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Robert Stilling

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**Goldsmiths**  
UNIVERSITY OF LONDON

# Imperial Shame, Magnificent Decay Decadent Poetics and the Colonial West Indies

Robert Stilling

Florida State University

In the introduction to *The Poet of Guiana*, a selection of works by Walter MacArthur Lawrence published posthumously in 1948, the editor, Patrick H. Daly, identifies Lawrence as ‘the leader of the Aesthetic movement in Guiana because of the high regard he had for literary purity as such’. Daly praises Lawrence, who was born in British Guiana 1896 and died in 1942, as ‘the most intellectual and urbane Guianese poet of his generation’, known for his ‘chaste, strenuous, athletically supple and pure verse’. And though Lawrence was ‘prone to excess emotional fervour and long, complex sentences [...] his poetry generally has euphony’. Daly describes Lawrence’s talent as being ‘like a delicately strung instrument: the higher it is the deeper is its possessor’s sensitivity’. While Daly stipulates that ‘hypersensitivity’ in an artist is abnormal, he echoes Walter Pater by defending Lawrence on the grounds of ‘temperament’. Lawrence’s ‘sensitivity claimed as its ancestry merely the artist’s temperament [...]. He would have been less than an artist – and more than an artist – had his art not been agonised by profound sensitivity’.<sup>1</sup> In describing Lawrence as an artist agonized by sensitivity but not hypersensitive, graceful yet prone to emotional excess, Daly locates Lawrence’s poetry on the line between aestheticism and decadence, between refinement and an abnormal over-refinement. This is a distinction Daly affirms by identifying Lawrence with the virtuosity of Algernon Charles Swinburne while disavowing Swinburne’s more scandalous traits:

We consider Lawrence to have been the first of the moderns in this country, but his contact with the final, spiritual moments of Victorianism, and the influence of his masters, Swinburne (that is Swinburne’s desirably effective orchestration without Swinburne’s irreligion) and Wordsworth, gave him strength and uniformity.<sup>2</sup>

In declaring Lawrence to be the ‘first of the moderns’, whose strengths as a poet are nevertheless founded on a lingering Victorianism, Daly unwittingly damned his subject with well-

intentioned praise. While Lawrence was well known in the West Indies from the 1920s to the 1940s, his reputation suffered in the postwar period as literary and political paradigms shifted away from the Victorians, with their whiff of imperialism, toward literature committed to the cause of anticolonialism. Daly sought to shore up Lawrence's reputation with whatever prestige still attached to aestheticism, appealing directly to a privileged class of readers educated at the West Indies' best schools, claiming that Lawrence 'wrote his name into educated acceptance as the Poet of Guiana', and comparing the Georgetown schools he attended to Eton and Oxford.<sup>3</sup> But it was this framing of *The Poet of Guiana* that made Lawrence an easy target for later anticolonial critics who dismissed his work as a relic of the *ancien régime*, praising it only for those moments when Lawrence exhibited a nascent national consciousness, but dismissing Lawrence's antiquated Victorianism.

The problem of talking about a twentieth-century aestheticist movement in anglophone Caribbean poetry is the problem of talking about poetry that is dismissed as derivative of a period in late-Victorian verse that was already seen as a 'nostalgic indulgence [...] irrelevant to the modern world', especially in the wake of modernism.<sup>4</sup> Such poetry in the Caribbean, which succeeded the Romanticism of earlier nineteenth-century poets such as the Guianese poet Egbert 'Leo' Martin (1861-1890), is viewed as doubly irrelevant in histories of Caribbean literature for failing to fit a postcolonial critical narrative that prizes anticolonial sentiment, foregrounds black cultural consciousness, and values a more organically transformative poetics, seeing strict lyric formalism as hopelessly imitative, decadent, and politically disinterested.<sup>5</sup> In histories of Caribbean literature, terms such as aestheticist, decadent, and Parnassian, or an association with Swinburne, have often served as critical shorthand for the kind of literature characteristic of the tail-end of empire before independence movements drove a desire for new national literatures.<sup>6</sup> As a consequence, the emergence of decadent and aestheticist modes in early twentieth-century Caribbean writing has largely been ignored or poorly understood. Making matters more difficult, much of this writing is accessible in only a handful of special collections libraries. Unsurprisingly, such early twentieth-

century Caribbean writing has rarely made it onto the radar of scholars of decadence and aestheticism, whose own scholarly histories are still catching up to the more geographically expansive work currently being done in the field.<sup>7</sup> Even recent work demonstrating that aestheticist and decadent writing continued to flourish well into the era of modernism has yet to take stock of those colonial writers who witnessed first-hand the decline of empire that European decadents so often imagined.<sup>8</sup>

But to account for all the ways in which such poetry has been dismissed is not to describe what this poetry was actually doing or why it was felt to be appropriate for its time. In this article, I will discuss the work of two West Indian poets, the Guianese-born Lawrence and the Jamaican-born poet W. Adolphe Roberts, who wrote self-consciously aestheticist and decadent verse, singing hymns to beauty that protest the conditions of imperial decline. Such poetry does not represent an organized movement so much as it represents the literary affiliations of two poets who found a still-viable oppositional poetics in the example of decadent and aestheticist writing. For Lawrence and Roberts, aestheticist and decadent verse provided a means to decry the evident decline of Britain's colonies, oppose colonial administrations, critique the greed of a still-powerful planter aristocracy, and promote West Indian political autonomy, even if these writers remained nostalgic for empire or stopped short of calling for political independence. A turn toward decadent and aestheticist modes of writing enabled these West Indian poets to formalize in verse a recognition of the apparent irrelevance of the colonies within an imperial scheme characterized by political and economic neglect, and to protest specific constitutional reforms that abrogated the rights of colonials to self-government. Aestheticism's defence of art for art's sake and its disdain for commodification suited these poets' interest in measures of value outside the economic order of a liberalized global marketplace. The oppositional poetics of decadence likewise allowed for expressions of beauty that defied a lack of collective political purpose. Moreover, these poets positioned their verse not as a species of Victorian imitation, but as a rival to free-verse modernism.

As Matthew Potolsky has noted, the political leanings of decadent writers are often a moving target and can swing from one extreme to another. Swinburne, for example, ‘began his career as a fervent republican and advocate of the Risorgimento, but later became a no-less fervent panegyrist of the British Empire’.<sup>9</sup> Despite the decadents’ reputation for seeking refuge from the real world in the cloistered realm of the aesthetic, their appreciation of beauty could just as easily indicate a rejection of the corruption of modernity. As Richard Dellamora has commented, ‘decadence is always radical in its opposition to the organization of modern urban, industrial, and commercial society.’<sup>10</sup> Marion Thain has similarly argued that the flourishing of aestheticist lyric at the fin de siècle might be read as a self-conscious response to the perceived irrelevance of the lyric genre to urban, capitalist modernity.<sup>11</sup> Such verse engaged modernity, paradoxically, by appearing to turn away from it.

