenth-century Britain" (www.soundingvictorian.org); *Re:dress Women Composers Project*, directed by Kate Kennedy, a collaboration between the Oxford Centre for Life-Writing, Oxford University, BBC Radio 3, and the Oxford Dictionary of National Biography that works to "create a resource to facilitate performances of music written by women" (www.centreforwomencomposers.com); and the magisterial *Baudelaire Song Project*, directed by Helen Abbott, that "brings together for the first time all the song settings ever of Charles Baudelaire's poetry, looking at classical music and popular music settings, in French original and in translation, with music scores and in audio format" (www.baudelairesong.org). These digital humanities projects, with their ability to reach beyond the academic community to engage also with creative practitioners and the general public, together with the publication of book-length studies of late nineteenth-century Victorian music and music history, have changed the research landscape dramatically. Not only have they increased the accessibility of resources for scholars interested in the music culture of the Victorian period more broadly, but they have led to new conceptualizations and insights into the relationship between the arts. The study of "singing translations," as Helen Abbott calls them, whether they are adaptations/translations of Swinburne by Percy Grainger or riffs on Baudelaire by

heavy metal bands, is now a rapidly expanding field of research that draws on a wide range of discussions that connect literature and music as well as debates about gender, national character, the role of intellectuals, and the relationship of Britain with continental Europe.[4]

This article explores the vogue for setting poetry to music in the late-Victorian and Edwardian periods, focusing particularly on the circles and networks that brought composers such as Cyril Scott and Frederick Delius to the work of decadent poets like Ernest Dowson. The routes to discovery were not always direct or obvious. Scott and Delius, for example, did not find Dowson for themselves in English-speaking contexts; they were gifted his work by European writers, artists, and musicians working on the continent, and most notably by members of the Frankfurt Group. Dowson's poetry was presented to Scott by the German Symbolist poet Stefan George almost as foreign literature.

Decadence resonated in various ways and signified a variety of things to different composers. To women musicians and composers, for example, such as Radclyffe Hall, Adela Maddison, Ella Overbeck, and Ethel Smyth (who worked a passage between the mainstream musical establishment and semi-private concerts and musical evenings), decadent literature resonated with the themes of unconventional sexuality, violence, and death. From what can be pieced together from cultural-historical studies of the period, biographies, memoirs, letters, newspaper and journal articles, and original sheet music, it is evident that the proliferation of decadent literature in the British and European musical scene of the time is a remarkable testimony to the richness and variety of the best of late-Victorian decadent verse.[5]

1. Decadent song literature

The poetry of late-Victorian English decadents sustained a substantial popular song literature at the *fin de siècle* and in the early decades of the twentieth century. Of the English decadents whose poems were set to music, the most popular were Ernest Dowson and Arthur Symons, compared to a modest number of musical settings of poems by Beardsley, Alfred Douglas, Lionel Johnson, and Oscar Wilde.[6] A preliminary survey of the musical settings of late-Victorian and modern British literature reveals that the collections most favored by composers were all published in the 1890s and included Douglas's *The City of the Soul* (1899), Dowson's *Verses and Decorations* (1899), and Symons's *Silhouettes* (1892), *London Nights* (1895), *Amoris Victima* (1897), and *Images of Good and Evil* (1899). Meanwhile, the most popular poems set to music were Dowson's "*Non sum qualis eram bonae sub regno Cynarae*" (better known as "Cynara" and hereafter cited as "*Non sum qualis*") (5 settings) and "*Vitae summa brevis spem nos vetat incohare longam*" (9 settings), and Symons's "Fountain Court" (8 settings) and "Memory" (7 settings).

Among the composers inspired by late-Victorian decadent poetry were Roger Quilter and Arnold Schoenberg,[7] but the English composers Scott and Delius were particularly drawn to the slim volumes of Dowson's verse. While Delius was transported by the wistful longing and diminuendo in the poet's evocation of mood and atmosphere, which he expressed with lavish orchestration and chromaticism, Scott found inspiration for his modern soundscapes and Pre-Raphaelite archaism, and saw the potential in Dowson's crafting of language for radical formal experimentation. In a letter of 1959, he reflected that Dowson was "the poet that inspired me most at the start of my career."[8]

This is perhaps not surprising. Of all the English decadents working at the *fin de siècle*, Symons and Dowson were the most musically minded and attentive to

matters of form. Music was for Symons both the supreme expression of the imaginative life and a "divine hallucination," full of foreignness and mystery. His reflections on the "interpenetration of substance and form"[9] and his concern with what he called the "universal science of beauty"[10] represented an emergent direction in modern aesthetics towards greater freedom of association between the arts. Symons could actually read and play music (he was a decent pianist, able to sight-read and improvise, and he had a piano carted up six flights of stairs to his rooms in Fountain Court), but Dowson had a finer ear for sound. In much the same way as a musician creates music from a combination of sounds and silence, so Dowson attempted to produce sound-patterns in his poems that override narrative intelligibility. His lexical range was not so much narrow as distilled. He deployed a core range of sounds expressive of personal emotion and punctuation to control the pace and the length of the pauses.[11] In "Villanelle of Sunset," for example, as Stephanie Kuduk Weiner demonstrates, the use of pauses is archaic and poetical, drawing on a system of punctuation dating back to early printed books. "The graduated system of stops, drawn from rhetoric and its interface between written and spoken language," she writes, "pertains to sound rather than organizing syntax."[12]

