

Fin de Siècle / Decadence

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Lesbian Decadence: Representations in Art and Literature in Fin-de-Siècle France by Nicole G. Albert; translated by Nancy Erber and William Peniston.

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ABOUT THE Book

In 1857 the French poet Charles Baudelaire, who was fascinated by lesbianism, created a scandal with *Les Fleurs du Mal* [The Flowers of Evil]. This collection was originally entitled “The Lesbians” and described women as “femmes damnées,” with “disordered souls” suffering in a hypocritical world. Then twenty years later, lesbians in Paris dared to flaunt themselves in that extraordinarily creative period at the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries which became known as the Belle Époque.

Lesbian Decadence, now available in English for the first time, provides a new analysis and synthesis of the depiction of lesbianism as a social phenomenon and a symptom of social malaise as well as a fantasy in that most vibrant place and period in history. In this newly translated work, praised by leading critics as “authoritative,” “stunning,” and “a marvel of elegance and erudition,” Nicole G. Albert analyzes and synthesizes an engagingly rich sweep of historical representations of the lesbian mystique in art and literature. Albert contrasts these visions to moralists’ abrupt condemnations of “the lesbian vice,” as well as the newly emerging psychiatric establishment’s medical fury and their obsession on cataloging and classifying symptoms of “inversion” or “perversion” in order to cure these “unbalanced creatures of love.”

Lesbian Decadence combines literary, artistic, and historical analysis of sources from the mainstream to the rare, from scholarly studies to popular culture. The English translation provides a core reference/text for those interested in the Decadent movement, literary history, French history, and social history. It is well suited for courses in gender studies, women’s studies, LGBT history, and lesbianism in literature, history, and art.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Nicole G. Albert is an independent scholar with a doctoral degree in comparative literature from the Sorbonne. She is the editor of *Renée Vivien à rebours: études pour un centenaire* [*Renée Vivien Against the Grain: Studies for a Centenary*] and *Renée Vivien, une femme de lettres entre deux siècles* [*Renée Vivien: A Woman Writer between Two Centuries*] as well as the author of *La Castiglione: Vies et Métamorphoses* [*Castiglione: Lives and Metamorphoses*].

ABOUT THE Translators

Nancy Erber is professor emerita of linguistics and modern languages at LaGuardia Community College, City University of New York. An expert in fin-de-siècle literature, she edited, along with George Robb, *Disorder in the Court: Trials and Sexual Conflict at the Turn of the Century*. **William A. Peniston** is the librarian and archivist at the Newark Museum, as well as a French historian with a doctoral degree from the University of Rochester. He is the author of *Pederasts and Others: Urban Culture and Sexual Identity in Nineteenth Century Paris*. Nancy Erber and William A. Peniston co-edited and co-translated *Queer Lives: Men's Autobiographies from Nineteenth-Century France* and *Bougres de vies: huit homosexuels du XIXe se racontent*.