The aestheticist and decadent writing that emerged in the West Indies, however, had to grapple with a different but related set of problems, namely emancipation, economic liberalization, and the loosening bonds of empire. As Christopher Taylor has argued, since works of liberal political economy such as Adam Smith’s *The Wealth of Nations* pointed out the burdensome costs of maintaining an empire, the West Indian colonies came to be seen as an economic millstone around Britain’s neck. As Parliament reduced tariffs meant to protect the colonies and opened British trade to new markets, the price of sugar collapsed. With the additional loss of forced labour after emancipation, West Indian plantations largely ceased to be profitable.<sup>12</sup> White planters, fearing a violent uprising on the part of the formerly enslaved, abandoned the colonies in droves, leaving scenes of ruination and dereliction.<sup>13</sup> As Taylor describes it: ‘As the profitability of the West Indian colonies declined, British capital and British imperial attention shifted from the West Indies to more remunerative sites within empire, such as India, or to sites beyond it, such as Cuba and Brazil.’<sup>14</sup> As Britain lost interest in the welfare of its West Indian colonies and failed to fulfil ties of moral obligation, “[neglect]” was the name West Indian writers gave to [...] the divestment of economic capital, political care, and popular concern from the colonies that had once been

considered the crown jewels of the British Empire.<sup>15</sup> As Britain's West Indian colonies languished, West Indian writers increasingly represented themselves as the subjects of imperial neglect:

From elite plantation owners to their emancipated ex-slaves, from Tory protectionists to mulatto socialists, West Indians across the lines of race and class strove to render legible the subtle institutions of neglect and, by so doing, to recompose empire as a political world bound to accord meaning and value to West Indian lives – whatever the economic value of the West Indies.<sup>16</sup>

Taylor finds little evidence of anticolonial nationalism in nineteenth-century West Indian writing. Rather, he finds 'an intense fealty to the British Empire, on one hand, and an emergent investment in the hemispheric Americas, on the other'. West Indian writers 'insisted on being considered [...] rights-bearing subject of an expansive imperial polity.'<sup>17</sup> They produced 'normative' fantasies of how 'the empire should work to sustain West Indian life' even as they despaired at the 'recognition that British attentions were going elsewhere'.<sup>18</sup> Even as the political autonomy of black nation states became increasingly thinkable, empire loyalism persisted into the twentieth century.<sup>19</sup> As colonials felt themselves to be increasingly irrelevant to the new economic order, they sought non-economic measures of value. Nevertheless, Taylor emphasizes that 'West Indian writers never posited literature as possessing an autonomous, self-evident value.' The nineteenth-century literature of imperial neglect 'is almost entirely, unapologetically indifferent to literariness.'<sup>20</sup>

This began to change as the influence of the aesthetic and decadent movements seeped into the work of West Indian poets such as Lawrence, Robert, and the 'Parnassian' Jamaican poet and translator Vivian Virtue (whose work I do not have space to examine here).<sup>21</sup> As Daly tells it, the emergence of an aesthetic movement in British Guiana, for example, followed the failure of Guianese poetry since the 1830s to grapple with the reality of emancipation. Daly observes that over the course of the nineteenth century, Guianese poetry was 'overcast' by the 'indecorously intruding fact' of slavery, which had clouded Guianese 'culture at every stage [...] sedimenting into the nerve centres of contemporary art'.<sup>22</sup> He observes that emancipation was an 'obsession' of nineteenth-century Guianese poets who nevertheless ignored the 'determination of the slaves to

be free', either by casting emancipation as the will of God or by discounting enslaved West Indians' long history of revolt: 'Thus, when early poets were not singing of emancipation as a condescending gift from a despotic plutocracy born to subjugate, they were sniggering about [Christianity]'. Where, Daly asks, 'are the great odes commemorating the bloody slave revolts of 1763' or 'the East Coast insurrection of 1823[?]'. It was only with the emergence of the aesthetic movement that poetry began to exhibit 'the epiphany of national pride'.<sup>23</sup> Lawrence thus distinguished himself from the 'decorously decadent generation who had been bred on the rank and unwholesome matter of the early emasculators – the strawberry-and-cream-doggerelists' who turned a blind eye toward the reality of post-emancipation society.<sup>24</sup> Daly suggests that post-emancipation Guianese poetry had grown decadent by refusing to face up to the legacy of slavery. It took the indecorousness of the aesthetic movement to finally grapple with these long-ignored realities. Rather than turning away from reality, aestheticism offered the possibility of cultural realism.

Despite this development, the poetry of Lawrence and Roberts's generation has often been represented as a mere curiosity. Edward Baugh, for example, writes that

[s]uch interest as their work can hold now is almost exclusively historical. [...] It is as if one of their chief aims was to show that natives of the colonies could write verse like that which poets of the "mother country" had written.

Citing Lawrence's 'Morning Ode', Baugh caustically remarks: 'But perhaps the trouble was not so much the fact of imitation as the relative feebleness of the imaginations which were imitating'.<sup>25</sup> It is true that there is no shortage of stock imagery in Lawrence's conventionally cross-rhymed quatrains in 'Morning Ode'. Nevertheless, such poetry is notable for turning a European aesthetic that often fantasized about the tropics toward the task of local description, hybridizing aestheticism with a New World artistic vision:

A new world's in the making right before my seeing eyes,  
And light and colour riot all around—  
From yonder blazing sundawn painting pictures in the skies,  
To this bejewelled carpet on the ground.<sup>26</sup>

While redundancies such as ‘seeing eyes’ and ‘sundawn’ might provoke criticism that Lawrence is generating syllables to fit the metre, Lawrence’s ornate phrasing, however clichéd, insists on itself as an act of real-world observation. It also colours daybreak with just a hint of decadent twilight in the echo of sundown in ‘sundawn’. More importantly, Lawrence identifies his South American coastal colony as itself a work of art in the very process of its making as it is painted and bejewelled before his eyes. He deploys aestheticism as a metaphor for how the idea of a nation comes into consciousness: through an act of aesthetic poiesis. But despite the hope ‘Morning Ode’ finds in Guiana’s dawn as a nation, poems such as ‘Stream’ identify the mechanisms of imperial neglect: parliamentary meddling over trade policy and the bureaucratic officiousness of customs officers who ‘enforce every nice little point of the law’. In ‘Stream’, Lawrence wonders who can think of the glory of Guiana’s natural beauty (the ‘falling or washing’ of a stream) when burdened by the ‘insatiate’ material needs that seem the sole concern of the empire, as ‘[w]hen the lords of the port and the princes of trade and commerce contend over pratiques and dues, | And would-be Disraelies and Gladstones wax warm, advancing their anti-reciprocal views’.<sup>27</sup>

Lloyd Brown is more sympathetic to Lawrence, arguing that ‘the *universal* significance of his national theme has important implications for the subsequent development of national consciousness in West Indian poetry’.<sup>28</sup> But if Lawrence’s poetry helps develop a national consciousness, it does so by registering the consequences of imperial ‘inaction’, as in ‘Guiana’, a poem written to mark the centenary of the colony’s consolidation under British rule in 1831, an anniversary cast here as Guiana’s *fin de siècle*:

The Day dies down and the Century ends in gloom grosser far than the night’s  
That descend when day of the sunshine is done as wane the warm westerly lights,—  
In gloom that falls on thy soul as a pall more cold than the sea’s inner heart;  
And the death-like hold of a century-old inaction is playing its part.<sup>29</sup>

Lawrence develops a national consciousness here by attributing decadent subjectivity to the poem’s object of address, Guiana itself, as a ‘soul’ shrouded in gloom. The twilight that falls on



Guiana at the century's end is the twilight of national ambition, which negatively registers the persistence of such national ambition.