Dowson's emphasis on visual and aural patterns in his poetry, what he described in a letter dated 20 March 1891 to Victor Plarr as "mere sound verse, with scarcely the shadow of a sense in it, has a Symbolist-inspired musicality that finds a correlation in the purity of Beardsley's fine line.[13] In the poems of Dowson and the black-and-white drawings of Beardsley, we encounter a resistance to, rather than a rejection of, representation in favor of a formalist aestheticism that emphasizes purity of tone and rhythm. In their mastery of form, Dowson's and Beardsley's work represent a high point in late-Victorian aesthetics that intersected with innovations

and experimentation by modern British composers like Scott. As R.K.R. Thornton and Caroline Dowson comment in the note to "Chanson sans paroles," a poem in imitation of Paul Verlaine's *Romances sans paroles* (1874), Dowson "frequently suggested that he was interested more in the music of his poems than their meaning."[14] He may not have been musical or professed any knowledge of music, but the beauty of his choice of words and his loosening of syntax, as well as rhythm (mainly in relation to the alexandrine), made an enduring impression on early twentieth-century music.

2. Cyril Scott (1879-1970): composer, mystic, translator

Cyril Scott was admired by Claude Debussy**,** Maurice Ravel, Richard Strauss, and Igor Stravinsky, and he was described by the conductor Eugène Goossens as "The Father of British Modern Music."[15] His experiments in free rhythm, generated by expanding musical motifs (above all in his revolutionary First Piano Sonata of 1909), are said to have exerted an influence on Stravinsky's *Rite of Spring*. Scott was a transitional avant-garde figure at the *fin de siècle*. As biographer Sarah Collins notes, he "occupied an unusual in-between space[;] . . . his unconventional harmonic and rhythmic practices positioned him as a modernist, yet his underlying aesthetic sensibilities were steeped in romantic allusion."[16]

Scott was born in 1879 in Oxton, a village in the north of England, near Liverpool. He was the youngest of three children, his father a scholar of Greek and a businessman in shipping. Scott showed a precocious talent for music, picking out tunes on the piano almost before talking, and in 1891 at the age of 12 was enrolled in the Frankfurt conservatoire to study piano. He returned to England two years later to continue his piano studies, but in 1895—at the age of 16—he went back to Frankfurt

to study with Ivan Knorr at the Hoch Conservatory, and there he met Balfour Gardiner, Percy Grainger, Norman O'Neill, and Roger Quilter, who came to be known as the Frankfurt Group.

This second period in Frankfurt made a huge impression on Scott. In 1896 he met the German poet Stefan George and the German illustrator Melchior Lechter, both of whom influenced his outlook and personal aesthetic. Of George, Scott writes in his biography, *Bone of Contention*: "besides being a remarkable poet he *looked* like one to a superlative degree, with [a] pale and somewhat Dantesque face, very deep-set, rather melancholy eyes and his imposing head of long black hair . . . . He both loved and radiated power."[17] Through George, Scott became interested in arcana and Pre-Raphaelite otherworldliness, and he easily plugged into George's cosmopolitan dandified style and anti-bourgeois sentiments. George had attended Mallarmé's famous *mardis*, and instilled in the young English musician "disinterestedness, a pure fervor and obedience to the cult of beauty."[18] Scott self-consciously fashioned for himself a romantic spiritual persona, wearing expensive suits and watch chains, playing chess intensely, and reading books on reincarnation and oriental occultism. In a photograph of 1902, now in the Grainger Museum Collection in Melbourne, he fixes the viewer with a severe stare, his hair swept back and leonine, his starched white collar crisp against a black velvet cravat (Fig. 1). Like J.-K. Huysmans's fictional neurotic Des Esseintes, and indeed George and Lechter, who furnished their apartments with medieval mini-chapels, Scott created an "ecclesiastical atmosphere" in his own home, building his own gothic furniture, replacing his windows with church stained-glass, and burning incense.[19]

[FIGURE 1 GOES HERE]

Figure 1: Photographic portrait of Cyril Scott, October 1902, by Barraud Studio, Grainger Museum Collection, Melbourne, Australia.

