

lace Hamilton's 1979 book *David at Olivet* not only glamorizes David's homosexual affairs but makes them central to the book, depicting the young harpist as soothing the king with more than music. Thus, when David becomes involved with Jonathan, the king is jealous not of his military prowess and popularity, but of his son. James Levin, in *The Gay Novel* (1983), criticizes Hamilton for not understanding the sexual rituals of ancient Palestinian ethnic groups, but retrofitting David with a twentieth-century sexual perspective instead.

Throughout its history the David and Jonathan legend shows a constantly changing interplay between ancient texts and modern interpretations, an interplay that will doubtless persist in the future.

Ward Houser

### DAY, F. HOLLAND (1864–1933)

American photographer. With, and perhaps even before Alfred Stieglitz, F. Holland Day was America's first advocate of photography as an art form, as opposed to a mere technique for recording reality. Day was a key figure in developing the pictorialist aesthetic which is today associated with the Photo-Secession movement. Between 1895 and 1910 Day's prints were well known and influential both in America and Europe, making him the first American photographer with an international reputation.

The only child of a wealthy Boston manufacturer, Day had money to indulge his tastes: assembling a notable collection of Keats material; publishing fine books as a partner of Copeland and Day; providing educational expenses and personal instruction for boys from the Boston slums, such as the poet Kahlil Gibran, who was Day's most famous discovery and pupil; and, of course, his photography. Following his meteoric rise and almost equally steep descent as the leader of the new American photography, Day

retired in 1917 to his bedroom on the third floor of the family mansion, spending the fifteen years before his death as a self-proclaimed invalid.

Day's homosexuality was never openly acknowledged, but may be inferred from the circumstances of his life, the circle of known homosexuals with whom he associated, and his work. A number of his finest photographs are male nudes or Greek themes involving young boys, adolescents or men. Unlike his contemporary Baron von Gloeden, Day's fall from photographic grace was largely not because of the sexual undertones of his work. Bostonians were sufficiently cultured to accept male nudes as "art," though they were scandalized when Day had himself lashed to a cross on a local hillside and photographed as the dying Christ for a "sacred series." More important causes were a 1904 fire which destroyed his studio and much of his work, his own dilettantism and willful withdrawal from the photographic scene, and his quarrel with Stieglitz, who simply wrote Day out of photographic history.

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Donald Mader

### DECADENCE

A historic phase of decline or deterioration of a society or nation is sometimes called decadence. The term is also used more narrowly to denote certain facets of literature and art in France and England during the last decades of the nineteenth century, when some of the creative figures of the fin-de-siècle were homosexual.

Belief in historical decline is probably rooted in the psychological fact that, as they grow older, human beings

tend to recall earlier phases of their own lives in rosy terms, while deprecating the present. Projected onto peoples and societies, this experience suggests that the "good old days" were better than the present, while the future is likely to be worse yet. In some conservative modes of thinking this comparison is elevated to an archetypal pattern.

*Classical Models.* The Greeks and Romans had two chief models of epochal decline. According to the first, as outlined by the seventh-century poet Hesiod, human society began in an Edenic time of harmony and abundance, termed the Golden Age. In due course, however, this utopia yielded in turn to Silver and Bronze ages of increasing barbarism—until society plunged into the final bleak Iron Age. This pessimistic historical scheme presents a grim picture of successive stages of decline, the only consolation being the memory of the happiness of the Golden Age. According to some poets like Vergil and Horace in the entourage of the emperor Augustus (ruled 27 B.C.—A.D. 14), this age of bliss could return, starting the cycle anew.

The other model of decline cherished by classical antiquity begins with the idealization of a primitive past in a rural setting with a low level of technology, when human society was happy precisely because of scarcity. Since there was little to steal, theft was rare, and hardship caused people to work together instead of against each other. "Sweet are the uses of adversity," as Shakespeare was later to put it. This idealized picture of a stern but virtuous past held particular appeal for such Roman moralists as Cicero and Juvenal, who evoked the early days of the Republic as a foil to denounce their own age. A variation was to locate primitive virtue not in the remote past but in contemporary tribal societies. Tacitus lauded German uprightness, condemning in contrast Roman decadence, luxury, covetousness, and self-indulgence. Revealingly, not until the Christian Salvian, who wrote

during the collapse of the Empire in the fifth century, does homosexual conduct per se figure in the catalog of vices.

Because of the pessimism (or pessimistic realism) of the classical mind these two models—that of decline from the Golden Age and that of corruption of primitive virtue—were dominant. A few Greek thinkers, however, did adopt a more hopeful view, pointing to the triumphs of technology as evidence that humanity had progressed after all. Moreover, with the official adoption of Christianity in the fourth century, Eusebius and other Patristic writers elaborated a new concept of progress, that of advancing states of moral perfection. Thus in Old Testament times, polygamy and even incest (Lot and his daughters) had under certain circumstances been permissible, but are so no longer. A great signpost on this road of human moral advance was of course the Incarnation of Christ, which will lead in due course to the Second Coming and the restoration of all things. Before the longed-for consummation can be secured, however, there will be a period of frightful apocalyptic turmoil. This prospect of sudden reversal—of decline *after* progress—was to prove a haunting vision.

