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***INTELLECTUELS ET DECADENCE DURANT LA BELLE EPOQUE : LE CAS D'OCTAVE
MIRBEAU ET PAUL ADAM***

Most studies of the notion of decadence in fin-de-sicle France have seen it as a theme belonging to a right-wing political and intellectual discourse. However, this dissertation demonstrates that the idea of decadence permeates the thinking of intellectuals coming from very diverse ideological backgrounds. Indeed, a study of two literary luminaries of the period, Octave Mirbeau and Paul Adam, shows that their revolt against what they perceived as a decadent Third Republic served as a catalyst for their political peregrinations. In their search for remedies to the ills of contemporary civilization, they spanned the political spectrum from the extreme-right to the extreme-left. Octave Mirbeau, polemical journalist, novelist and playwright, started as an antisemitic proponent of the throne and the army. He then acted as one of the main literary spokesmen for the anarchist movement, before becoming a prominent Dreyfusard. Shortly before his death, Mirbeau joined the ranks of the socialists close to Jaur. On the other hand, Paul Adam, novelist, prolific essayist and journalist, began his career as a member of the literary avant-garde, very close to utopian socialism. A running-mate of Maurice Barr during the Boulanger campaign, he soon after became an ardent anarchist, a moderate Dreyfusard and spent the rest of his life espousing an odd brand of nationalism. Just like Mirbeau and Adam, many writers and artists in the early 1890's gravitated toward anarchism in their revolt against the Third Republic. Because of its ideological fluidity, the libertarian movement attracted elements coming from the left and the right who rallied around a number of key concepts: antiparlamentarianism, a rejection of the authority of the State, a criticism of democracy, a certain fascination for violence and a dose of elitism. Thus, one can look at anarchism as the founding moment in the gradual formation of an "intellectual party" in France. The Dreyfus Affair, which traditionally has been viewed as the moment of emergence of the modern French intellectual and of his "engagement", should therefore be interpreted as the culmination of a process rather than its starting point.