Scott discovered Dowson through George who had met Dowson in London in 1898. Little is known about this meeting, but George was familiar with the work of English decadents and had translated poems by Dante Gabriel Rossetti, Swinburne, and Dowson. Of his encounter with Dowson in London, George wrote to his Dutch friend Paul Verwey in 1898, "my repeated encounters with E D were happy ones," and he compared Dowson's appearance to the "unnatural contorted faces by Aubr. Beardsley . . . somewhat life-less."[20] Scott was immediately smitten with Dowson's "pale nuns and Horatian courtesans," declaring that "Previous to that, poetry had not interested me in the least, but henceforward it became almost a passion, though for many years I could find no other English poet to appeal to me" (*My Years*, 30, 32). He made 21 song settings of Dowson's verse between 1900 and 1915, including "Yvonne of Brittany" (1903), "A Valediction" (1904), "Amor Umbratilis" (1905), "His Lady's Treasures" (1908), "Evening" (1910), "Beata Solitudo" (1911), "A Roundel" (1911), "Villanelle of the Poet's Road" (1911), "Retrospect" (1913), "Soli Cantare Periti Arcades" (1914), "The Pierrot of the Minute" (1937), and "*Vitae summa brevis spem nos vetat incohare longam*" (pre-1940). The modern soundscapes of Dowson's verse appealed to Scott. Although he did not hold to any abstract philosophizing about art, Dowson was fastidious about form, constantly revising and experimenting with stresses, pauses, inversions, repetitions, and refrains to create exquisitely wrought melodies. As both a romantic and modern innovator, and "under the influence of modern metrical experiments in verse (to which he himself contributed)" (Banfield, 92), Scott appreciated the refined lyrical beauty of Dowson's poetry, its emphasis on patterns of words and phrases, and silence.

Scott had many talents—some contemporaries thought too many; as well as composing music, he painted and wrote and translated poetry. When in 1898 he left Frankfurt to return to settle in Liverpool, he shared an apartment with Charles Bonnier, a professor in French literature at the university.[21] Bonnier was an ardent Wagnerite and a lifelong committed socialist, and instilled in Scott a deep love of poetry, especially the French decadents (Bonnier had known Mallarmé). For the next few years Scott lived a life of radical politics and aesthetics in equal measure, surrounded by figures prominently involved in the Fabian Society, women's suffrage, and pacifism, and infused with the aesthetic principles of Edward Burne-Jones, Edward Carpenter, Havelock Ellis, William Morris, and Rossetti. Bonnier taught Scott versification and persuaded him to translate Baudelaire's *Les Fleurs du mal* into English. After meeting Arthur Symons in London, who was—by Scott's account at least—very encouraging, he published a selection of the poems with Elkin Mathews in 1909, followed a year later by a volume of translations of Stefan George's lyrics.

Scott's selection of Baudelaire's poems from *Les Fleurs du mal* reveals his increasing preoccupation with mysticism and beauty. As a young man, he transitions, mainly through the influence of his friend Hans Lüthy, away from the dogmas of the Christian religion so dearly held by his mother through agnosticism to the teachings of certain Western and Eastern esoteric traditions, and finally to occultism and Vedantism. His closest women friends were spiritualists. In 1902 he met the pianist and Christian Scientist Evelyn Suart, who championed his music and premiered many of his works, and, through her, he became interested in metaphysics. After separating from his wife, Rose Allatini, in 1943, he met the clairvoyant Marjorie Hartson, who remained his companion until his death. He was also a close friend of author and

clairvoyant Janet Melanie Ailsa Mills, who wrote under the pen-name H. K. Challoner.

Eschewing those poems in *Les Fleurs du mal* that deal with the shock and thrill of modern life (there is no mention of Paris, the text is de-politicized, de-historicized), Scott selects poems that are sensuous and romantic (“La Chevelure”), atmospheric (“Evening Harmony”; “Mists and Rains”), and evocative of longing and loss (“To a Passer-By”; “The Set of the Romantic Sun”), attempting to retain a musicality through the shapes of sounds in English, often at the expense of sense. Bonnier might have taught him how rhyme and meter work, but Scott’s translations are pedestrian and somewhat flawed. His translation of the title of Baudelaire’s “La Vie Antérieure” (from *Spleen et L’Idéal*) as “Interior Life,” for example, mistakes the word “antérieure,” which in French means “previously” or “prior,” for “interior” (the correct English translation of the title would be “A Former Life” or “A Past Life”). The syntax of Scott’s English translation adheres doggedly to the French. He changes the word order only in the third stanza to retain the original rhyme scheme, effecting a rhyme between “waves” and “slaves.” Here for comparison are Baudelaire’s original poem and Scott’s translation in full:

La Vie Antérieure (Baudelaire)	Interior Life (Scott)
J’ai longtemps habité sous les vastes portiques Que les soleils marins teignaient de mille feux, Et que leurs grands piliers, droits et majestueux, Rendaient pareils, le soir, aux grottes basaltiques.	A long while I dwelt beneath vast porticos, Which the ocean-suns bathed with a thousand fires, And which with their great and majestic spires, At eventide looked like basaltic grottoes.
Les houles, en roulant les images des cieux,	The billows, in rolling depictured the skies,

Mêlaient d'une façon solennelle et mystique	And mingled, in solemn and mystical strain,
Les tout-puissants accords de leur riche musique	The all-mighteous chords of their luscious refrain
Aux couleurs du couchant reflété par mes yeux.	With the sun-set's colours reflexed in mine eyes.
C'est là que j'ai vécu dans les voluptés calmes,	It is there that I lived in exalted calm,
Au milieu de l'azur, des vagues, des splendeurs	In the midst of the azure, the splendours, the waves,
Et des esclaves nus, tout imprégnés d'odeurs.	While pregnant with perfumes, naked slaves
Qui me refraîchissaient le front avec des palmes,	Refreshed my forehead with branches of palm,
Et dont l'unique soin était d'approfondir	Whose gentle and only care was to know
Le secret douloureux qui me faisait languir.	The secret that caused me to languish so.

Scott cut his translating teeth on Baudelaire, just as George had done ten years earlier, but his translations overlay Baudelaire's subtle, resonant, labile use of language with a sentimental musicality and youthful amateur enthusiasm. Given the poor quality of some of the translations, it is somewhat surprising that Symons should have endorsed Scott's translation when they met in London, but we only have Scott's word for that.

Scott's London circles were intensely cosmopolitan. His introduction to Symons for instance came via a series of social connections made by his friends the composer Percy Grainger, the socialite Lilith Lowrey, and the painter Jacques-Émile Blanche who knew Symons well. The Frankfurt Group met regularly in London to perform and discuss each other's work. Balfour Gardiner's house in Kensington was a regular meeting-place, and Scott attended along with Frederic Austin, Arnold Bax, Benjamin Dale, and Gustav Holst, among others. It was at one of these gatherings that Scott probably met Delius. He found rooms for him in London in 1907, but they were

not the closest of friends. Scott was considered very avant-garde and was not part of Delius's circle.

3. Frederick Delius (1862-1934): Songs of Sunset

Like Scott, Delius was gifted a copy of Dowson's poems, most likely by either his great friend Gardiner or his wife, the painter Jelka Rosen. He was immediately enamored and set eight of them to music: "Moritura"; "Cease smiling, Dear! a little while be sad"; "Autumnal"; "*O Mors!*"; "Exile"; "In Spring"; "Spleen"; and "*Vitae summa brevis spem nos vetat incohare longam*," which were published as *Songs of Sunset* by Leuckart, in both full and vocal score, in 1911(Fig. 2). He kept the poems intact apart from a couple of minor changes and the omission of the third stanza of "Moritura," the second and fourth stanzas of "Cease smiling," and the final stanza of "Autumnal."

[FIGURE 2 GOES HERE]

Figure 2. Cover page of Frederick Delius, *Songs of Sunset*, Leipzig: F. E. C. Leuckart, 1911, © The British Library Board, F585.hh.(36).

By the time Delius encountered Dowson's poems in 1908, he had a reputation for large-scale concert works (between 1902 and 1905, he wrote three large works for orchestra and voice: *Appalachia*, *Sea Drift*, and *A Mass of Life*), but he was inspired by the melancholy of Dowson's poems. They energized him and fulfilled "just about every criterion for the composer in terms of his personal world-view: all his philosophical *raisons d'être* are here, ranging from the poignancy of Man's transient existence on Earth compared with Nature's eternal renewal, to the austere belief that we come from nothing and return to nothing."[22] Delius originally gave the piece an elegiac title, *Songs of Twilight and Sadness*, for he envisaged the eight poems as a

song-cycle, a unified structure expressing in variant form the feelings of world-weariness and lost love. He set the eight poems into self-contained sections divided by a double bar, with various vocal settings, ranging from choral in the first and third sections, single soloist (soprano in the fourth, baritone in the fifth and seventh), a duet for two soloists in the second, and all voices together in the sixth and eighth.

