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Among the Decadents: Nancy Cunard's Art of Imitation

Birgit Van Puymbroeck

In an early version of *The Waste Land* (1922), T. S. Eliot introduces the character of Fresca, who is presented as an inferior poet, growing up on the authors of the fin de siècle: Fresca "was born upon a soapy sea / Of Symonds—Walter Pater—Vernon Lee." She is a promiscuous woman who rarely lies alone at night and "scribbles verse of such a gloomy tone / That cautious critics say, her style is quite her own."[1] Although Fresca embodies late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century anxieties about poetry and gender, she is often identified as Nancy Cunard, the twentieth-century British poet and socialite, who is best known today for her celebrity status and political activism.[2] What is often overlooked, however, is that she was also a poet in her own right, who originally wrote in a decadent-modernist style. This article aims to recover Cunard's early poetry for critical analysis. It focuses on *Outlaws* (1921), *Sublunary* (1923), and *Parallax* (1925), and reads Cunard's poetry against the background of current debates about the relations between modernism and decadence.

Although decadence is notoriously difficult to define—according to David Weir, it is "a word rich in connotation, poor in denotation"—Cunard can easily be linked to the decadent movement.[3] She was a friend of Norman Douglas and Ronald Firbank, and maintained close ties with Arthur Symons and George Moore, whose work she also published at the Hours Press.[4] Her early poems draw on themes closely associated with decadence, including the relations between art and life, past and present, copy and original. They not only go against bourgeois norms but also comment on time, transience, and death, often resulting in a melancholic mood. While Cunard's poetry tends to be read either as derivative of male models or as a direct reflection on her life, she consciously built on a decadent style.[5] In this,

she was no different from Eliot and Ezra Pound, who incorporated decadent themes and motifs in their work, even if she was judged differently.[6] Reading Cunard among the decadents reevaluates her poetry and demonstrates an evolution in her work from a decadent style to a modernist, experimental form.

Cunard's poetry has recently been republished by Carcanet Press in an edition by Sandeep Parmar.[7] Still, her early work has received little critical attention, with scholars mainly focusing on Cunard's networking and political activism, as well as her later antifascist, anticolonial, and multilingual poetry.[8] Cunard's first biographer Anne Chisholm writes that "for all her approval of modernism and the avant-garde, [Cunard] did not have a natural, unforced poetic talent" (*Nancy Cunard*, 87). Similarly, feminist critics such as Susan Stanford Friedman, Maureen Moynagh, and Jane Marcus have situated Cunard's contribution on a socio-political rather than a poetic level.[9] Although Cunard's long poem *Parallax* has recently undergone critical reappraisal, it is often treated as a standalone piece rather than as part of her broader poetic development.[10] Nevertheless, Cunard's early poetry can be read productively against a continued decadence and shows her anti-establishment attitude that was to become her trademark.

The Decadent in the Modern

Although decadence has long been considered antithetical to modernism, scholars increasingly recognize the complex interplay between the two movements. In *Decadence in the Age of Modernism* (2019), Kate Hext and Alex Murray describe the two movements as "not diametrically opposed but mutually constitutive and thoroughly implicated in each other's aesthetic development and textual politics."[11] Similarly, Vincent Sherry has read modernism backward, showing how twentieth-century authors such as Eliot and Pound built on late nineteenth-century tropes and techniques in *Modernism and the Reinvention of*

Decadence (2014). Still, the relation between the two is not as linear or teleological as is often assumed. While in some cases decadent authors evolved from a decadent to a modernist aesthetics, others resisted this development. In *Literature and the Politics of Post-Victorian Decadence* (2015), Kristin Mahoney points to Max Beerbohm and Vernon Lee as late-Victorian authors who continued a decadent aesthetics until well into the twentieth century.[12] As these and other studies show, decadence and modernism converged and diverged at different points, forming a complex constellation of intersecting relations.

Traditionally, debates concerning the interactions between modernism and decadence have focused on gender and sexuality. Modernist authors such as Pound, Eliot, and W. B. Yeats rhetorically set themselves aside from decadence to avoid any association with "homosexuality" or "femininity." They distanced themselves from the avant-garde of the 1890s, as well as from women poets, who—according to Andreas Huyssen—had become synonymous with the mass market.[13] As Cassandra Laity explains in *H.D. and the Victorian Fin de Siècle: Gender, Modernism, Decadence* (1996), "Eliot's, Pound's, and Yeats's highly public 'masculinization' of poetic modernism . . . constituted a response to the crisis of sex/gender identification" in the early twentieth century, which amalgamated the Oscar Wilde trials, the rise of the New Woman and the expansion of the reading public.[14] By trivializing the works of others, whether women or gay authors, male modernists aimed to underscore their professionalism and masculinity. F. S. Flint and Harold Monro, for instance, downplayed H.D.'s poetry, judging her images as "novel—but shallow." As Laity continues, "Behind such trivializations of H.D.'s work lurked misogynist preconceptions about the 'preciousness' of women's writing" (Laity, *H.D.*, 51).

Like H.D., Cunard was dismissed as a female poet. Her open sexuality was perceived as threatening. At the same time, her poetry was seen as flooding the market with mediocre verse, at the expense of more serious (male) literature. Cunard was called derivative. An

unsigned review of *Parallax* in the *New Statesman*, for instance, noted that she modeled her poem "so closely on Mr. T. S. Eliot's *The Waste Land*" that it was impossible "to keep [the latter] out of [one's] mind while reading the present volume": "It is her misfortune that in planting her feet in her master's larger footprints the original sharpness of the trail is somewhat blurred."[15] Similarly, the *Times Literary Supplement* highlighted Cunard's imitative style: "The conclusion is unavoidable that Miss Cunard's poem would never have been conceived in its present shape without the example of Mr. Eliot."[16] *The Waste Land* was the undisputed original, *Parallax* a cheap knockoff. As feminist critics have shown, these statements emerged from the cultural anxiety surrounding women poets. Indeed, reviewers saw it their job to "protect the public from counterfeit culture" (Marcus, *Nancy Cunard*, 27).

