

### *23 The Decadent at Home*

But such moods still had to be worked up, decadence itself had to be cultivated. It was a rank of honour awarded by one's peers - one had to qualify. How? First and foremost, one transgressed. One felt, thought and acted as transgressively as possible. Wherever and whenever a norm was perceived, one instinctively violated it Why? – Partly because not to do so condemned one to the contemptible law-abiding ranks of the impotent Bourgeoisie, but also (and much more importantly) because transgression supplied the drug of extremity, the source of intoxicating moods; and if the mood did indeed intoxicate, then that was proof of its artistic authenticity and validity.

Thus the Decadent became hooked on transgression, In what manner he chose to transgress became almost unimportant. Paramount was the setting of oneself outside the traditional canon of morality, beyond the pale of bourgeois behaviour.

Of course, the quickest, easiest and most time-honoured route to social ostracism, and thus a kind of psychological independence, lay in the extravagant exercise of one's sexuality. Decadents thus conscripted their libidos into the service of outrage. Not that sexuality was slow to volunteer its services - sexual fulfilment (if only involving a quick visit to Barclays Bank) is always close at hand! Indeed, its animalistic nature had always lent itself to bourgeois disgust. So why disappoint it? With gay abandon, decadents masturbated madly or made love to each other, to their sisters, mothers, friend's wives, strangers, exotic foreigners, or, if they were more than usually diligent in their calling, other species (no hierarchy intended)!

### *78 The power structure inherent in the offer of a cup of tea...*

When asked if he wants a cup of tea, a 'critical theory' professor doesn't answer yes or no but analyses the question semiotically thus: 'in offering me a cup of tea this person is involving me in a set of cultural assumptions, a power structure, a struggle for hierarchy, suggesting he is free to offer me something called tea which I am at liberty to accept or refuse. But what is tea? How has it become available? And why is he free to offer it? And am I really at liberty to consider this thing called an 'offer' in any real way? What is the value system inherent in the set of circumstances in which he sees fit to offer me tea? By this time of course the cup of tea has gone cold and is undrinkable. The same goes for poetry in universities.