The song-cycle was first performed by the Beecham Symphony Orchestra at Queen's Hall in London in June 1911, and it received fair reviews from the critics, who were on the whole appreciative of the emotional expression given to the words. It was Delius's original idea to put "*Non sum qualis*" as the climax of *Songs of Sunset*, but he stopped work at the words "feast is finished…" and did not take up the composition again until 1929 when Thomas Beecham asked him if he had an unpublished work for voice and orchestra to include in a festival of the composer's music. The performance of *Cynara* in October 1929 as part of the Delius Festival was critically acclaimed. *The Times* noted that its "most marked characteristic which seems to reflect his inmost musical temperament is a kind of nostalgic emotion. . . . *Cynara* . . . deals in something stronger than home-sickness, but the kind of reaction portrayed in Ernest Dowson's poem is just that tinge of regret that lies at the heart of almost all Delius's contemplative music."[23]

Delius was not the only composer to create a song-cycle from decadent poetry. The song-cycle was a genre that had grown in popularity throughout the nineteenth century through the work of French composers like Debussy, Gabriel Fauré, and Jules Massenet.[24] Fauré (1845-1924) composed *Cinq melodies "de Venise,"* Op. 58 in 1891, based on five poems by Verlaine from the collections *Fêtes galantes* and *Romances sans paroles*: "Mandoline" (from Fêtes galantes); "En sourdine" (from Fêtes galantes); "Green" (from Romances sans paroles); "À Clymène" (from Fêtes

galantes); “C'est l'extase” (from Romances sans paroles) (Fig. 3). According to Fauré, the song-cycle looped a number of musical themes from one song to another (he used a similar technique for his later song-cycle, *La bonne chanson* [1892-94], based on nine of Verlaine’s poems from *Fêtes galantes*). In a letter to his patron, Winnaretta Singer, princesse de Polignac, he claimed that he had created a new form whereby the return of the themes of the other songs in the final one, “C’est l’extase,” made the songs into a kind of suite, “a story.” Thus “Mandoline” sets the Watteau-esque dreamlike atmosphere in which the four love-poems were to be played out; “En sourdine” is tender and lyrical, mirroring the carnal and spiritual link which unites the lovers; “Green,” more upbeat, more mischievous, is a playful declaration of feeling; “À Clymène” is a sensuous and mystical portrait of the beloved; and “C’est l’extase” brings everything together in what Jean-Michel Nectoux in his biography describes as “a pantheist expression of human love.”[25]

[FIGURE 3 GOES HERE]

Figure 3. Gabriel Fauré, “Mandoline,” song-cycle based on Paul Verlaine’s poetry, fly leaf, London: Metzler & Co., 1891, © The British Library Board, H. 1798.j.(59.)

4. Adela Maddison (1866-1929): musician, translator, cosmopolitan

“Mandoline” was translated into English by Adela Maddison (Fig. 4). She retains Verlaine’s light, synaesthetic touch, transforming his sensory emphasis on aural, visual, and textural details (“écouteuses”; “chanteuses”; “vestes de soie”; “robes à queue”; “molles ombres bleues”; “rose et grise”) into verbs and adjectives that suggest a gentle and atmospheric musical rhythm and harmony (“gaily”; “Trailing”; “Pointing”; “Swaying”; “humming”; “dreamy”), bringing the poem round to a cyclical finish that reiterates the idea of a timeless (“oft-told”) youthful courtship

situation (gaily singing; alleys shady). Here are Verlaine's original poem and Maddison's translation/adaptation in full:

Mandoline (Verlaine)	Mandoline (Maddison)
Les donneurs de sérénades	Serenades gaily singing
Et les belles écouteuses	Courtly lord and gentle lady
Échangent des propos fades	The oft-told story repeating
Sous les ramures chanteuses.	Along the alleys shady
C'est Tircis et c'est Aminte,	See Tirsis and see Aminta
Et c'est l'éternel Clitandre,	Damon sighing, Celia smiling
Et c'est Damis qui pour mainte	With graceful wit and with compliment tender
Cruelle fait maint vers tendre.	The hours beguiling
Leurs courtes vestes de soie,	Trailing their silken robes
Leurs longues robes à queues,	Pointing with each dainty shoe
Leur élégance, leur joie,	Swaying their figures glide
Et leurs molles ombres bleues	In the hazy shadows blue
Tourbillonnent dans l'extase	Dimly in the opal moonlight
D'une lune rose et grise,	See them tread the graceful measure
Et la mandoline jase	While the mandoline's low humming
Parmi les frissons de brise.	Thrills them with a dreamy pleasure
	Serenades gaily singing

	Courtly lord and gentle lady The oft-told story repeating Along the alleys shady

Maddison was allegedly the lover of Fauré and in many biographies this dubious fact is the one that stands out, but Maddison was one of a number of women musicians and composers at the *fin de siècle* who embraced a decadent aesthetic and challenged traditional ideas about the role of women artists. These include Mabel Veronica Batten, Ella Overbeck, and Ethel Smyth, as Sophie Fuller has revealed in her seminal essay, "'Devoted Attention': Looking for Lesbian Musicians in Fin-de-Siècle Britain."

