

## Decadent Culture in the United States: Art and Literature Against the American Grain, 1890-1926 (Suny Series, Studies in the Long Nineteenth Century)

By David Weir

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Decadent Culture in the United States traces the development of the decadent movement in America from its beginnings in the 1890s to its brief revival in the 1920s. During the fin de siècle, many Americans felt the nation had entered a period of decline since the frontier had ended and the country's "manifest destiny" seemed to be fulfilled. Decadence--the cultural response to national decline and individual degeneracy so familiar in nineteenth-century Europe--was thus taken up by groups of artists and writers in major American cities such as New York, Boston, Chicago, and San Francisco. Noting that the capitalist, commercial context of America provided possibilities for the entrance of decadence into popular culture to a degree that simply did not occur in Europe, David Weir argues that American-style decadence was driven by a dual impulse: away from popular culture for ideological reasons, yet toward popular culture for economic reasons. By going against the grain of dominant social and cultural trends, American writers produced a native variant of Continental Decadence that eventually dissipated "upward" into the rising leisure class and "downward" into popular, commercial culture.

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### Review

David Weir chases down myriad long-ignored traces of a largely forgotten American artistic subculture: the often gay, countercultural, urbane, and sometimes snooty group that flew the banner of decadence. he is an unassuming and admirably prepared guide. *Modern Philology*

Weir provides useful insights into what he assumes was the hardly home-grown phenomenon of American Decadence. *The Times Literary Supplement*

this book is more expository than analytical, but the absence of previous scholarly attention to these issues makes it necessarily so. Weir's engaging writing style makes the book broadly accessible Highly recommended. CHOICE

Weir admirably recovers the contexts for American versions of late nineteenth-century and early twentieth-century decadence. He skillfully and resourcefully explores its dominant tendencies and locates its various urban settings. Weir gives enough space both to individual works and to their various cultural backgrounds so that the book is remarkably well balanced. Gordon Hutner, University of Illinois"

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## About the Author

David Weir is Professor of Comparative Literature at the Cooper Union for the Advancement of Science and Art. He is the author of *Brahma in the West: William Blake and the Oriental Renaissance*, also published by SUNY Press; *Decadence and the Making of Modernism*; *James Joyce and the Art of Mediation*; and *Anarchy and Culture: The Aesthetic Politics of Modernism*.

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