Brown singles out 'Guiana' as passionate and effective, if marred by 'occasional pretentiousness ("tenebrious sky") and clichés ("flickering flame")'.<sup>30</sup> Nevertheless, Lawrence deploys such decadent clichés toward a new end, to express the abjection rendered by imperial neglect:

The years—lost years that the rest of the World had filled with the treasures of Time,  
Have bequeathed thee nought but a name that to claim, were just a magnificent crime,—  
Have left thee less than the dust of decay piled up to Imperial shame;  
And the light that lighteth Ambition's rough road has paled to a flickering flame.  
But Hope, high up the tenebrious sky, o'ershines the inglorious Night.  
And a cry goes up (and the voice is the voice that speaketh of impotent might)  
From gods, not men,— what a people are here! Guiana, they're hoping again,  
For the cry goes up from the deepest despair: God give us a chance to men!<sup>31</sup>

Here, Lawrence mixes iambs and anapests in a rhythm reminiscent of Poe's 'Annabel Lee', doubling up ballad stanzas in long heptameter lines that also recall Swinburne's typically echoic phrasing ('years, lost years', 'light that lighteth', 'the voice is the voice'). The poem laments a century of misrule and market liberalization that left Guiana behind even as the accumulation of wealth continued elsewhere. In presenting the 'decay' of the colony as a mark of shame against the empire, the poem appeals to the conscience of empire in an effort to strengthen, not abandon imperial ties regardless of economic interests. The colony longs for a chance at manhood through a moral claim to recognition, for it is only as a subject of empire that such manhood is deemed possible.

If Swinburne is known for 'remorselessly self-involved prosodic spectacle[s]' that dramatize the diffusion of subjectivity into language, Lawrence does not quite pull off the same feat.<sup>32</sup> He nevertheless maintains an incessant musicality that threatens to overwhelm its subject just as the hollowing out of imperial subjectivity has left 'Guiana' an empty 'name'. The lyric subject diffuses into a universalist cry *de profundis*. If Lawrence's exhortatory verse sometimes pales to a flickering flame, its 'impotent might' reflects what many West Indian colonials felt to be the

impotent political condition of the colonies. Brown finds in such poetry ‘a spirited national call for purpose’ not unlike that of Derek Walcott, but he laments the lack of anti-imperial sentiment: ‘Lawrence is still constrained to counterbalance his anticolonial themes with the pervasive imperial loyalties of the early twentieth century’.<sup>33</sup> This is because, for Lawrence, opposition to colonial neglect was perfectly compatible with empire loyalism, and the prosodic histrionics of his verse demanded attention for renewed claims to imperial subjecthood.

While British Guiana was consolidated under British rule in 1831, its constitution reflected the vestiges of Dutch colonial law until 1928 when the constitution was abolished and the British reconstituted Guiana as a Crown Colony, allowing for direct rule by the British government. Thus ‘1928 became known as the year of the rape of the constitution’.<sup>34</sup> As Raymond T. Smith explains:

superficially, [1928] appeared to be a struggle on the part of Guianese to hold on to the limited political rights they had, and to try to establish the rights of Guianese citizens as against the dictates of the Colonial Office. There are undertones of a conflict between the interests of the mainly English-owned sugar industry and the interests of a professional and merchant class with a strong desire to open up the interior of the country. But the elected members of the Combined Court [a former governing body] were not social revolutionaries; one cannot detect any advocacy of complete social reorganization. They were educated gentlemen for the most part, identifying themselves with the existing English rulers, and arguing their fitness to govern on the grounds that they constituted a Europeanized élite.<sup>35</sup>

While Lawrence’s major poems written for Guiana’s 1931 centenary lament a hundred years of squandered promise, much of the anger in his poetry can be attributed to the immediate fact of the colony’s constitutional loss of autonomy, an action taken in part at the behest of the white planter minority. As A. J. Seymour comments, ‘Lawrence had the courage to sing what he calls the Rape of the Constitution and Guiana at the Cross-roads’.<sup>36</sup> The consequence of these reforms included a narrowing of government activity to economic development and the abrupt loss of political representation by a rising middle class of white, black, ‘coloured’, and Asian merchants and professionals. As the educated son of a sawmill manager and a Creole with African ancestry, Lawrence would have been among those privileged West Indians newly disempowered by the constitutional reforms.

Daly gives Lawrence credit for acknowledging that emancipation occurred only after a long struggle of resistance by the colonies' enslaved populations. However, in poems such as 'Guiana: Allegory', Lawrence displaces the possibility of black revolution, long feared by white planters, onto the suffering body of Guiana, figured as an innocent white maiden and child of nature who revolts against an apparent conspiracy of white planter aristocrats and foreign powers. That is, Lawrence leaves black revolt out of the picture. In the poem, Guiana, on the arms of Time, is set upon by 'silver-tongued' orators and 'despoilers' who rob her of her native jewels, 'usurping every right she dared to claim'.<sup>37</sup> To protect her, Time lulls the maiden to sleep, and she becomes a sleeping beauty, enduring long years entombed in the 'deep, depressing gloom' of cold marble as in 'some great mediaeval sepulchre'.<sup>38</sup> 'Yet through it all, serenely, undisturbed, Guiana sleeps [...] uncrowned, unthroned', until she suddenly wakes her from deathlike slumber:

Then, like a frenzied spirit rising with a spirit's might—  
To life a new but wild Galatea sprung,  
Her bare, disjewelled arms, like polished copper in the night,  
In righteous wrath above her head upflung  
Her unbound hair behind her streaming as she flies along  
As though her long pent passions lent her wings,  
Thrice steeled, her fragile frame upon that high-bred robber throng,  
Now blind to every fear, Guiana flings.<sup>39</sup>

She is beaten back into submission, 'crushed beneath the heel | Of Power', but what interests me here is how Lawrence renders an opposition between the purity of art and the degradation of colonial neglect in a distinctly Gothic mode.<sup>40</sup> Guiana is cast as both Gothic revenant and Galatea possessed of her own agency. She is not the statue carved by Pygmalion into his silent ideal of a woman, warmed to life by Aphrodite for his pleasure, as in Ovid's myth, but an image of artwork itself springing to life from the tomb. Her purity left her helpless. Helpless, she becomes a statue. Once made into art of ambiguous race – her arms are polished copper – she rises in revolt against the 'high-bred robber throng' who hijacked the colonial government.<sup>41</sup> The maiden not only embodies the nation, as Galatea she also embodies the revolt of art against the corruption of the state.