The victory of the Moderns in their quarrel with the Ancients in late seventeenth-century France, as well as the scientific revolution completed at the same time in Sir Isaac Newton, prepared the way for the Enlightenment belief in human progress through science and institutional reform for a mankind that was basically good.

*Evolutionary Concepts.* The publication of Charles Darwin's *Origin of Species* in 1859 set the doctrine of evolution on its triumphant march, seeming to demonstrate scientifically and conclusively that in the larger scheme of things progress was inevitable. Even here, however, there were dark patches. Evolutionists recognized a regressive potential in organisms, the so-called atavisms. Thus the Italian criminologist Cesare Lombroso

lumped homosexuals together with criminals as throwbacks to a more primitive phase of human existence. Still humanity could maintain progress by blocking these anachronisms and accelerate it by eugenics.

The overall atmosphere of optimism and uplift notwithstanding, nineteenth-century political considerations led to a more somber view in some quarters. The countries of southern Europe were compelled to recognize that the pacesetters of material progress were found in northwestern Europe, and that they seemed to be falling inexorably further and further behind. Even in a British Empire "on which the sun never set" doubts began to be voiced. How secure were society's foundations? Were savages noble after all? Was Nietzsche right in *Beyond Good and Evil*? Was the Boer War humane?

*Historical and Literary Permutations.* It was in France, however, that the theory of decadence emerged most fully and influentially. The word *décadence* had figured in the title of Montesquieu's *Considérations sur les causes de la grandeur des Romains et de leur décadence* (1747), and then of the French translation of Edward Gibbon's masterwork, and was thus redolent of the perennial problem of the reasons for Rome's decline. Gradually it came to indicate not simply a historical phase, but also a qualitative judgment on the state of civilization.

The word *décadence* was given a new twist by the French critic Désiré Nisard in 1834 as a pejorative term for certain literary trends of his own day. Nisard, whose professional interest was Latin literature, compared the mannerism and affectation of the Silver Age with certain aspects of the romanticism of his own day.

The defeat of France in the Franco-Prussian war (1870) induced a profound undertaking of national self-examination, accompanied in some quarters by a mood of resignation. In the 1880s the label *décadence* was actively embraced

by the bisexual poet Paul Verlaine ("Langueur"), the novelist Joris-Karl Huysmans (*A Rebours*), and their followers. Joséphin Péladan, an advocate of androgyny, wrote a series of novels under the umbrella title "La Décadence latine," implying that the whole of the Romance world was on the downward path. Others were fascinated by the regressive history of the *Byzantine Empire* and the perverse figure of Salome. While the "decadent" writers and artists soon found that it was more expedient to march under the banner of Symbolism, the association of their work with hot-house sophistication and rarified excess—in short the *fin-de-siècle*—did not immediately vanish.

England, much influenced by nineteenth-century French cultural exports, had her own decadent writers and poets. The disgrace of the most notable of them, Oscar Wilde, in the three trials of 1895, which had repercussions throughout Europe, served for many to link the literary concept of decadence with the image of a perverted lifestyle.

In due course, with the dawning of the new century and especially after the drama of World War I, much of the old thinking faded away. In the Soviet Union today, however, the official line still treats every kind of literary and artistic experiment as *dekadentnyĭ*, occasionally labeling its creators as "pederasts."

*Degeneration.* In a parallel development, biological and pseudobiological thought spread the concept of degeneration. The French physician Bénédict-Auguste Morel held that the insalubrious conditions and relentless pressures of modern urban life caused the emergence of degenerate types who inevitably bequeathed their afflictions to their descendants (*Traité des dégénérescences . . .*, 1857). In his insidious *L'uomo delinquente* of 1889, Lombroso claimed to have isolated a whole cluster of physical traits characterizing congenital criminals, including male homosexuals and lesbians. The English Darwinian E. Ray Lankester

linked biological degeneration with the fall of empires (*Degeneration*, London, 1880). It remained for the journalist Max Nordau to fuse the literary and biological trends in his widely read diatribe *Entartung* (*Degeneration*) of 1891. He held that sexual psychopaths would gain power to compel society to adapt to them, and even predicted that sexual inverts would become numerous enough to elect a majority in the imperial German parliament that would vote persons of the same sex the right to contract legal marriage. Even sadists, zoophiles, and necrophiliacs, he anticipated, would find regulated opportunity to gratify their cravings.

His contemporary Friedrich Nietzsche castigated the nineteenth century for its pervasive decadence, which he likened to the biological decline of an organism, but saw a possibility of renewal through the cultivation of "Dionysiac art." Hitler was later to assert that homosexuality had destroyed ancient Greece—in which Sparta represented for National Socialism the ideal "Aryan civilization"—and that his Reich must avoid this fate.