More recently, the focus in the debate on the relations between modernism and decadence has shifted from gender and sexuality to time and temporality. In *Feeling Backward: Loss and the Politics of Queer History* (2007), Heather Love distinguishes between "queer sexuality" and "queer time," noting that there is no "natural" link between the two, even though they are historically concomitant: queerness is often linked to a discourse of anti-futurity or skepticism regarding the future, even if there is no intrinsic link as such.[17] Building on Love, Sherry defines decadence as a predominantly temporal condition. For him, decadence apprehends time as a "falling away from its ideal imaginary" and raises "the absolute instant [i.e., the extreme Now] to a value it cannot realize or sustain" (Sherry, *Reinvention of Decadence*, 34). Decadence relates to and resists modernism: it highlights the present moment, yet at the same time realizes its unfulfilled potential. Decadent poets search for the "ultimate Now"; they seek to escape time by losing themselves in a moment of ecstasy. As Baudelaire had already written in *Paris Spleen* (1869), "You must be drunk always . . . Not to feel the horrible burden of Time that crushes your shoulders and bends you

earthward, you must be drunk without respite."[18] Cunard's poetry exemplifies this feeling by alternating moments of rapture with those of despair.

Among the Decadents

Cunard was born into the upper ranks of the aristocracy, the daughter of the British shipping magnate Sir Bache Cunard and the American society hostess Lady Maud "Emerald" Cunard. After studying in Munich and Paris, she shared an apartment in London with Iris Tree, the daughter of the actor Sir Herbert Beerbohm Tree and niece of the decadent writer and caricaturist Max Beerbohm. Together, they frequented such artists' haunts as the Café Royal and the Eiffel Tower Restaurant, mentioned in Cunard's poems "Voyages North" and "To the Eiffel Tower Restaurant."[19] In her memoir *These Were the Hours* (1969), Cunard describes her encounters with Symons at both establishments: "Nearly every time we saw each other he would talk of Verlaine and Rimbaud, of Baudelaire and Mallarmé, of the decadence of the nineties, and then of Whistler, Wilde, Conder, Beardsley, and Ernest Dowson" (Cunard, *These Were the Hours*, 67).

Early twentieth-century authors not only frequented the same places as the late nineteenth-century avant-garde, but also imitated its style. Cunard remarks how Pound presented himself as a dandy: he wore "black and white check trousers," a "black velvet jacket," "a large-brimmed black felt hat," "a sweeping black cape," "yellow chamois leather gloves and a cane" (123–24).[20] Similarly, Eliot is known to have worn cadaver green face powder at private parties as a tribute to Baudelaire (Laity, *H.D.*, 6).[21] In early twentieth-century London, artifice was seen as an enhancement on life. Cunard and Tree used extravagant makeup and dressed up in costumes inspired by Beardsley and Léon Bakst. As Tree recalls, "We were bandits, escaping environment by tunneling deceptions to emerge in forbidden artifice, chalk-white face powder, scarlet lip rouge, cigarette smoke, among roisters

of our own choosing” (quoted in Gordon, *Nancy Cunard*). Paradoxically, to be seen as avant-garde, early twentieth-century authors continued the style of the 1890s.

Cunard and Tree were part of the group that formed itself around the poetry anthology *Wheels* (1916–21), edited by Cunard and Edith Sitwell.[22] With its melancholic poetry, *Wheels* constituted an alternative to Edward Marsh’s popular series *Georgian Poetry* (1912–22), which mainly comprised romantic poetry. *Wheels* published Osbert, Sacheverell, and Edith Sitwell, Wilfred Owen, and F. W. Tennant, as well as translations of Rimbaud by Helen Rootham. According to Leah Budke, Sitwell explicitly cultivated a decadent image for the serial anthology by curating the press clippings section at the end of each volume: “Of the six lengthier reviews [at the end of the second volume], five emphasize the fact that the publication, with its dolorous and morbid mood, reflected the character of aestheticism and Decadence.”[23] Although Cunard only contributed to the first volume, her association with *Wheels* exemplifies her decadent and rebellious spirit.[24]

The titular poem “Wheels” imagines thoughts as wheels, “rolling forever through a painted world,” showing a world of artifice.[25] It refers to the circus, with clowns, masks, and caravans, and uses the allegorical figures of Fate, Death, Love, Joy, Sin, Folly, and Despair to stand in for life itself. Cunard’s “dwarfs and other curious satellites / voluptuous-mouthed, with slyly pointed steps” remind the reader of a Beardsley drawing, while her images mix sight and sound as in “spinning hoops” and “cymbals clash” (Cunard, “Wheels,” 13). For all its exuberance, the poem also has a more reflective tone: the great revolving of the spheres” and the “trampling of their chariot wheels”, for instance, evoke “Time’s wingèd chariot” in Andrew Marvell’s “To His Coy Mistress” (1681) (Cunard, “Wheels,” 14). The world itself is a “fabulous wheel controlled by Time,” unstoppable in its constant motion (14). As Marcus observes, the image is one of a macabre satire that holds no promise of rejuvenation or renewal (*Nancy Cunard*, 58).

Many of Cunard's poems that figured in *Wheels* were reprinted in her poetry collection *Outlaws*, published by Elkin Matthews in 1921.[26] Matthews had been the partner of John Lane at the Bodley Head, which had published the *Yellow Book* (1894–97), as well as works by Symons and Dowson. An ad in the *Bookman* (1921) places Cunard's volume in the company of Symons's *Charles Baudelaire: A Study* (1920), Martin Binbaum's *Oscar Wilde: Fragments and Memories* (1920), and Pound's *Umbra* (1920), highlighting the relation between decadence and modernism in the early 1920s.[27] Moreover, the poems in *Outlaws* employ decadent tropes and motifs, as indicated by the title of the collection, which recalls the figure of the *poète maudit*. The image of the "outlaw" is also echoed in specific poems: in "Prayer," for instance, Cunard refers to the speaker as "iconoclast, / the ideal Antichrist, the Paradox."[28]

Decline and decay are addressed in "The Last of Pierrot," which uses a character of commedia dell'arte to indicate the end of an era:

> Pierrot again on octaves strums around,
> (Octaves his only meaning, speech and measure),
> White, wasted, wanton fool that kisses pleasure
> Thinking with love's glass knife to stab the ground
> And draw life-blood from out his painted heart;
> Forgetting that its texture is but paper,
> More fragile frills than gossamer or vapour,
> A ribbon, tied with eighteenth-century art.[29]

Pierrot is a mechanical figure, who "strums around." He exists by virtue of sound or poetry, as illustrated by the double meaning of "octave" as musical interval and stanza. Although he desires pleasure, his heart is but painted on, showing his lack of vitality. "Its texture is but paper," further demonstrating its fragility. According to Sherry, decadent poetry frequently

makes use of puppets, masks, and effigies to highlight the relation between art, life, and time: puppets function as "an image and icon of an historical time that has outlived its natural or organic term" (*Reinvention of Decadence*, 23). Similarly, Pierrot signifies a life outlived:

> He sits and shivers on a tattered stool,
> Hearing the cold grind out the endless breath
> From saddened shadows: "Sober now," he saith,
> "The cards lie upwards on the useless pool,
> The drums are filled with blood and wine and lead,
> Carnaval buried long, and Pierrot dead." (Cunard, "The Last of Pierrot," 15)

The images suggest decline and death: Pierrot "sits and shivers." His stool is "tattered", while the cold "grind[s] out the endless breath from saddened shadows." The half-alliterations in "sits and shivers" and "saddened shadows" illustrate his waning strength. The antiquated "saith" not only fits the regular rhyme scheme, but also illustrates his outmoded nature. As the poem draws to a close, the mood becomes heavier, underscored by the consonance of "d" in "filled," "blood", "lead," and "dead." Cunard uses the form of the sonnet, juxtaposing the lightness of the octave ("frills," "gossamer," and "vapour") with the heaviness of the sestet ("drums filled with blood and wine and lead"). On the one hand, her use of a traditional form illustrates her desire to be taken seriously as a (woman) poet. On the other hand, it shows her inclination to the past. Like Pierrot, the poet is stuck in the old forms of expression.

Other poems in the volume treat the delights and dismays of the modern city. "Voyages North," for instance, begins with the passage of time: "The strange effects of afternoons! / Hours interminable, melting like honey-drops / in an assemblage of friends..."[30] It draws on a series of images associated with the city, including "crowds," "shops," and "the intolerable army of winter road-workers / picking" ("Voyages North," 25). Streets and

stations are “serried together like cheap print,” linking urban life with mass culture (25). The city is both exhilarating and oppressive to the speaker who longs to escape:

> But if I were free
>
> I would go on, see all the northern continents
>
> Stretch out before me under winter sunsets (26)

Still, the speaker remains transfixed in the here and now. Through the use of the conditional and the modal verbs “would” and “should,” the speaker expresses the desire for a future that remains unrealized. They are worn down by the “subjective drowsiness of mind” that does not allow for an escape beyond the imaginary (26). The poem exemplifies the feeling of unfulfilled potential characteristic of the fin de siècle. Although there is a clear desire for change, this is ultimately unrealized.

As these and other poems illustrate, Cunard uses decadent themes and motifs. The passage of time as loss has been linked to the feeling of aftermath following World War I and the decline of the British Empire (Sherry, *Reinvention of Decadence*, 246–47). While Cunard does not directly address empire within her early poetry, she comments on World War I in “Zeppelins,” “War,” and “1917,” describing the devastation, lost lives, and vanishing of “glorious dreams . . . conceived of faith in blind futurity.”[31] Her early collection prefigures her later work to the extent that it comments on the issues of the time. Her language and form indicate decline rather than renewal. Cunard was not unique in this, as many poets—men and women—used decadent themes and motifs to express the spirit of the age. Yet while Pound and Eliot were seen as poets carrying poetry forward, Cunard was perceived as moving backward.

The Art of Imitation

In the 1920s, Cunard was advised and inspired by various mentors including Moore and Pound. Moore regularly discussed poetry with her and asked her to collect poems for an anthology of "objective" poetry that focused on the musicality of language.[32] In his lengthy review of *Outlaws* in the *Observer* (1791–), he counted her among the great passionate women writers in history, including Héloise, St. Theresa, and Emily Brontë.[33] Pound enlisted Cunard's help when researching the *Cantos* (1925). She investigated the poet Sigismondo Malatesta and sent him information on the philosopher Gemisthus Plethon.[34] Although very different in style and personality, Moore and Pound both advised Cunard on her writing. For Moore, Cunard had a clear vision but lacked talent, defined as "handicraft, tact, judgment" (Moore, "Outlaws," 24). For Pound, she was writing in a too elaborate style. In 1921, he wrote to her: "my dear, why, why the devil do you write in that obsolete dialect and with the cadences of the late Alfred Tennyson . . . one adjective per line [is] usually enough" (quoted in Chisholm, *Nancy Cunard*, 86).[35] Where Moore encouraged Cunard to polish her style, Pound argued that it was too polished already, showing her intermediate position between the late nineteenth and the early twentieth centuries.

Although Cunard often alluded to Eliot in her poetry, she did not receive feedback from the author of *The Waste Land*. She did own a copy of "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" (1915), which had been given to her by an Irish soldier during the War. In addition, her scrapbook contains a copy of "Gerontion" (1920) in Eliot's hand, suggesting a close relation between the two poets (Gordon, *Nancy Cunard*, 36–37).[36] Eliot's influence on Cunard is clear in her second volume *Sublunary*, published by Hodder and Stoughton in 1923. In this collection, Cunard uses images and prosodic patterns reminiscent of Eliot. The title refers to the relation between an ideal and a material reality. In Aristotelian physics, the sublunary sphere is the realm of changing nature, as opposed to the eternal ether.

Cunard focuses not only on transience but also on imitation. As Barbara Spackman and Matthew Potolsky argue, imitation understood as mimesis is one of the primary concerns of decadence.[37] Decadent writers question the relations between art and life, copy and original, constantly exposing the "natural" as "constructed" (Spackman, "Interversions," 48). They regard imitation as a means of production rather than reproduction.[38] Imitation takes on many forms in decadent art, going from allusion, citation, parody, translation, and tribute to the description of artifice, the portrayal of education and discipleship, and the use of ekphrasis (Potolsky, "Pale Imitations," 235–36). A good example is Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1893), which questions the relations between art and life, copy and original, master and pupil. Moreover, as Potolsky notes, imitation has a temporal dimension, as it seemingly reverses time:

> the conventional notion of imitation informs the characterization of decadence as a "pale" imitation of some prior literary form: decadence is the false copy living off some real original. But imitation, the decadents recognized, is also a practice of resignification, a repetition with a difference. It necessarily alters the "original" meaning of that model; or, to put it another way, it renders the model a model, "creates" it as an original. To this extent, the imitation is both effect and cause, both temporally subsequent to the original and simultaneous with it. (237)

Rather than merely reproducing an object or a text, imitation also alters that object or text, reversing the flow of time. Since the original only exists as original by means of the copy, both exist simultaneously.[39] This is relevant for Cunard, whose poetry has been dismissed as derivative. Reading Cunard's work through the lens of decadence, however, shows the complexity of her imitative practice. It frames Cunard not as a dilettante but as a decadent poet, whose poetry revisits and re-signifies pre-existent models. By imitating Eliot, Cunard

not only casts his work as a model but also responds to it. This practice is already announced in *Sublunary* and put to the test in *Parallax*.