Katherine Mary Adela Tindal was born *probably* in London in 1866 into an upper-class family, her mother of Anglo-Irish descent and her father Louis Symonds Tindal, an English Vice-Admiral (Fig. 4). Nothing is known about her early musical education, but at the age of 19 she married Frederick Brunning Maddison, one of the senior directors of the music-publishing firm Metzler & Co. He was more than 30 years her senior, and after a couple of years of marriage they had two children (in 1886 and 1888). Fred published her first pieces of music, a song and a piano piece, in 1882, and together they hosted a successful musical salon in London in the 1890s, which was frequented by Fauré, who was contracted to Metzler & Co. in 1896. During the 1890s he had much to do with the couple: he taught Adela musical composition, his music was performed often at their musical salon, and he stayed at their villa in Brittany. Fauré thought Adela was "extraordinarily gifted."[26]

[FIGURE 4 GOES HERE]

Figure 4: Photographic portrait of Adela Maddison, *The Sketch*, 16 October 1902, © British Library Board, HUI. LD52 pg 160.

In 1898, she left her husband and children and went to Paris, perhaps to be with her lover—as Fauré's biographers believe. However, as Fuller argues, her decision was likely to have been a professional one; she was well known in French musical circles and several of her works had been published in Paris.[27] In 1906, to the astonishment of her friends, Adela moved to Berlin, a city she did not much like but where lived the family of Marta Gertrud Mundt, secretary to the princesse de Polignac (the dedicatee of "Mandoline"). After Fred Maddison's death (probably in 1906), Mundt and Adela developed a close companionship and became lovers. Adela re-entered London's music scene during the war but was less involved in lesbian society circles. She died in a nursing home in Ealing, west London, in 1929.[28]

Unsurprisingly perhaps for an Irish woman travelling between London, Paris, and Berlin, Adela's music was cosmopolitan in style, and deemed decadent by contemporary critics. In a round-up of weekly music events, the *Athenæum* described her compositions performed with Fauré at St. James's Hall in London in May 1896 as "somewhat Wagnerian in character" (Anonymous, 627). She bridged the gap between languages and cultures, translating and adapting a variety of writers' works into song. Her *Twelve Songs, Op. 9 & 10* (1895) includes "Bleak Weather" (Ella Wilcox Wheeler), "Before Sunset," "The Triumph of Time,"[29] "Stage Love," "An Interlude," "Rococo" (Swinburne), "A Little While," "Insomnia" (D. G. Rossetti), "O That 'Twere Possible" (Tennyson), "A Lament" (Shelley), "No. 1. Liebe" (Heine), and "No. 2. An Den Mond" (Altes Volkeslied).

Maddison's preference for an impressionist style of continental music over the academic British type was probably the reason why, at the turn of the century, she

invited Cyril Scott to her home in Paris to meet Fauré, Debussy, and Ravel. During that visit Scott and Ravel spent many hours together performing their compositions to each other,[30] but Scott was ambivalent towards Debussy. "[W]ith his somewhat Christ-like face, marred by a slightly hydrocephalic forehead," Scott writes in *My Years of Indiscretion*, Debussy "was neither an unpleasant personality nor an impressive one."[31] About his hostess, however, Scott had little illuminating to say. In his biography, *Bone of Contention*, he describes her as a "composeress," "a married woman who moved in London society."[32] Apart from devising a witty conundrum round her surname,[33] he seems to have regarded her merely as a conduit to meeting other likeminded male composers. Like the public perception of so many independent women artists at the *fin de siècle*, Adela's musical talents were eclipsed by her role as Fred's wife.

Maddison was not a mere conduit however. She was an accomplished translator and composer with an international reputation who moved between the public-facing male-musical world and the private spheres of lesbian music-performance in the early twentieth century. Her work on the Continent was followed by the newspaper press in England, which suggests, despite the paucity of accessible material on her now, that she had a much greater public profile than currently thought. At the foot of a column titled "Affairs in Berlin" in the *Observer* for 13 November 1910, for example, Maddison's opera *Der Talisman* is singled out for praise, albeit rather circumspect. "The management of the Leipzig opera," the correspondent writes, "has given Mrs. Maddison's production a first-rate cast and an exceptionally fine mounting." He goes on, "German critics await its initial performances with the liveliest interest," concluding that "Leipzig was the scene of the only other English opera ever produced in Germany, Miss Smythe's 'The Wreckers,' recently seen at

Covent Garden. It is considered an interesting coincidence that both 'The Wreckers' and 'The Talisman' are the work of English women."[34]

Conclusion

The study of the interrelationship of decadent literature and music offers new perspectives on transnational social networks and artistic circles and the publication and circulation of new translations. The techniques of musical arrangement and composition often overlapped with literary translation. Two of the composers I have discussed in this article were also translators and two of them boldly adapted the literary text, taking individual poems out of published sequence and grouping them into song-cycles. Moreover, there is growing evidence that women played a significant if under-vaunted role in the proliferation of late-Victorian decadent song literature. As Fuller demonstrates, there were many semi-private concert-performance circles of women musicians and composers who were setting the poems of Swinburne, Maurice Maeterlinck, and Verlaine to music.