While Lawrence plots Guiana's loss of autonomy as the endpoint of a hundred years of decline since the days when Guiana was 'decked in splendour', his poetry represents a response to constitutional reforms that had only recently placed the economic interests of the sugar and mineral extraction industries over the rights of middle-class imperial subjects of various races to control their own destiny.<sup>42</sup> Though Lawrence calls out the 'noble throng' with 'pale' faces 'whose souls are steeped in wrong', he hardly calls for a revolution or independence.<sup>43</sup> Rather, his critique of Guiana's colonial decadence calls for a restoration of creole self-governance, figured by a chaste but vulnerable maiden, within the imperial system.

Brown ultimately casts Lawrence's Swinburnism as incompatible with the goals of political and literary independence:

But notwithstanding Daly's enthusiasm for the imitations of Swinburne's work, the truth is that Lawrence fails to develop his undeniable potential because he devoted so much of his talent to churning out replicas of Wordsworth and Swinburne. For example, 'Kaieteur' [a Romantic landscape ode] shows flashes of intense feeling that is the main strength of 'Guiana', but on the whole it is merely a mechanical imitation of Swinburne. On balance, however, his much abused potential makes him an apt representative of the achievements and failures of his generation. Like their more accomplished nineteenth-century predecessors they combine an underdeveloped but promising vision of a West Indian destiny with a slavish loyalty to the literary heritage and political hegemony of the British Empire.<sup>44</sup>

Here I am reminded of Quentin Crisp's quip that 'if at first you don't succeed, failure may be your style'.<sup>45</sup> If Lawrence failed to live up to the anticolonial telos of later critical narratives, then perhaps failure is his style, and the stylization of failure the main achievement of his generation. In any case, the understandably urgent ideological imperatives of later postcolonial criticism have come at the cost of any explanation for such verse as Lawrence's other than that of 'mechanical imitation' and 'slavish loyalty', despite the historically specific conditions of colonial decline and constitutional reform these poems protest. And if Lawrence's overstuffed metres are excessive, Daly assures us this is deliberate. Lawrence 'retained a uniformity and stability' against the 'disintegrating' forces in Guianese poetry. Moreover: 'He had to work [...] against the petticoated puerilities and rhodomontade of the mad moderns, the sex-crazy moderns whose muse is a minx

and little better than a strumpet'.<sup>46</sup> That is, Daly poses Lawrence's metrical uniformity, his 'mastery of – and his enslavement by – metre' against the lurid musings of free-verse modernism.<sup>47</sup> There is also the possibility that Daly is speaking of Lawrence's own poetic tendencies. He writes that he hopes to publish Lawrence's collected works 'unexpurgated'.<sup>48</sup> This never happened, and one wonders what petticoated puerilities remain in the archive.

Seymour notes how Lawrence was 'partly ashamed' at 'the new manner of writing' he attempted in his poem 'Futility', in which he felt his art had been 'prostituted'.<sup>49</sup> With its evocation of posthumous regret and its cliché image for the ephemerality of attachment (dead flowers strewn on a grave), the poem might easily be mistaken for one by Ernest Dowson.

The flowers are dead on the grave and a sad sight lay;  
My token of love, you had thought and your heart had bled  
As you laid them so tenderly there and behold in a day  
The flowers are dead.

[...]

And as vain your love too long in the heart hid away.  
Then, some of it shown in a smile or kind word said  
Much more would have meant than tributes you now would pay  
The flowers are dead.<sup>50</sup>

Even if Lawrence felt such verse catered too much to modern tastes thematically, the lyric style he crafts – a sort of anapestic sapphic stanza that out-Swinburnes Swinburne – remains a deliberate formal throwback in an era of modernist free verse.

Baugh remarks that W. Adolphe Roberts was 'no less derivative than his contemporaries'. However, he 'was more gifted than they, with a reasonably good ear for the melodious and richly sensuous line. He is a by-product of the English "decadent" school of the 1890s and could have held his own in that company'.<sup>51</sup> Indeed, Roberts's three volumes of poetry, *Pierrot Wounded* (1919), *Pan and Peacocks* (1928), and *Medallions* (1950) were written in a decidedly decadent mode. Roberts (1886-1962) was a prolific writer of novels, histories, and verse who worked briefly in France as a reporter during the Great War and spent much of his career in New York before returning to Jamaica late in life. His poetry is perhaps best considered alongside that of Edna St. Vincent Millay,

a Greenwich Village Bohemian who, as Sarah Parker has shown, presented ‘an alternative to modernism’ by ‘reworking decadent forms and themes’.<sup>52</sup> Roberts was closely acquainted with Millay from around 1918 to 1921 and was an early promoter of her work. Like other decadents in the age of modernism, Roberts understood how queerly anachronistic it was ‘to be 1890’ in the 1920s, as Carl Van Vechten put it.<sup>53</sup> Among the admiring references to the Yellow ’90s in Roberts’s autobiography, he recalls his acquaintance with Richard Le Gallienne, the so-called ‘Golden Boy’ of the 1890s, calling him a ‘minor’ decadent poet and ‘voluntary exile’ who had become a ‘habitué’ of the New York café scene: ‘I have never known a man who belonged more definitely to an age before the one we lived and moved in than did Richard Le Gallienne’.<sup>54</sup> Roberts nevertheless continued to publish Le Gallienne’s poems in the magazines he edited.

Roberts was not shy about his distaste for free-verse modernism and conventional Victorian verse. In his autobiography he recalls a disagreement with Millay, who regarded Tennyson and Housman as poetic innovators. Roberts insisted that Swinburne was the greater innovator, telling Millay: ‘Many of Swinburne’s poems are in new metres, many employ new rhyming schemes, others distill fresh values from words. The language is richer in effects because of him’.<sup>55</sup> When Roberts read Swinburne to Millay, she responded, ‘That is but sound’, describing Swinburne’s poetry as purely musical and, as music, ‘inferior to Chopin’.<sup>56</sup> They also disagreed about the new ‘free verse school’ promoted by Amy Lowell. Millay was more tolerant than Roberts, despite her proclivity for formal lyrics. Roberts does praise Millay’s free-verse poetry, but he denied that Millay had ‘established a case for the discords produced by the freaks of our day’.<sup>57</sup> As if to prove his point, he dedicated a series of villanelles to Millay in *Pierrot Wounded* and invented a unique sonnet-like stanza for her in *Pan and Peacocks*. *Pierrot Wounded* is a mixed bag of Parisian decadence, commedia dell’arte, and pro-French wartime jingoism. It includes a translation of Gabriele D’Annunzio. For the purposes of this article, I will concentrate on the more sophisticated 1920s works in *Pan and Peacocks*.