*Modern Offshoots.* A recent variation on the decadence concept is the notion circulating in some quarters of Afro-American opinion that sub-Saharan Africa was originally exempt from homosexuality, this perversion being forced on its inhabitants and their descendants in the New World as an instrument of colonial subjugation. In this perspective, homosexuality figures as part of the pathology of the declining white race. However this may be, there is abundant evidence for homosexuality in Black Africa both before and after colonization. Ironically it is the fear of homosexuality as a purported obstacle to progress and modernity that was forced on Africans by "enlightened" western opinion, not the practice itself. The ultimate origin of the myth of the sexual exceptionalism of Black Africa is probably Chapter XLIV of Edward Gibbon's *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* (1781): "I believe, and hope, that the negroes, in

their own country, were exempt from this moral pestilence."

*Appraisal.* Two final points remain to be considered: the components of the decadence model, and the question of whether the sexual side of it can be aptly applied to Greece and Rome. The symptoms of decadence frequently mentioned are economic recession and dislocation, population decline, corruption, excessive luxury, widespread neurasthenia, social alienation and unrest, moral licence, and collapse of trust and honesty. Insofar as homosexuality has been regarded as a negative factor it has been added to this list. More specifically, it has been claimed, as among National Socialists perpetrating the Holocaust, that the homosexual person, by withdrawing from the procreative pool, contributes to population decline, which has (as now, for example, in Western Europe) often provoked anxiety in the pro-natalist camp. Let us try to enter somewhat further into the mindset which entertains this mode of thinking. Are the factors cited in this catalogue mere symptoms or are they causes? To the extent that homosexuality, say, is simply—in this view—merely a sign of an underlying malaise, would it make sense to combat it? It might seem that in this context antihomosexual measures are the equivalent of slaying the messenger who has brought unwelcome news. As these questions show, thinking about decadence tends to be emotionally fraught, and in practice symptoms and causes are thrown together helter-skelter.

These varied aspects notwithstanding, the popular mind still seeks to inculcate homosexuality in the fate of Greece and Rome, and especially to see its indulgence as a major cause of the decline and fall of the Roman Empire, which crumbled in the face of the invading barbarian hordes of the fifth century, and later lost what had been three-fourths of its territory to the expansionist zeal of Islam. Can this charge be sustained? The expansive age of Greece from the seventh through

the third century was, according to our documentation, their age of idealized **pederasty**. Far from causing a decline in population, this flowering of same-sex love accompanied an almost explosive increase in population, requiring the foundation of colonies throughout much of the Mediterranean world and later the conquests of **Alexander the Great** in western Asia. Conversely, the period of Greek decline—the second and first centuries B.C.—corresponded to an incipient sexual puritanism and a glorification of heterosexual married life.

As for Rome, most of the homosexual scandals reported by such writers as **Suetonius** and **Tacitus** belong to the great age of the first and second century; according to Gibbon the latter century ranks as one of the greatest ages of human happiness. Only in the fourth century, under the Christian emperors, did the Roman state take legal action against consensual male same-sex conduct. Thus, if the legitimacy of this general line of macrohistorical moralism be allowed—and probably it should not be—the unwise suppression of homosexuality failed to revive the might of the Roman empire, and may even have hastened its decline. To be sure, as we have seen, Roman writers were given to rhetoric about decadence, including denunciations of homosexual behavior as early as Cato the Elder (234–139 B.C.), but historical evidence provides no warrant for the truth of their assertions. The issue is injected into contemporary discourse solely as a tactic of homophobes, not as a causal factor debated seriously by historians.

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## DECRIMINALIZATION

The repeal of the sodomy laws which had been inherited from the late **Middle Ages** and the **sixteenth century** came in two distinct phases. First, there was the wave of decriminalization generated by **Enlightenment** criticism of the penal legislation and practice of the Old Regime, characterized by harsh and barbarous penalties for trivial or purely sacral offenses, the use of torture to elicit confession, and the like. The second major phase developed as a product of the social reform movement that began late in the Victorian era.

### *The Enlightenment Tradition.*

The thinkers of the eighteenth century—**Montesquieu**, **Beccaria**, **Voltaire**—paved the way for the law reforms that came in the period of the French Revolution. In September–October 1791 the French Constituent Assembly adopted a new criminal code which embodied the principle that offenses against religion and morality, insofar as they did not harm the interests of third persons or of society as a whole, should not be the object of prosecution by the secular authorities. This law became the basis of the Penal Code which forms part of the so-called **Code Napoléon**, a comprehensive set of laws for the First Empire adopted in 1810.

The influence of this code was enormous, particularly in the Catholic countries of the Old and New Worlds. Thanks to the spread of the Napoleonic model, virtually all the Catholic states of Western Europe abandoned the medieval statutes against sodomy. But in the Protestant sphere it was only the **Netherlands** that benefited from decriminalization, for the simple reason that Napoleon annexed the entire country to his Empire in 1811, and when independence was regained in 1815, the new code remained.

A few other jurisdictions saw major changes in the law. The colony of Pennsylvania founded by William Penn in 1681 reduced the penalty for sodomy to the minimum that public opinion would