Decadence in England may have been seen by many as a spent force by the turn of the century, derided as a mannered confection, "a movement of elderly youths," as Holbrook Jackson put it, "who slipped away to die in taverns and gutters,"[35] but in Britain and Europe there was a renaissance of interest among musicians and composers in late-Victorian decadent poetry. The traffic of artists, writers, and musicians across the English Channel at the *fin de siècle* led to a cross-pollination of traditions, movements, and côteries and created new readerships and literary markets. These networks of exchange mediated cultural production while the circulation of translations of literary and musical texts had an effect on the development of literary and musical styles. The writers, artists, musicians, translators,

and publishers who gathered at the Café des Tribunaux in Dieppe in the 1890s, for example, constituted a dynamic cross-continental knowledge exchange, a vibrant mix of writers, artists, musicians and composers, a cosmopolitan community that included Beardsley, Charles Conder, Debussy, Fauré, Maeterlinck, George Moore, Albert Roussel, and Wilde.

The risk of moving across boundaries—whether they be temporal, physical, or related to discipline and specialization—is the loss of a certain identity and purpose, but as this article aims to show, approaching song-literature from a late-Victorian decadence perspective opens the way to understanding more about cosmopolitan networks of exchange at the *fin de siècle* and uncovering various transnational alliances forged within those networks. A follow-on study could quite feasibly be a collaborative multidisciplinary project in the digital humanities involving Victorianists, decadence scholars, musicologists, historians, and translators to generate a more detailed map of the relational structures that shaped late-Victorian decadent song literature. Such a project would create an invaluable archive of material for scholars working on a range of disciplines and inter-disciplines within the broad field of humanities and foster new conversations and engagements. One simple benefit of this kind of collaboration would be the sourcing of original sheet music which, before 1900, was not routinely catalogued by major national repositories like the British Library. The original sheet music of four of Fauré's *Cinq mélodies "de Venise"* (1896), which includes Maddison's translations of Verlaine for example, has proven extremely elusive.

Late-Victorian decadent song literature constituted no more perhaps than sentimental salon music. The public were soon fatigued by its delicate world-weariness. Delius's *Songs of Sunset* was dedicated to Hans Haym's Elberfield Choral

Society, but it did not perform the cycle until 1914 as Haym regarded the piece as being niche. In a letter to the painter Ida Gerhardi in 1913, he wrote, “this is not a work for a wide public, but rather for a smallish band of musical isolates who are born decadents and life’s melancholics at the same time.”[36] While that might be true of Dowson—that the singing translations by both Scott and Delius were for life’s mystics and melancholics only—it is not true of Maddison, whose translations, adaptations, and librettos were favorably received in the musical press. Standing outside the British musical establishment as she did, fluid in sexuality and friendship, many years a resident of France and Germany, Maddison is perhaps an important starting-point to understanding the mobility of decadence as a transnational, translational cultural form at the turn of the twentieth century and its legacy beyond purely literary manifestations.

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Notes

[1] My eyes and ears have been opened newly wide by colleagues and specialists in the fields of musicology and translation (especially by colleagues in the Decadence and Translation Network https://dandtnetwork.glasgow.ac.uk/). Special thanks to Helen Abbott, Sarah Collins, Bénédicte Coste, Michael Craske, Matthew Creasy, Diana Hallman, Howard Haskin, Katharina Herold, Fraser Riddell, Michael Shaw, and Emma Sutton for their invaluable insights and suggestions.

[2] See Phyllis Weliver, ed., *The Figure of Music in Nineteenth-Century British Poetry* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005); Phyllis Weliver, *The Musical Crowd in English Fiction, 1840–1910: Class, Culture, and Nation* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006); and Phyllis Weliver, *Women Musicians in Victorian Fiction, 1860–1900: Representations of Music, Science and Gender in the Leisured Home* (London: Routledge, 2016). Also, Emma Sutton's work on the relationship between literature and music: *Aubrey Beardsley and British Wagnerism in the 1890s* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2002); *Opera and the Novel* (Special Issue: *Forum for Modern Language Studies*, co-edited with Michael Downes, April 2012); and *Virginia Woolf and Classical Music: Politics, Aesthetics, Form* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh UP, 2013). Major scholarly developments are summarized by Craske (2018): 542-43.

See also my own work in the area of decadence studies: "The Musical Analogy in Beardsley Criticism," "The Musical Aesthetics ('such as it is') of Arthur Symons (1865-1945)," and "'The quintessence of quintessence': music and musicality in Ernest Dowson's Verse."

[3] Gooch, "Delius and Dowson," 16. This is the case especially, as Gooch notes, because of the false ascription of Delius's "Songs of Sunset" to Arthur Symons rather than Dowson in Arthur Hutchings's *Delius* (London: Macmillan, 1948), an error

repeated in Eric Blom's edition of Grove's *Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, 5th edition (London: Macmillan, 1954), vol. 2, 655 (Gooch 1974: 14-15).