In ‘The Celt’, which is dedicated to Millay, and in two other poems inspired by her, ‘Tiger Lily’ and ‘Vale’, Roberts employs an unusual 14-line stanza for which I have not found a precedent. The lines vary in metre from pentameter to dimeter and trimeter. The unusual rhyme scheme features both cross-rhyme and couplets, buries a triple rhyme in lines 7-9, and recalls its A-rhyme in the eleventh line, while trochaic inversions halt whatever momentum builds in the shorter lines. The effect is lighter yet more plaintive than a typical sonnet.

This is the sorrow of our Celtic hearts,  
Lonely and fey:  
Grieving that the old mystery departs,  
We pass for mummers in ignoble marts  
And learn to say  
The words of everyday.  
Drunken with dreams, we know the joy thereof;  
But, though we strove,  
We might not turn from beauty’s quest to love.  
Before the banners of lost wars are furled,  
April’s first flower starts,  
Vagrant and sad,  
Our feet to find where magic may be had  
About the world.<sup>58</sup>

The poem mourns the disenchantment of the world and its language, trailing intimations of lost Celtic magic (Millay was of Irish descent). For the ‘we’ that is the subject of the poem, everyday language is an acquired speech. They pass silent as mummers in the ignoble marketplace, an act of refusal at the reduction of language to economic utility. If we presume the ‘we’ of this poem to be lovers and fellow poets (this is how Roberts describes his relationship with Millay), then each poet’s singular commitment to beauty ultimately leaves both parties on separate paths as art takes priority over romantic love. If there is significance to Roberts’s use of this off-kilter form here, it may be that the form refuses to mouth the language of the ‘ignoble marts’. Rather, it flaunts its idiosyncrasy, refusing the neat closure of a love-sonnet, but also answering the provocation of free-verse modernism with an artfully unconventional stanza that Roberts formalizes through repetition (the stanza repeats three times in ‘Tiger Lily’), setting its metrical ‘feet’ toward whatever magic may still be had in lyric.

As the editor of *Ainslee's* magazine, an inexpensive monthly that published poetry as filler in the spaces between short fiction, Roberts was aware how little money poetry earned in the literary marketplace. *Pan and Peacocks* was published after a period when Roberts had edited two failed magazines, one a cheaply produced fiction magazine,<sup>59</sup> and another a literary quarterly, *The American Parade*, that Roberts founded in 1926 in hopes of appealing to an elite readership. Both projects folded after a year, leaving Roberts to freelance work.<sup>60</sup> It is no surprise then that Roberts's lyrics often advertise their own refusal of the ignobility of the marketplace, raising poetry up as a source of value for its own sake. This can be seen in 'Villanelle of Immortal Youth', which refuses not just the everydayness of the market, but the progress of time: 'We have declared allegiance to the Spring | And raised her temple in this urban mart. | December shall not find us sorrowing'. Instead of bowing to the market, it is '[t]o jewelled pipes of Pan we dance and sing'.<sup>61</sup> Roberts turns his opposition to the 'urban mart' into a collective ritual, the worship of lyric in an attempt to revive a lost world. Or, as Roberts writes in another villanelle: 'Our hearts were pagan and the quest old'.<sup>62</sup>

For Roberts, the inspiration for such a quest can be found in Swinburne. His autobiography includes a bizarre account of a 1923 trip to London in which he traced Swinburne's daily walk up Putney Hill and had the uncanny sensation of 'watching him with an inner eye as he followed the same route long ago', perceiving Swinburne's 'frail body and sloping shoulders' just ahead of him. Roberts then finds himself drawn to a bench where he finds the letters 'A. C. S.' carved into the seat, leaving him to wonder whether he 'had been in communication with the disembodied ego of Swinburne' or whether, having gone to Putney 'with a receptive attitude', he had rather 'thrown [his] mind open to a flood of telepathic suggestions from survivors who had known him in the flesh'.<sup>63</sup> Whatever the case, his 'Villanelle of the Master's Praise (Algernon Charles Swinburne)' proudly follows in Swinburne's footsteps, praising Swinburne in the same epideictic mode that Swinburne used to praise Baudelaire:

He tuned our pipes before dark death befell.



We are but silver, he a golden gong.  
We bring our best in greeting and farewell.<sup>64</sup>

As Potolsky has argued, it was Gautier and Swinburne who ‘first [defined] decadence as a project, as a cultural and political stance organized around judgments of taste and expressions of appreciation.’ Swinburne’s elegy for Baudelaire, ‘Ave atque Vale’, for example, which Roberts alludes to (‘greeting and farewell’), made ‘admiration itself a central preoccupation for the decadent movement’.<sup>65</sup> It was through such acts of appreciation that the decadents posited themselves as part of a transnational aesthetic elite. In ‘Villanelle of the Master’s Praise’, Roberts counts himself among a cosmopolitan community of poetic mourners: ‘His is the music that we strive to swell | With halting voices that he sweeps along’. The speaker wonders whither Swinburne’s spirit had gone, whether to Olympus (presumably) ‘where the immortals dwell’, or to Hades among the ‘fields of asphodel’, or to some other place. The speaker calls on the female spirits Swinburne gave voice to, Sappho, Proserpine, Faustine, Dolores, and Fragoletta, to intercede on the speaker’s behalf and bear his lyric homage to Swinburne: ‘Speak to him, Sappho, lest he hear us wrong [...] I, a frail voice, have brought a villanelle. | Bear it to him, Faustine, among the throng’.<sup>66</sup> The villanelle is self-reflexive in that the poem we are reading, which is pleading that a poem be carried to Swinburne, is the poem the speaker hopes will be carried to Swinburne, making the plea to be heard by the dead master identical with the act of homage itself. In seeking to communicate with the dead, the poem binds together a community of Swinburne’s admirers. Nonetheless, Sappho and her cohort constitute an elect group whose selective judgment and intercession are necessary to lift a ‘frail voice’ from among the ‘throng’ lest that voice be misheard. The dramatic speakers Swinburne inhabited in his poetry thus become his ears in death, selecting which tunes can be piped across the boundary of the living and the dead. The female figures Swinburne immortalized, in a way, become the editorial gatekeepers and couriers of the underworld.