"Ballad of 5 Rue de l'Etoile" invites an unnamed "you" to join the speaker to escape from dreary existence. It starts:

> When you are dazed with antics of the street,
>
> And weary of its tumult, and the fleet
>
> Of turbulent traffic, faces, gestures, cries,
>
> Turn to a dipping alley where the skies
>
> Remoter seem from the intemperate light,
>
> And here spend cooler hours until the night;
>
> Pausing with a street of downward coil
>
> That slights obscurely from the vast Etoile.[40]

The alley serves as a tunnel to escape from society and leads to all kinds of temporary pleasures:

> All at your hand that you may wish for: take
>
> the succulent fruit-store opposite to slake
>
> parched eyes with scarlet colour and fresh green.
>
> When to my room you've climbed, and having been
>
> Struck for a moment by fantastic deer
>
> That on my curtains dance, turn patient ear
>
> To story of the house and those that dwell
>
> Discreet behind their pearl-grey walls and sell
>
> Some, their light loves, and some, their willing brain. ("Ballad of 5 Rue de l'Etoile," 44–45)

The poem recalls Christina Rossetti's "Goblin Market" (1862) with its description of ripe fruit, its attention to detail and color, and its vocabulary of the market.[41] It mixes commerce and sex, and highlights prostitution: some sell "their light loves," while others sell "their willing brain," possibly referring to hackwork. The "you" is invited into a shady milieu, hinted at by a vocabulary of darkness ("obscurely") and the "downward coil" that leads to society's underbelly. It is here that Cunard alludes to "Prufrock":

> I'll tell you how the women come and go,
>
> Seemly and neat—for love will have it so;
>
> Love that must climb some midnight stair
>
> Up several floors, demands good comfort there,
>
> And comfort finding maybe will return— ("Ballad of 5 Rue de l'Etoile," 45)

Cunard echoes "Prufrock"'s "In the room the women come and go / Talking of Michelangelo," lines that themselves allude to Symons's "Scènes de la Vie de Bohème: At the Ball": "Two and two, to and fro, / They dance to the strains of *Manolo*."[42] Another reference could be Symons's "Memory" in *London Nights* (1896): "Other thoughts may come and go, / Other moments I may know."[43] In both cases, Cunard imitates Eliot, imitating Symons, creating a chain of references that are productive rather than reproductive, recasting the original. She responds to Eliot, questioning the respectability of the women. While they act "seemly and neat," they think about sex, burn with passion, and quickly move to other men:

> And so their eyes can laugh, their lips can burn
>
> With many a passion patiently (though then
>
> Their thoughts may longing turn to other men). (Cunard, "Ballad of 5 Rue de l'Etoile," 45)

The women, in other words, enjoy sex. They are not to be judged as the encounters yield both love and pleasure: “Out of their minds are gone the days of stress, / and beauty is well served and love as well” (45). Cunard rewrites “Prufrock” from a female perspective. Her poem uses a decadent style, in that it goes against bourgeois norms, highlights a world of illusion, and uses imitation as a strategy for resignification. Although the poem is written in a strong iambic pentameter with a regular rhyme scheme, showing a traditional form, the speaker self-consciously asserts: “I’ll tell you how the women come and go,” underscoring a personal viewpoint.

Like “Ballad of 5 Rue de l’Etoile,” “Time Alone Grapples” draws on “The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock” with its many rhetorical questions:

> Or shall one start
>
> Hot for certainty—leap into the dark,
>
> Plunge in the chasm
>
> While a cloud
>
> Blows doubting mists around the heart?[44]

The poem expresses the speaker’s desire to hold on to the present. It uses images of decay, including “past fruit gone rotten,” “dry rot,” “soured love-apples,” and the “roundworm” taking his fill of the apples (“Time Alone Grapples,” 78). Contrary to some of Cunard’s earlier work, “Time Alone Grapples” has an irregular form with varying line lengths, jumpy rhythms, and sporadic rhymes. The erratic form expresses the speaker’s doubt as they try to transfix the present: “Only in such a spasm / Set out to clasp and keep / a dream that struggles back to sleep” (78). Although the speaker aims to prolong the present—both by stating “I would have nothing die” and by using the present continuous (“drinking,” “thinking,” “saying”)—they know that this is a futile task. Like “Prufrock,” the poem ends on a note of despair:

In angry host

I see the hours embark,

And the funnel of my last ship on the horizon sinking. (79)

Time moves on, relegating the present to the past. The image of the ship sinking recalls the final lines of "Prufrock": "Till human voices wake us, and we drown."[45] Cunard echoes Eliot, similarly expressing existential doubt.

"Ballad of 5 Rue de l'Etoile" and "Time Alone Grapples" both hark back to "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock," illustrating Cunard's imitative practice. In the first poem, she seemingly writes back to Eliot, stressing the women's sexuality and drawing on a female model. In the second poem, she conveys a similar feeling of cultural anxiety and decline. The poems demonstrate an evolution in Cunard's style insofar as they go from a traditional to a modern form. Yet they also underscore themes and techniques associated with decadence, including sexuality, transience, and allusion.

A Sideways View on Modernity

If much of Cunard's poetry has been forgotten, her poem *Parallax* has recently been re-evaluated. David Ayers reads *Parallax* as a rewriting of *The Waste Land*. He highlights Cunard's particular use of voice, as she mixes her own voice with that of Eliot and the fictional poet-fool (Ayers, "*The Waste Land*," 31). Jane Goldman reads *Parallax* in relation to Baudelaire's *flâneur* and the modern city: the (male) speaker wanders from place to place, constantly changing his perspective, creating various forms of parallaxis (Goldman, "1925," 66–67). Tory Young emphasizes the role of performance in the poem: by questioning what perishes and what lasts, the poem offers a commentary on the canon (*Myths of Passage*, 287). More recently, Oliver Tearle and Paul Giles have commented on *Parallax*. For Tearle, Cunard's poem is a form of literary allusion. By alluding to *The Waste Land*, it expresses the

feeling of aftermath both socially and aesthetically.[46] Giles discusses *Parallax* in the context of modernist temporal and antipodean experiment. He mentions the non-agency of the speaker and the poem's melancholic tone (*Backgazing*, 92).[47] Although these critics offer valuable insight into the poem, focusing on different aspects, they do not explicitly link Cunard to decadence, nor do they read *Parallax* in relation to her broader oeuvre.