[4] I am grateful to both Helen Abbott and Sarah Collins for sharing their thoughts about the translation and adaptation of poetry into song literature and for helping me see the broader cultural and intellectual implications of research in this area (private email communication with Sarah Collins, 28 June 2019).

[5] And perhaps also to the work of some less accomplished poets, like Alfred Douglas and Olive Custance. Douglas wrote a few decent sonnets, but his literary fame is undoubtedly because of his association with Wilde.

[6] See Bryan N. S. Gooch and David S. Thatcher, *Musical Settings of Late Victorian and Modern British Literature: A Catalogue*.

[7] Arnold Schoenberg's *Vier Orchesterlieder* [Four Orchestral Songs], Op. 22, 1, is a setting of George's translation of Dowson's "Seraphita") and Roger Quilter set four of Dowson's poems to music: "Beato Solitudo" ("A Land of Silence," 1911); "A Coronal" ("Violets and leaves of vine," 1915); "In Spring" ("Songs of Sorrow'," 1928); "*Vita summa brevis*" ("Passing Dreams," 1958).

[8] Quoted in Banfield, *Sensibility and English Song*, 91.

[9] Symons, "What is Poetry," 194.

[10] Symons, *Plays*, ix.

[11] For a fine-grained analysis of the British decadents' debt to French poets, see Clive Scott, *Channel Crossings*, especially Chapter 6, "French Inflexions in the English Poetic Voice of the 1890s."

[12] Kuduk Weiner, "Sight and Sound in the Poetic World of Ernest Dowson," 500.

[13] Dowson, *Letters*, 189, For an extended analysis of Dowson's use of visual and aural patterns, see Kuduk Wiener (483).

[14] Dowson, *Ernest Dowson*, 243.

[15] Scott, *Bone of Contention*, 155. This and other accounts of praise for Scott's "historical placement" are discussed briefly by Collins: "There has developed a standardised account . . . which inevitably includes Eugene Goossens' comment . . . , Elgar's comment crediting Scott with the same and implying personal indebtedness on that account, Debussy's invocation that Scott was 'one of the rarest artists of the present generation' and the epithets 'musical messiah,' 'English Debussy' and 'enfant terrible' that were applied to Scott in the music press of the time" (3-4).

[16] Collins, *The Aesthetic Life of Cyril Scott*, xiv.

[17] Scott, *Bone of Contention*, 102.

[18] Norton, *Secret Germany*, 47.

[19] Eaglefield Hull, *Cyril Scott*, 29.

[20] See the letter from George to Verwey, 16 August 1898, in Wolfskehl and Verwey, *Karl Wolfskehl and Albert Verwey*, 47. I am grateful to Katharina Herold for sharing this archival material with me.

[21] Charles Bonnier wrote a series of short essays on English authors, including Emily Brontë, Henry James, George Gissing, George Meredith, Thomas Hardy, Walter Pater, Jane Austen, Charles Dickens, and Robert Louis Stevenson, collected together as *Milieux D'Art* and privately printed by Donald Fraser, Liverpool, n.d. The collection also contains an essay that has never been cited in Dowson scholarship: "E. Dowson," dedicated to Cyril Scott (15-17).

[22] Quoted in Lee-Browne and Guinery, *Delius and his Music*, 229.

[23] Quoted in Lee-Browne and Guinery, *Delius and his Music*, 241.

[24] As Laura Tunbridge comments, the song-cycle was a popular genre in the nineteenth century "attract[ing] composers because, through its close relationship

with poetry […] it encourage[d] experimentation with [modernist] notions of self-expression" (2010: 5).

[25] Nectoux, *Gabriel Fauré*, 179.

[26] Fuller, "'Devoted Attention'," 85.

[27] Fuller, "'Devoted Attention'," 86.

[28] This biographical information is derived from Sophie Fuller's more detailed account of Maddison's life and career (see Fuller 2002: 85-87).

[29] Michael Craske describes the musical phrasing of Maddison's "The Triumph of Time" as "particularly interesting," "a fragmentary, synaesthetic ekphrasis of Swinburne's poem" (2018: 554).

[30] Collins, *The Aesthetic Life of Cyril Scott*, 99.

[31] Scott, *My Years of Indiscretion*, 101.

[32] Scott, *Bone of Contention*, 125.

[33] "If Adela Madison is the daughter of her father's daddy's son, / Then what relation is Adela Madison / To the sister of her father's daddy's son?" (Quoted in Scott, *Bone of Contention*, 125).

[34] See Fuller, "'Devoted Attention'," 85.

[35] Jackson, *The Eighteen Nineties*, 63.

[36] Quoted in Lee-Browne and Guinery, *Delius and his Music*, 229.