Roberts repeatedly figures beauty as a rare thing in modern life, a ‘gem in pawn, | Save only to [...] alien rogues’.<sup>67</sup> Those enthralled to beauty also stand witness to the decadence and

degradation of society, as in the sonnets that open *Pan and Peacocks*. These sonnets plunge the reader into the excesses of ancient Rome and pay homage to a pre-modern, pagan world whose beauty awaits restoration by latter day adherents. The first poem, 'Peacocks', recalls the scene of Pompey's third triumph after his conquests in Asia. The poem draws on Plutarch's life of Pompey, which describes this rival to Julius Caesar at the height of his popularity parading royal captives from Eastern Europe and the Orient through the streets of Rome. Plutarch goes on to recount Pompey's political demise and assassination (he was stabbed in the back by a former lieutenant upon seeking safe harbour in Egypt).<sup>68</sup> In Roberts's sonnet, the 'peacocks' are Pompey's captives, who bear their defeat with haughty contempt for their captors:

They came from Persia to the sacred way  
And rode in Pompey's triumph, side by side  
With odalisques and idols, plumes flung wide,  
A flame of gems in the chill Roman day.  
They that were brought as captives came to stay,  
To flaunt in beauty, mystery and pride,  
To preen before the emperors deified,  
Symbols of their magnificent decay.

Then there was madness and a scourge of swords.  
Imperial purple mouldered into dust.  
But the immortal peacocks stung new lords  
To furies of insatiable lust.  
Contemptuous, they loitered on parade—  
Live opals, rubies, sardonyx and jade.<sup>69</sup>

Roberts's 'peacocks' resemble orientalized dandies. In Baudelaire's terms, the dandy is 'the supreme incarnation of the idea of Beauty transported into the sphere of material life'.<sup>70</sup> Even conquered natives can represent 'the last spark of heroism amid decadence'.<sup>71</sup> Lawrence's captives are living gem-like flames who flaunt their plumage in defiance of a martial display that is little more than a mark of the excesses of empire. Indeed, it is not clear whether they are symbols of their own 'magnificent decay' or the emperors'. Nevertheless, the captives display an 'immortal' beauty that outlasts their captors. As Roman fortunes take a downward turn from the martial triumph of the octave to the 'madness' and strife of the sestet, the beauty of these captives only hardens with the closure of the final couplet. These hostages from the East become precious gems

while the imperial purple moulders to dust. The ‘insatiable lust’ they provoke has its own racialized decadent pedigree, recalling the Latin title of Baudelaire’s poem ‘*Sed non satiata*’, which describes the speaker’s insatiable lust for his lover, an ‘ebony sorceress’.<sup>72</sup> Baudelaire’s title further recalls Juvenal’s Sixth Satire, which describes the insatiable lust of Messalina, wife to the Emperor Claudius, who worked at a brothel each night only to leave in the morning unsatisfied.<sup>73</sup> Though Pompey’s captives drive their captors to insatiable lust in ‘Peacocks’, they remain cool, loitering on parade. Pompey’s Rome, despite its recent triumph, is shown to be decaying amid its own desires. Beauty, held captive to empire’s martial imperatives, reigns eternal even in defeat.

Roberts’s sonnet ‘Matriarchy’, a political allegory that heralds the restoration of a pre-democratic, pre-Christian order figured as female, could serve as a coda to Swinburne’s ‘Hymn to Proserpine’:

Their dull democracies commence to wane.  
Cooped in their capitals of steel and stone,  
The ape, the tiger and the hog have grown  
Thick through the neck and atrophied of brain.  
So the wheel turns, and your day comes again.  
Magnificent in tyranny, alone,  
You will loll back on your pomegranate throne  
And teach man how an empress shows disdain.

I shall make songs to greet you. I shall bear  
Roses and subtle perfumes for your hair,  
I shall not fear that you will bid me go.  
For though you spurned all others, you would spare  
Swinburne and Keats and Baudelaire and Poe,  
Pan and his troop of fauns and poor Pierrot.<sup>74</sup>

In *Pierrot Wounded*, Roberts had used the tiger to represent the primitive violence that terrorized man’s ape forefathers and from which Europe’s leaders had not freed themselves as they found themselves plunged into a war.<sup>75</sup> The hog in ‘Matriarchy’ presumably represents greed or some other quality of the world’s atrophying democracies. We can guess that the magnificent tyrant is Proserpine, queen of the underworld returned to her pomegranate throne as Swinburne predicted: ‘But I turn to her still, having seen she shall surely abide in the end’.<sup>76</sup> As in Swinburne, she is the representative of an older order, but also the muse of death and melancholia as she was for Keats,

Baudelaire, and Poe, with Pan and Pierrot as her attendants. But there's an odd temporality to the turn here. While Proserpine's restoration seems assured in the octave ('your day comes again'), the sestet reveals that restoration to be an event that lies in the future ('I shall make songs to greet you'). Roberts again conflates the poem in hand with the promise of a future poem. In the closing couplet, Roberts places himself within the decadent lineage of acolytes upon whom Proserpine has bestowed favour. Queen of the dead, she is the patroness of a perennially revenant poetry that survives the failing politics of the moment. Her tyranny is a foil to the dullness of modern democracy and the democratization of poetry. If the poem seems alarmingly anti-democratic, it is worth noting that during Roberts's brief stint as a war reporter he witnessed an artillery attack that left a soldier's chest blown open in front of him.<sup>77</sup> His disillusionment with the atrophy of political leadership hardly makes him unique among poets who survived the Great War, nor would such reactionary politics be out of place in the decadent lineage he hails.

Another sonnet, 'Orgy', stages the scene of Roman decadence again, this time in the memory of a speaker who asks a lover to recall an orgy they witnessed:

Do you remember at the Roman feast  
How the burnt incense eddied in thick whirls  
Above the roasted peacocks and the pearls  
Melting in wine? Do you recall the creased,  
Enormous jowls of the Priapic beast  
Who spent his lust upon the dancing girls?  
Their bruised white bodies and their tumbled curls?  
The slobber foaming at his lips like yeast?

Lolling behind the curtains, we looked down  
And watched the bloated gluttons roll and crown  
Their heads with vine leaves, wilted in the steam.  
Epicurean, beautiful, unchaste,  
Once only did we turn about to taste  
A kiss too merciless for them to dream.<sup>78</sup>

What makes this poem decadent is not the orgy worthy of Petronius, but the Epicurean restraint of the voyeuristic couple who look down on the orgy from above, aloof, savouring a kiss that the bloated gluttons lack the discernment to appreciate. There are any number of accounts of such scenes of excess in Pliny, Suetonius, Juvenal, the Augustan Histories, and so forth. The melting of

pearls in vinegar or wine is a recurring emblem of excess from Cleopatra to Caligula.<sup>79</sup> What matters is the speaker's coolness toward the scene of gluttony and their delectation in the memory of a kiss enjoyed in contempt of that gluttony. As in Villiers's *Axël*, the dream of this kiss is superior to gross experience.