Although there are strong indications that Cunard started writing *Parallax* in 1923, the poem was not published until 1925 by The Hogarth Press.[48] In her poem, Cunard explicitly refers to *The Waste Land*, recalling particular themes and phrases, such as the renewal of spring ("Come music, / in a clear vernal month") and the description of the city:[49]

London—

Youth and heart-break

Growing from ashes.

The war's dirges

Burning, reverberate—burning (*Parallax*, 103–4)

As the poem's epigraph by Sir Thomas Browne indicates, the poem thematizes the relation between an ideal and a material reality: "many things are known as some are seen, that is by Paralaxis, or at some distance from their true and proper being" (99).[50] Similarly, the poem's title, "Parallax," highlights the importance of perspective since the phenomenon of parallaxis, indicates the "difference or change in the apparent position or direction of an object as seen from two different points."[51] Whereas the poem's epigraph emphasizes the relation between an ideal and a material reality, the title highlights a change in position or direction, depending on the viewer's perspective. Several processes are at work in Cunard's poem: the poem offers a new perspective on *The Waste Land* and postwar culture, while also commenting on the relation between art and life. It combines multiple voices and uses an allusive practice to reflect on the relation between copy and original, past and present, reality and perception.

In *Parallax*, Cunard repeatedly highlights the relation between art and life. She writes,

What hand shall hold the absolute,

What's beauty?

Silent, the echo points to the ladderless mind

Tumbled with meanings, creeping in foetus thoughts… (106)

The poem underscores the importance of perspective ("What hand"?) and points to the impossibility of attaining "the absolute." It expresses the confusing experience of modernity and seems to preclude any form of transcendence. According to Dennis Denisoff, "Decadence emphasizes the artificiality inherent in any effort at representation" and "refuse[s] to allow society to pretend that it can know one objective reality or that progress to any sustainable ideal is even manageable."[52] Cunard's poem expresses a similar idea. It uses rhetorical questions ("What hand . . . / What's beauty?") and paradox ("silent, the echo") to signal doubt. "The ladderless mind" is "tumbled with meanings," refusing any single interpretation or transcendent ideal. To some extent, the passage also recalls Pound's *Hugh Selwyn Mauberley* (1920), where the speaker critiques the commodification of beauty ("We see *to kalon* / Decreed in the market place") and questions "What god, man, or hero / Shall I place a tin wreath upon," similarly pointing to a changing system of values.[53]

Parallax further comments on the inherent falsity of writing:

Words . . . like the stony rivers.

Anguished and dry.

Words clouding, spoiling, getting between one and the mark,

Falsely perpetuating—"Why he was thus,

Self-painted, a very personal testimony

Of half-expression"—and oh the hypocrisy

Of the surrender in the written word… (*Parallax*, 113)

Words are presented as sterile ("anguished and dry"). They get "between one and the mark," failing to do justice to the thing itself. They, moreover, transfix a constantly changing reality. Cunard uses quotation to indicate a shift in perspective and highlights the failure of representation. Her phrase: "And oh the hypocrisy / of the surrender in the written word…" recalls Eliot's citation of Baudelaire in *The Waste Land*: "'You! hypocrite lecteur!—mon semblable,— mon frère!'"[54] Although Cunard does not explicitly address the reader, she points to the hypocrisy of (self-)expression. Art and literature ultimately reflect the perspective of the spectator/reader, as indicated by the reference to the Narcissus myth, in which the gaze reflects itself rather than a deeper reality: "Only a ponderous mirror holds / The eyes that look deep and see but the eyes again" (Cunard, *Parallax*, 114). *Parallax* is a reflection on the *Waste Land*, a self-conscious imitation of an already imitative poem. It calls attention to its own constructedness and highlights the importance of point of view.

Parallax not only ponders the relation between art and life but also expresses the feeling of aftermath, thus continuing a decadent ethos. It opens with the image of the male poet-fool, walking from tavern to tavern: "All roads that circle back—he shall thread these / and know the mirage in the desert's eyes" (99). The poet-fool revisits the same scenes over and over, unable to move on. He is guided by illusion ("the mirage in the desert's eyes"), looking for yet never attaining a particular ideal. He is both Mauberley and Prufrock, the descendent of a previous age, who is at loss in the present world.

Like the poems in *Sublunary*, *Parallax* reflects extensively on the experience of time. It looks back, commenting on the continuation of the past within the present:

> —'Ah no—the new cannot put out the old—
>
> Though I clutch on the new I shall not shuffle off the old,
>
> Wrapped, folded together
>
> The new ripens in the known,

Folded, growing together—

Yes—(even to paradox)

Have I not loved you better, loving again?' (110)

Past and present exist simultaneously. They are "wrapped, folded together," ultimately "growing together." The speaker notes: "Is it the end or beginning, / Caesura, knot in the time-thread?" (109). The poem occupies the space of the "extreme Now," in which the present morphs into the past and the end coincides with the beginning. This is made clear not only through the word choice but also through the syntax, as Cunard uses dashes to suggest the simultaneity of various thoughts and phrases. She explicitly refers to "paradox," that is, the coexistence of contradictory thoughts and ideas. Sherry comments on this temporal sensibility in *Modernism and the Reinvention of Decadence*, viewing it as characteristic of the long turn of the twentieth century: "The moment of ultra-modernity, which is experienced as the ultimate Now in the temporal self-consciousness of modernism, is constantly sought and always lost" (34). Modernism aims to express the New and the Now, yet always falls short in doing so. The present cannot be perpetuated or sustained, resulting in a feeling of melancholia. Here, however, the speaker seems to come to terms with this loss, embracing the "old" as part of the present. To revisit is to enhance, to love "better" by "loving again."

Parallax further draws on several motifs associated with decadence including art, sex, and death, which stress either the desire to escape or the experience of loss. Like "Ballad of 5 Rue de l'Etoile," the poem recalls Rossetti's "Goblin Market":

Sorrow, my sister—

Yet who accepts

At once her tragic hand?

From pitiless explorations

Come the unwarrantable deeds,

The over-proved frustrations.

O vulgar lures of a curl!

. . .

