

Preface

This issue appears later than planned, so apologies to our readers. One of the reasons for the delayed publication is that important material and ideas emerged from the online, interdisciplinary conference *Global Decadence, Race, and the Futures of Decadence Studies* (31 March-1 April 2023), and we chose to take stock and incorporate some of them in this issue.

One of *Global Decadence's* aims was to demonstrate the anti-imperial legacy of decadence and provide a platform for scholars, artists, and writers of colour working on the circulation, reception, and translation of nineteenth-century decadent texts, or postcolonial reinventions of decadence. Chaired by Cherrie Kwok, Joe McLaughlin, and Amy Sailer, the virtual event 'was a short but profound glimpse into the current state of the field of decadence studies' (p. 135).

The field appears to be in rude health, although it is perhaps too soon to evaluate whether decadence studies is able to be fully undisciplined and decolonized, or whether the pressure of interrogating 'decadence's uneasy relationship with racial and cultural power hierarchies' (p. 139) will force the field to become something slightly else (depending on your view of what it is now).¹ There are definite challenges in approaching decadence as a global phenomenon, not least the issues of translation, the transmission of texts between different languages, and the fact that fewer and fewer students are studying ancient and modern languages (issues that bedevil the field of Comparative Literature also). But scholars have been arguing for some years for a more inclusive, more 'diffusionist' model of decadence studies. This model, as I described in the preface of *Volupté* 4.1 (2021), is one that de-centres the European origin story, stimulating multiple origin stories that explore decadence in terms of networks, patterns, delineations, vectors, and influences that resonate across different geographical and temporal zones.

The increasing ease of participating in online events has enabled an international community of scholars and enthusiasts to gather to explore the generative possibilities of the notion of global decadence. A principal aim of this community is, as Stefano Evangelista has put it, to explore 'marginal spaces which still remain largely outside the map of scholars of English literature'² and to see how international authors repurpose decadence, 'remap[ping] global literary history as a response to global conditions'.³ Contributors to this issue of *Volupté* invite us to see decadence in precisely those shifted and heterogeneous terms, from Western representations of tropical islands as colonial spaces (Bailey, Wilhelm), to the ways in which Indigenous authors respond to their treatment in colonial fantasies (Wilhelm, Clarke), to the role and place of Western aesthetic ideals at moments of transition to modern statehood (Chakraborty, Staudt), to the transmission of Asian literature into fin-de-siècle Europe (Bubb).

We are grateful to our guest editor, Robert Stilling, for bringing this issue together with such thoughtfulness, and to all of our contributors.

Jane Desmarais
Editor-in-Chief
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¹ The Decadence Research Centre at Goldsmiths will launch its Global Decadence wing in autumn 2023.

² Stefano Evangelista, *Literary Cosmopolitanism in the English Fin de Siècle* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2021), p. 91.

³ Robert Stilling, 'Mapping Global Decadence: Jeet Thayil's *The Book of Chocolate Saints*', *CUSP*, 1.1 (Winter 2023), 145-56 (p. 148).