If there's a politics to be extrapolated from Roberts's decadent verse, it hardly fits the charge of blind empire loyalism that critics such as Baugh and Brown reflexively ascribe to Roberts's allegedly Swinburnian imitations. (Despite his admiration for Swinburne, Roberts's poetry sounds more like that of Symons or Dowson). Rather, for Roberts, the Epicurean appreciation of beauty, and the identification with an aesthetic elite that carries the flame of a lost, pagan world, allows poetry to stand apart from the everyday world and its politics, intrigue, backstabbing, pointless warfare, and material gluttony. Roberts calls forth a kind of dandiacal beauty in a Baudelairean sense as a fragment of eternal beauty in dialectical relationship with the real world, opposing the world but reforming itself in relation to the world, adapting a decadent poetics to new historical contexts.

Roberts does take an explicit position in favour of West Indian self-government in his later prose. After *Pan and Peacocks*, he wrote a number of novels and histories that furthered the cause of national liberation in the West Indies. In his 1950 volume *Medallions*, he pays homage to Cuban poet and independence leader José Martí. In 1933 he published a statement on 'Self-Government in Jamaica' that opposed Jamaica's status as a Crown Colony.<sup>80</sup> In the statement, Roberts notes that Jamaica largely administered itself for its first two-hundred years under British rule. After the Morant Bay revolt in 1865, however, the planter class, which had vociferously opposed emancipation and feared a violent black uprising, petitioned to become a Crown Colony, allowing for direct rule by Britain:

The truth was, that the legislators of 1865 abandoned their powers, asked for and got a Crown Colony, because they doubted their ability to control the huge Negro population. They thought in terms of a Jamaica owned by the white minority, and for ever to be so preserved.

There being no ‘democratic opinion’ in 1865 ‘to restrain the planters’, Jamaica drifted into political slumber, showing

almost unparalleled indifference to their country’s destiny. Culturally and politically, the people of Jamaica have been dormant. They have developed a natural individualism, because that is a gift of God to all human entities; but it has almost no public expression.<sup>81</sup>

Roberts argues that it is long past time that Jamaica reassert its right to self-government. He heaps scorn on the self-interested planters and laments the political torpor into which his country had fallen. While I do not take the sonnets in *Pan and Peacocks* as specific political allegories for Jamaica’s status as a Crown Colony, one could argue that there are common threads between Roberts’s critique of Jamaica’s dormant political status and poems that display their contempt for the failure of imperial systems, the waning of democratic sentiment, and the lapse of a ruling class into gluttonous self-interest. These were the same political failures evident in the planter aristocracy’s willingness to forgo their own political rights in order to defend a culture grounded in white supremacy and horror at the prospect of black-majority government.

If the political loyalties and literary affinities of poets such as Roberts and Lawrence do not quite fit the anticolonial politics of a later generation of critics of West Indian literature, it should be clear by now, I hope, that the charges of empire loyalism and dead-end Victorian imitation at the very least need to be complicated. Such an undertaking is necessary if one is to understand the significance of decadent and aestheticist writing during this important early-twentieth-century moment in Caribbean literature and to sketch that moment’s continuity with the postcolonial writing that followed from it (if only to repudiate it). The charge of mechanical Swinburnian imitation belies a more nuanced set of aesthetic commitments and political imperatives. Indeed, the reflexive dismissal of these poets’ Victorianism ignores the way aestheticism and decadence enabled an oppositional poetics that must be read in the colonial context from which it emerges, and which ought to prod scholars of aestheticism and decadence to consider the range of critical positions opened by greater attention to colonial writing within a more geographically expansive conception of the field. Rather than regarding poets such as

Lawrence and Roberts as failed branches in the evolution of a West Indian poetics, it may be time to try to understand such poets on their own terms as self-consciously modern artists who set out to capture political failure, neglect, and decline in verse that deliberately opposed the modernist trends of their era and adopted a pose of disdain toward the literary marketplace. Given that even these poets' detractors acknowledge such writing to have been the most representative poetry of its era, we should take these poets seriously enough to examine their work for what it was, not just for what post-independence critics hoped it might have been.

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<sup>1</sup> P. H. Daly, [Biography], in Walter MacArthur Lawrence, *The Poet of Guiana, Walter MacArthur Lawrence: Selected Works*, ed. by P. H. Daly (Georgetown: Daily Chronicle, 1948), pp. 5-17 (p. 8).

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 9.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 8.

<sup>4</sup> Marion Thain, *The Lyric Poem and Aestheticism: Forms of Modernity* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2016), p. 1.

<sup>5</sup> While Manu Samriti Chander has examined how Martin drew on 'tropes associated with Wordsworth, Keats, Poe, and other English and American Romantics', adapting Romanticism to forge local communities of readers, no similar project has been systematically undertaken with regard to aesthetic and decadent Caribbean writing. See Manu Samriti Chander, *Brown Romantics: Poetry and Nationalism in the Nineteenth Century* (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 2017), p. 42.

<sup>6</sup> During the era of decolonization, anticolonial criticism routinely associated the notion of art for art's sake with the art and literature of dying European empires, measuring a new poetics of national consciousness against the over-refinements of a senescent and exhausted civilization. An axiomatic association of art for art's sake with the decadence of European culture is evident throughout the work of anticolonial thinkers such as Franz Fanon, Aimée Césaire, Leopold Senghor, Chinua Achebe, and Michael Thelwell. See Robert Stilling, *Beginning at the End: Decadence, Modernism, and Postcolonial Poetry* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2018), pp. 1-36.

<sup>7</sup> See Alex Murray, 'Introduction: Decadent Histories', in *Decadence: A Literary History*, ed. by Alex Murray (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020), pp. 9-12.

<sup>8</sup> See Kate Hext and Alex Murray (eds) *Decadence in the Age of Modernism* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2019).

<sup>9</sup> Matthew Potolsky, 'Decadence and Politics', in *Decadence: A Literary History*, p. 153.

<sup>10</sup> Richard Dellamora, 'Productive Decadence: "The Queer Comradeship of Outlawed Thought": Vernon Lee, Max Nordau, and Oscar Wilde', *New Literary History*, 35.4 (2004), 529-67 (p. 529).

<sup>11</sup> See Thain, *The Lyric Poem and Aestheticism*, pp. 1-18.

<sup>12</sup> Christopher Taylor, *Empire of Neglect: The West Indies in the Wake of British Liberalism* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press), pp. 1-32.

<sup>13</sup> For an example of how decadent modes of writing captured scenes of ruination and fears of black rebellion in fin-de-siècle West Indian epic poetry, see Robert Stilling, 'Warramou's Curse: Epic, Decadence, and the Colonial West Indies', *Victorian Literature and Culture*, 43.3 (2015), 445-63.

<sup>14</sup> Taylor, *Empire of Neglect*, p. 3.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 1.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 5.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 14.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 6.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 236.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 12.