For all Love-to-be-sold, who will not buy? (Cunard, *Parallax*, 100)

"Vulgar lures of a curl" evokes the cry from the goblins: "Buy from us with a golden curl", as does the repeated references to "buying."[55] Moreover, the poem presents love/sex as a commodity. The scene of modern love "in restaurants / cupid of crimson lamps" is reminiscent of Prufrock's "restless nights in one-night cheap hotels / and sawdust restaurants with oyster-shells" (Eliot, "Prufrock," 9). Even the feminine rhymes, "exploration" and "frustration," echo the rhymes in "Prufrock" (e.g., "indecisions" and "revisions"). Cunard alludes to both female and male predecessors. She uses the vocabulary of the market to describe love and explicitly refers to the workings of patriarchy:

Or how many thousand prodigal francs

From serious patriarchal banks

Must build the card-house for this 'Grand Amour'? (Cunard, *Parallax*, 101)[56]

Cunard critiques prevailing gender norms by calling out the hypocrisy of Victorian and Edwardian England. She explicitly mentions patriarchy and juxtaposes the seriousness of "patriarchal banks" with the fragility of the "card-house" of modern love ("Grand Amour"). Her critique of patriarchy returns further on in the poem, where she describes an old man sitting immobilized in a corner:

And in Les Baux,

An old life slips out, patriarch of eleven inhabitants—

"Fatigué" she said, a terse beldam by the latch,

"Il est fatigué, depuis douze ans toujours dans le même coin." (106)

The image of the man suggests the decline of society ("an old life slips out"). The old woman notes how he is tired, sitting in the same corner for the past twelve years. Rather than hinting at renewal, Cunard suggests a continued paralysis. While Eliot found inspiration in religion and myth, Cunard offers a more sustained critique. As Marcus states, "Nancy Cunard was, in fact, the great poet of the aftermath . . . she had faith in neither the Church of England nor canonical English culture to revive the dead lands" (*Nancy Cunard*, 28).

In *Parallax*, commerce is associated not only with sex but also with art. In France, Cézanne's life is reduced to a house for rent: "In Aix, what's remembered of Cézanne? / A house to let (with studio) in a garden" (Cunard, *Parallax*, 106). Similarly, beauty is reduced to a commodity, as shown by the following lines: "Beauty picked in a field, shaped, re-created, / Sold and despatched to distant Municipality" (106). The poem expresses late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century anxieties about the market. However, it also comments on time and decay. An Italian art tour, for instance, shows art as forgotten and defunct: Genoa, San Gimignano, Siena, Arezzo, Pisa, and Florence with their various art treasures all exude past glory (112).

In a particularly arresting scene, *Parallax* uses the image of the "death-museum," which seems to preserve life in death:

> But in the charnel-cloister Dupuytren,
>
> Down a side-street, there's a full century's matter
>
> Collected—
>
> The death-before-life, the atom in the womb
>
> Preparing—snarled embryos,
>
>   Pinched
>
> By once-roseate poisons. (111)

The poem memorializes death as arrested development. It depicts death not as following but as preceding life: “the death-before-life” in a seemingly backward move. The poem further uses the images of “the atom in the womb” and “the snarled embryo,” showing an unhealthy life. It continues:

> The skeletons swing on a line,
>
> Dark-waxed, patined, defective-boned—
>
> O commemorable fusion of science with disease,
>
> (That was a new contemplation, the death-museum.) (111)

The passage recalls Pound’s account of Mr. Verog in *Hugh Selwyn Mauberley*, which uses the image of science (“picked foetuses and bottled bones”) to comment on halted progress (Mr. Verog as “the last scion)” (Pound, *Mauberley*, 15). Cunard similarly creates an image of standstill by merging “science” (progress) and “disease” (regression). Although it is possible to read the poem biographically—Cunard underwent a hysterectomy, possibly following an abortion, in the early 1920s—the image of the “death-museum” also resonates more widely (Gordon, *Nancy Cunard*, 99). It expresses a deep-seated disillusionment with time and indirectly comments on World War I, in which many men and women lost their lives. Instead of anticipating the future, Cunard refers to the unfulfilled potential of a life unlived (“Pre-natal dust, what life is it you missed?”). The use of parentheses and half-finished sentences further resists a coherent vision of the future.

Death is also present in the poem through the figure of the skeleton, which serves as a *memento mori*. In the beginning, we read: “Open the doors, the skeleton must pass” (Cunard, *Parallax*, 100). At the end, the speaker states:

> —And at last, before me
>
> In fierce rise and fall of impetuous seasons,
>
> The articulate skeleton

In clothes grown one with the frame,

At the finger-post waiting, aureoled with lamentations. (115)

Death is presented as part of life, as in Baudelaire's "Le Mort joyeux" (The Joyous Corpse) and "Danse macabre" (The Dance of Death). Here, Cunard seems to pick up on the morbid tone, already present in *Wheels*. The skeleton has grown "one with the frame," being part of life. It addresses the poet-fool and notes: "'Hail partner, that went as I / In town, in wastes—I, shadow, / Meet with you—'" (115). The image recalls *The Waste Land*:

And I will show you something different from either

Your shadow at morning striding behind you

Or your shadow at evening rising to meet you;

I will show you fear in a handful of dust. (Eliot, *The Waste Land*, 5)

Like Eliot, Cunard stresses life and death. She shows how death moves toward us rather than we toward death. Contrary to *The Waste Land*, she does not so much emphasize renewal as doubt, ending her poem in the voice of the skeleton with the words: "in doubt, in shame, in silence" (Cunard, *Parallax*, 115). Cunard seems to refuse to move on, remaining in an in-between state, commemorating the dead.

As Marcus notes, "The effect of *The Waste Land* was immense release from the burden of history, absolution and a washing away of the sins of the age," in contrast to Cunard's work, which "asked its readers to take responsibility for the war, for the history of slavery and the excesses of empire" (*Nancy Cunard*, 94). Although *Parallax* only addresses the war, the poem ultimately communicates a worldview that is more apprehensive than *The Waste Land*. Rather than focusing on the future, Cunard expresses the feeling of aftermath by drawing on decadent themes and motifs and by reworking and responding to the work of a contemporary. She takes a step sideways, reflecting on the present and its relations to the past.

To recognize the influence of decadence on Cunard opens the door for a revaluation of her poetry as engaging with the major issues of the time. It does not so much constitute a counterpoint to her political activism of the late 1920s and 1930s as a companion to the extent that Cunard's decadent influences can help to explain or contextualize some of the more troublesome aspects of her aesthetics and politics: her primitivism, racial fetishism, and eroticism. While beyond the scope of this article, this reevaluation is already under way with the work of Marcus and Mahoney. While Marcus links Cunard's primitivism to the desire for non-Western inspiration and renewal after World War I, Mahoney shows how her biographies, especially of Douglas, illustrate some of the "bad affects and 'disturbing attachments' decadence fostered in its wake" (Mahoney, *Nancy Cunard*, 223).

