# The XIX century through art

**Reason for choosing the path**

I have just studied Decadence and Aestheticism in different disciplines and I would like to explicit the connection among them in order to understand their different development in Italy, France and England. According to me the culture of the last decade of XIX century had been the turning point in art and its study allows to understand the developing of artistic movement of XX century.

**Problem posed or objective of the path**

Decadence and Aestheticism in literature, philosophy and art within the artistic movement.

# Path

In the path I’m going to analyse Gabriele D’Annunzio’s **Il Piacere** for Italian culture, Charles Baudelaire’s **Albatros** for French culture and both Walter Pater and Pre-Raphaelites’ trend of thought for English culture.

During the Modern Age scientific and technologic progress made people consider the well-being become only from material things. Art was considered un-productive and as a consequence useless. Some intellectuals did not accept the new (not) role of art and the will to distinguish themselves from the modern utilitarian society led to an act of rebellion.

The movement of reaction began firstly in the more industrialized countries. In England, artists, writers and philosophers reacted to Victorian orthodoxy and society. People called them *dandies* in order to indicate people, which are disdainful of middle-classes’ lifestyle.

The father of the movement, which coined the name of Aestheticism was Walter Pater. The name of the movement was due to the important role of beauty; indeed life should be considered as a *work of art* to live it as intensely as possible. According to Walter Pater’s opinion, only art could make life beautiful and it made people escape from the modern industrial reality.

The movement spread out in the whole Europe. For example in France we can find the *Poètes maudits*, whose name is due to one of Paul Verlaine’s collection of essays and articles. The adjective *maudits* was referred to their denounce and opposition to the contemporaneous society; indeed they were aware and proud of their behaviour. One of the most significant poems of the *Poètes maudits* was Charles Baudelaire’s one, where he denounced society’s attitude toward art and artists:

*….*

*À peine les ont-ils déposés sur les planches,  
Que ces* ***rois de l'azur****,* ***maladroits et honteux****,*

*….*

*Ce voyageur ailé, comme il est* ***gauche et veule****!  
Lui, naguère si* ***beau****, qu'il est* ***comique et laid****!*

*…*

*Le Poète est semblable au* ***prince des nuées*** *Qui hante la tempête et se rit de l'archer;****Exilé*** *sur le sol au milieu des huées,  
Ses* ***ailes de géant******l'empêchent de marcher****.*

**Albatros (Les Fleur du Mal) - C. Baudelaire**

***Rois de l'azur*, *prince des nuées*, *beau*** and ***ailes de géant*** makes the reader understand the importance of poetic language for Baudelaire; indeed he is aware of cognitive power of art but also he is ***maladroits et honteux***, ***gauche et veul***, ***comique et laid*** and he can’t ***marcher***. The poet-albatros is ***Exilé***, unsuitable to live within the modern society because people are not able to understand the role of art.

Moreover the term which designed the period in which intellectuals followed the same *Poètes maudits’* trend of thought was ***Decadence***.

In Italy, Gabriele D’Annunzio was one of the greatest writers of Decadence. He was influenced by Nietzsche’s philosophy and he wrote *Il piacere.* Just reading the title the intelligent reader should notice that it reminds to the idea of Walter Pater’s life style. Indeed also G. D’Annunzio made his life a *work of art* and he made it inimitable. In addition, the poet thought only verses could represent life in its true essence and beauty:

*.. il verso è tutto e può tutto. Può rendere i minimi moti del sentimento e i minimi moti della sensazione; può definire l'indefinibile e definire l'ineffabile ; può abbracciare l'illimitato e penetrare l'abisso, può avere dimensioni d'eternità; può rappresentare il* ***soprauomo****, il soprannaturale, l'oltramirabile; può inebriare come un vino, rapire come un'estasi; può nel tempo medesimo possedere il nostro intelletto, il nostro spirito, il nostro corpo; può, infine, raggiungere l'Assoluto.*

**Il Piacere - Gabriele D’Annunzio**

In the text you can read the word ***soprauomo***, indeed, the writer has read Nietzsche’s philosophy and he has inspired his whole life on it. According to the philosopher people have to leave the world of the “eternal return” and in order to get this purpose he has to go away from society to find new values and to return to linear time. However G. D’Annunzio overlooked philosophic aspects of Nietzsche’s ***Über–Mensch***,he based his life style on beauty worship and on moments of absolute sensations, feeling and emotions. These moments could be compared to Walter Pater’s ecstatic moments and according to him the artist should be eternalized in *works of art.* This attitude could make them be able to stop unstoppable time and to relish the essence of life.

Walter Pater’s trend of thought was influenced by the Pre-Raphaelites’ movement. The artistic movement may be considered as a reaction to academic accuracy of art. They tried to return to purity and simplicity of art preceding the XV century one. The subjects of the paintings are immersed in nature, because as the other Decadents they rejected the process of industrialization.

According to Pre-Raphaelites’ thought the primitive nature of human beings is a world of true beauty and they wanted to return there. But they were aware it was impossible and so they tried with their paintings to remind the idea of that beauty. The paintings express the relation they wanted to create with nature that is analyzed in all its features. The scenes usually eternalize a moment of life:



John Everett Millais’ ***Ophelia*** represents the pending instant between life and death, hot and cold and the study of nature is evident. The painting has a symbolic meaning, indeed it appeals to reader’s mind Shakespeare’s tragedy. It has his meaning in itself. Indeed according to Walter Pater and Pre-Raphaelites art justifies itself and it appeals to the reader’s senses and emotions with its beauty and without any moral purpose but ***art for art’s sake***.

**Bibliography**

#### Testi e Scenari 5, L’età del Naturalismo e del Decadentismo, Beatrice Panebianco , Cecilia Pisoni , Loretta Reggiani ,Marcello Malpensa, Zanichelli

**Sitography**

Notes from <http://www.marilenabeltramini.it/>

<http://tranellidiseta.blogspot.it/2012/11/ophelia-lattimo-sospeso.html>