<sup>21</sup> Edward Baugh describes Virtue as an 'aesthete' and 'Parnassian', with an 'air of a man single-mindedly cultivating his own dream of a world'. See Edward Baugh, *West Indian Poetry 1900-1970: A Study in Cultural Decolonisation* (Kingston: Savacou Publications, 1971), p. 6.

<sup>22</sup> Daly, p. 10.

- <sup>23</sup> Ibid., pp. 10-11.
- <sup>24</sup> Ibid., p. 12.
- <sup>25</sup> Baugh, *West Indian Poetry*, p. 5.
- <sup>26</sup> Lawrence, *The Poet of Guiana*, pp. 15-16.
- <sup>27</sup> Ibid., p. 29.
- <sup>28</sup> Lloyd W. Brown, *West Indian Poetry*, 2nd edn (London: Heinemann, 1984), p. 27.
- <sup>29</sup> Lawrence, *The Poet of Guiana*, p. 22. The possessive apostrophe in 'night's' is in the printed text, although 'nights | That descend' would make more sense grammatically. We have chosen to follow the printed text here.
- <sup>30</sup> Brown, *West Indian Poetry*, p. 27.
- <sup>31</sup> Lawrence, *The Poet of Guiana*, p. 22.
- <sup>32</sup> Jerome McGann, 'Introduction', in Algernon Charles Swinburne, *Major Poems and Selected Prose*, ed. by Jerome McGann and Charles L. Sligh (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004), pp. xxiii-xxiv.
- <sup>33</sup> Brown, *West Indian Poetry*, pp. 26, 28.
- <sup>34</sup> Raymond T. Smith, *British Guiana* (London: Oxford University Press, 1962), p. 55.
- <sup>35</sup> Ibid., p. 56.
- <sup>36</sup> A. J. Seymour, 'Introduction to the Poetry of Walter MacA. Lawrence', *Kyke-Over-At*, 2.6 (1948), 35-38 (p. 36).
- <sup>37</sup> Lawrence, *The Poet of Guiana*, p. 40-41.
- <sup>38</sup> Ibid., p. 41.
- <sup>39</sup> Ibid., pp. 42-43.
- <sup>40</sup> Ibid., p. 43.
- <sup>41</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>42</sup> Ibid., p. 38.
- <sup>43</sup> Ibid., p. 40.
- <sup>44</sup> Brown, *West Indian Poetry*, p. 28.
- <sup>45</sup> Nigel Kelly, *Quentin Crisp: The Profession of Being* (Jefferson: McFarland and Company, 2011), p. 170.
- <sup>46</sup> Daly, p. 9.
- <sup>47</sup> Ibid., p. 10.
- <sup>48</sup> Ibid., p. 15.
- <sup>49</sup> Seymour, 'Introduction', p. 36.
- <sup>50</sup> Quoted in Seymour, 'Introduction', p. 36.
- <sup>51</sup> Baugh, *West Indian Poetry*, p. 6.
- <sup>52</sup> Sarah Parker, 'Burning the Candle at Both Ends: Edna St. Vincent Millay's Decadence', in *Decadence in the Age of Modernism*, ed. by Kate Hext and Alex Murray, p. 137.
- <sup>53</sup> Carl Van Vechten, 'Ronald Firbank', *The Double-Dealer*, 3.16 (1922), 185-86 (p. 185).
- <sup>54</sup> W. Adolphe Roberts, *These Many Years: An Autobiography*, ed. by Peter Hulme (Kingston: The University of the West Indies Press, 2015), p. 213.
- <sup>55</sup> Ibid., p. 222.
- <sup>56</sup> Ibid., p. 223.
- <sup>57</sup> Ibid., p. 224.
- <sup>58</sup> W. Adolphe Roberts, *Pan and Peacocks* (Boston: The Four Seas Company, 1928), p. 41.
- <sup>59</sup> *Brief Stories*, published by Harper's.
- <sup>60</sup> Roberts, *These Many Years*, pp. 230-32.
- <sup>61</sup> Roberts, *Pan and Peacocks*, p. 25.
- <sup>62</sup> Roberts, 'Villanelle of the Golden Fleece', in *Pan and Peacocks*, p. 26.
- <sup>63</sup> Roberts, *These Many Years*, pp. 242-44.
- <sup>64</sup> Roberts, *Pan and Peacocks*, p. 23.
- <sup>65</sup> Matthew Potolsky, *The Decadent Republic of Letters* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2013), p. 47.
- <sup>66</sup> Roberts, *Pan and Peacocks*, p. 23.
- <sup>67</sup> Roberts, 'Villanelle of Dalliance', in *Pan and Peacocks*, p. 27.
- <sup>68</sup> Bernadotte Perrin, trans., *Plutarch's Lives* (London: W. Heinemann, 1917), pp. 115-325.
- <sup>69</sup> Roberts, *Pan and Peacocks*, p. 11.
- <sup>70</sup> Charles Baudelaire, 'Further Notes on Edgar Poe', in *The Painter of Modern Life*, trans. and ed. by Jonathan Mayne (New York: Phaidon, 1995), p. 99.
- <sup>71</sup> Charles Baudelaire, 'The Painter of Modern Life' in *The Painter of Modern life*, pp. 28-29.
- <sup>72</sup> Charles Baudelaire, *The Flowers of Evil*, trans. by James McGowan (Oxford: Oxford World Classics, 1993), p. 55.
- <sup>73</sup> Juvenal, Satire VI, lines 114-135, in *Juvenal and Persius*, trans. by G. G. Ramsay (London: W. Heinemann, 1961), pp. 92-93.
- <sup>74</sup> Roberts, *Pan and Peacocks*, p. 12.
- <sup>75</sup> Roberts, 'Tiger and Ape', in *Pierrot Wounded* (New York: Britton, 1919), p. 8.
- <sup>76</sup> Algernon Charles Swinburne, 'Hymn to Proserpine', in *Major Poems and Selected Prose*, p. 103.
- <sup>77</sup> Roberts, *These Many Years*, pp. 194-95.
- <sup>78</sup> Roberts, *Pan and Peacocks*, p. 13.



<sup>79</sup> James Grout has helpfully compiled instances in ‘Cleopatra and the Pearl’, in *Encyclopedia Romana* (1997-2020) <[https://penelope.uchicago.edu/~grout/encyclopaedia\\_romana/miscellanea/cleopatra/cabanel.html](https://penelope.uchicago.edu/~grout/encyclopaedia_romana/miscellanea/cleopatra/cabanel.html)> [accessed 16 June 2021].

<sup>80</sup> This statement was originally published as an appendix to Roberts’s *Sir Henry Morgan: Buccaneer and Governor* (New York: Covici Friede, 1933). Roberts felt it important enough to include it in his autobiography.

<sup>81</sup> Roberts, *These Many Years*, p. 265.