Cunard's early poetry can be read productively against debates on the relations between modernism and decadence; she uses imitation as a technique for resignification and questions the relation between past and present, copy and original. Although she is not often mentioned in relation to gender, her early poetry also suggests a critique of patriarchy by gesturing towards female models and gendered norms. By reading Cunard from the perspective of a continued decadence, we can discover new layers of meaning in her work and appreciate her as a decadent modernist poet, not the inferior "Fresca" but a complex woman poet who intertwined multiple tendencies in her work.

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[1] T. S. Eliot, *The Waste Land: A Facsimile and Transcript of the Original Drafts including the Annotations of Ezra Pound*, ed. Valerie Eliot (London: Faber and Faber, 1971), 27.

[2] Anne Chisholm suggests that it is "tempting—though not flattering—to identify Nancy with Fresca" (*Nancy Cunard: A Biography* [New York: Knopf, 1979], 339). Chisholm's suggestion is accepted as fact by Lois Gordon who writes, "That Eliot turned against Nancy is evident in the ninety-line Fresca passage in 'The Fire Sermon' section of *The Waste Land*, which Pound excised during the time he and Nancy were involved" (*Nancy Cunard: Heiress, Muse, Political Idealist* [New York: Columbia University Press, 2007], 39). Jane Marcus also identifies Fresca as Cunard (*Nancy Cunard: Perfect Stranger*, ed. Jean Mills [Clemson, SC: Clemson University Press, 2020], 85–87). For an account of Cunard as celebrity, see Jeremy Braddock, "Media Studies 1932: Nancy Cunard in the Archive of Claude McKay," *Modernism/modernity Print Plus* 3, no. 2 (2018), doi.org/10.26597/mod.0050. For an account of Cunard's status as political activist, see Maroula Joannou, "Nancy Cunard's English Journey," *Feminist Review* 78 (2004): 141–63; and Laura A. Winkiel, "Nancy Cunard's *Negro* and the Transnational Politics of Race," *Modernism/modernity* 13, no. 3 (2006): 507–30.

[3] David Weir, *Decadence and the Making of Modernism* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1995), 119. Weir defines decadence as a bohemian lifestyle, a particular mode of writing, and a period of cultural transition between nineteenth-century romanticism and twentieth-century modernism. Cunard has been linked to decadence by Jane Marcus and Kristin Mahoney. See Marcus, *Nancy Cunard*, 104–5; Kristin Mahoney, "Nancy Cunard and the Afterlives of Decadent Desire," *Feminist Modernist Studies* 4, no. 2 (2021): 222–34.

[4] Cunard wrote about these friendships in her memoirs. See Nancy Cunard, *Grand Man: Memories of Norman Douglas* (London: Secker and Warburg, 1954); Nancy Cunard, *G. M.:*

Memories of George Moore (London: Rupert Hart-Davis, 1956); and Nancy Cunard, *Thoughts About Ronald Firbank* (New York: Albondocani Press, 1971). *Thoughts About Ronald Firbank* was written at the request of Miriam Benkovitz in 1954. Cunard published Arthur Symons's *Mes Souvenirs* and George Moore's *Perronik the Fool* at the Hours Press. See Nancy Cunard, *These Were the Hours: Memories of My Hours Press, 1928–1931*, ed. Hugh Ford (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1969).

[5] Cunard's poem *Parallax* was especially seen as derivative of Eliot, as indicated below.

[6] Vincent Sherry has shown the extent to which Pound and Eliot built on decadence in their work. Vincent Sherry, *Modernism and the Reinvention of Decadence* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2015). For Eliot's relation to decadence, also see Cassandra Laity, "T. S. Eliot and A. C. Swinburne: Decadent Bodies, Modern Visualities, and Changing Modes of Perception," *Modernism/modernity* 11, no. 3 (2004): 425–48.

[7] Nancy Cunard, *Selected Poems*, ed. Sandeep Parmar (Manchester, UK: Carcanet Press, 2016). Although Parmar's edition is invaluable in making Cunard's poetry available to a broad readership, it also contains a number of misprints. All quotations from this edition have been compared to the original editions.

[8] If Cunard's poetry is discussed, it is especially her later poetry. See Birgit Van Puymbroeck, *Modernist Literature and European Identity* (New York: Routledge, 2020), 143–58; and Ameya Tripathi, "Bombing Cultural Heritage: Nancy Cunard, Art Humanitarianism, and Primitivist Wars in Morocco, Ethiopia, and Spain," *Modernist Cultures* 17, no. 2 (2022): 191–220.

[9] Susan Stanford Friedman, "Nancy Cunard," in *The Gender of Modernism: A Critical Anthology*, ed. Bonnie Kime Scott (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990), 63–68, 63;

Maureen Moynagh, introduction to *Essays on Race and Empire*, ed. Maureen Moynagh (Peterborough, UK: Broadview Press, 2002), 9–63, 23; Marcus, *Nancy Cunard*, 12.

[10] For critical appraisals of *Parallax*, see David Ayers, "*The Waste Land*, Nancy Cunard, and Mina Loy," in *Modernism: A Short Introduction* (Oxford, UK: Blackwell, 2004), 24–38; Jane Goldman, "1925, London, New York, Paris: Metropolitan Modernisms—*Parallax* and Palimpsest," in *The Edinburgh Companion to Twentieth-Century Literatures in English*, ed. Brian McHale and Randall Stevenson (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2006), 23–34; Tory Young, "Myths of Passage: *Paris* and *Parallax*," in *The History of British Women's Writing, 1920-1945*, ed. Maroula Joannou (Basingstoke, UK: Palgrave MacMillan, 2013), 8:275–90; Oliver Tearle, *The Great War, The Waste Land and the Modernist Long Poem* (London: Bloomsbury, 2019); and Paul Giles, *Backgazing: Reverse Time in Modernist Culture* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2019).

[11] Kate Hext and Alex Murray, introduction to *Decadence in the Age of Modernism*, ed. Kate Hext and Alex Murray (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2019), 1–26, 2.

[12] Kristin Mahoney, *Literature and the Politics of Post-Victorian Decadence* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2015).

[13] Andreas Huyssen argues that the popular was consistently associated with the feminine and vice versa. See Andreas Huyssen, *After the Great Divide: Modernism, Mass Culture, Postmodernism* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986).

[14] Cassandra Laity, *H.D. and the Victorian Fin de Siècle: Gender, Modernism, Decadence* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 1.

[15] "A Parallel," *New Statesman*, June 20, 1925, 290.

[16] "Two Poets," *Times Literary Supplement*, May 28, 1925, 364.

[17] Love writes: “This is not to suggest an essential or ‘natural’ connection between homosexuality and melancholia. Queer critics have argued against naturalizing this link, and it is certainly important to understand it as neither essential nor inevitable. But critiquing such a link ought to be distinguished from denying its existence” (Heather Love, *Feeling Backward: Loss and the Politics of Queer History* [Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2009], 20).

[18] Charles Baudelaire, *Paris Spleen: Little Poems in Prose*, trans. Keith Waldrop (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 2009), 71.

[19] “Voyages North” was published in *Outlaws* and “To the Eiffel Tower Restaurant” was published in *Sublunary*.

[20] Cunard notes how Pound resembled “Rodolfo in ‘La Bohème’” (*These Were the Hours*, 123–24).

[21] Also see Jeffrey Meyers, “T. S. Eliot’s Green Face Powder: A Mystery Solved,” *Yeats Eliot Review* 28, no. 3–4 (2011): 33.

[22] There is some confusion about who edited the early issues of *Wheels*. Marcus notes how “the painter Nina Hamnett, in her memoir *Laughing Torso*, says it was Cunard” (*Nancy Cunard*, 110). This is supported by the titular poem “Wheels.”

[23] Leah Budke, “Reading Edith Sitwell’s Annual Poetry Anthology *Wheels* Through the Lens of Female Aestheticism,” *English Literature in Transition, 1880–1920* 61, no. 2 (2018): 232–49, 232.

[24] Cunard married Sydney Fairbairn in November 1916. This may explain why she only contributed to the first volume of *Wheels*.

[25] Nancy Cunard, “Wheels,” in *Selected Poems*, 13–14, 13.

[26] Chisholm notes how Cunard “subsidized the publication herself” (*Nancy Cunard*, 83).

[27] Advertisement for Elkin Mathews, *The Bookman*, April 1921, 27.

[28] Nancy Cunard, "Prayer," in *Selected Poems*, 22.

[29] Nancy Cunard, "The Last of Pierrot," in *Selected Poems*, 15.

[30] Nancy Cunard, "Voyages North," in *Selected Poems*, 25–26, 25.

[31] Nancy Cunard, "1917," in *Selected Poems*, 17–18, 18. "Zeppelins" was originally published as "Destruction" in *Wheels*, with minor differences.

[32] Moore's anthology was published as *Pure Poetry: An Anthology* by the Nonesuch Press in 1924.

[33] George Moore, "Outlaws," *The Observer*, February 27, 1921, 4.

[34] James J. Wilhelm, "Nancy Cunard: A Sometime Flame, a Stalwart friend," *Paideuma* 19, no. 1–2 (1990): 201–21, 209–10.

[35] Pound promised to send her poem to the *Dial*, even though he was "almost certain" that they would not take it (Chisholm, *Nancy Cunard*, 86).

[36] Gordon writes that Eliot and Cunard were lovers.

[37] See Barbara Spackman, "Interversions," in *Perennial Decay: On the Aesthetics and Politics of Decadence*, ed. Liz Constable, Dennis Denisoff, Matthew Potolsky (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1999), 35–49; and Matthew Potolsky, "Pale Imitations: Walter Pater's Decadent Historiography," in *Perennial Decay*, 235–53.

[38] Matthew Potolsky, "The Work of Imitation: Decadent Writing as Mimetic Labour," in *The Labour of Literature in Britain and France, 1830–1910*, ed. Marcus Waithe and Claire White (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018), 167–81.

[39] This is not unlike what Eliot describes in "Tradition and the Individual Talent" (1919).

[40] Nancy Cunard, "Ballad of 5 Rue de l'Etoile," in *Selected Poems*, 44–46, 44.

[41] Although Christina Rossetti is not traditionally seen as a decadent poet, she wrote in a detailed and daring style that inspired many fin de siècle authors. Weir quotes Jean Pierrot stating that the influence of the Pre-Raphaelites on French decadent literature is "indisputable" (quoted in Weir, *Decadence*, 63).

[42] Roger Holdsworth, introduction to Arthur Symons's *Selected Writings*, ed. Roger Holdsworth (Manchester, UK: Carcanet, 2003), 18.

[43] Arthur Symons, *London Nights* (London: Leonard Smithers, 1896), 98.

[44] Nancy Cunard, "Time Alone Grapples," in *Selected Poems*, 78–79, 78.

[45] T. S. Eliot, "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock," in *Prufrock and Other Observations* (London: The Egoist, 1917), 9–16, 16.

[46] See Tearle, *The Great War*, 155. Although Tearle points to the issue of originality and imitation, he refers to modernist collaboration rather than decadent practice: "the most significant question raised by the review is what constitutes originality in the context of the densely allusive and frequently collaborative practice of creating modernist poetry: for instance, Pound's editing of *The Waste Land* or Mirrlees's use of Jane Harrison's work" (154).

[47] Although Giles remarks on the presence of the "macabre" and the "recursive feel" of the poem, he does not refer to decadence as such (*Backgazing*, 92).

[48] According to Parmar, who refers to Cunard's manuscript, the poem was "at least partly written in Italy in 1923" (Parmar, *Selected Poems*, 248). The fourteen lines starting with "The sand is scored with print of unknown feet" were published in the *English Review* in March 1923, confirming this early composition date.

[49] Nancy Cunard, *Parallax*, in *Selected Poems*, 99–115, 100.

[50] The title recalls the word "parallaxis" used in James Joyce's *Ulysses* (Ayers, "*The Waste Land*," 31). Giles adds that it might have been Virginia Woolf who suggested the title to Cunard: Woolf mentions parallaxis in her diary and refers to Sir Thomas Browne's *Christian Morals*, from which the epigraph was taken, in "The Elizabethan Lumber Room" (Giles, *Backgazing*, 89).

[51] "parallax." OED Online. June 2020. Oxford University Press.

[52] Dennis Denisoff, "Decadence and Aestheticism," in *The Cambridge Companion to the Fin de siècle*, ed. Gail Marshall (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 31–52, 33.

[53] Ezra Pound, *Hugh Selwyn Mauberley* (London: Ovid Press, 1920), 11.

[54] T. S. Eliot, *The Waste Land*, ed. Michael North (New York: W. W. Norton, 2001), 3–20, 7.

[55] Christina Rossetti, "Goblin Market," in *Christina Rossetti: The Complete Poems*, ed. R. W. Crump (London: Penguin, 2005), 8.

[56] The Carcanet edition erroneously reads "Grand Armour." This should be "Grand Amour." See Nancy Cunard, *Parallax* (London: Hogarth Press, 1925), 7.