Arthur Symons, Critic Among Critic

Symons, Arthur

Published by ELT Press

Symons, Arthur.  
Arthur Symons, Critic Among Critic: An Annotated Bibliography.  
Project MUSE. muse.jhu.edu/book/11046.

For additional information about this book
https://muse.jhu.edu/book/11046

For content related to this chapter
https://muse.jhu.edu/related_content?type=book&id=290797

Robert Browning's poems in “Dramatic Lyrics” present “the thoughts and inner feelings and conflicts of the speaker in what Arthur Symons refers to as the ‘subtle mental complexity’ of Browning's poetry” (120). “The humorous, nonchalant manner [that Browning uses in such poems as “The Confessional,” “Soliloquy of the Spanish Cloister,” and “Evelyn Hope”], which Arthur Symons describes as ‘strong and thoughtful humor … gay and hearty, satirical and incisive in turn’ … constitutes a voice in its own right, which might engage in conflict with other voices in the poem, thus contributing to the multiplicity of voices that cannot be heard in one way” (122).


In tracing the history of “art-as-such” into contemporary criticism, the Symbolist Movement plays one of many important parts. During this movement the concept of a “religion of art” developed fully and persuasively in its relation to art for art’s sake. AS, the “English exponent” of French Symbolism, reflected this concern in his book *The Symbolist Movement in Literature*. [Brief mention of AS.]


“Symons was not a poet of the first rank, and like many other such, he wrote a poem called ‘The Absinthe Drinker,’ with such lines as ‘The hours are all / Linked in a dance of mere forgetfulness’” (148). “Evelyn Waugh and his brother Alec drank absinthe in London, but rather self-consciously, as Alec wrote many years later: ‘Not many people alive today have drunk it. I did in the Domino Room at the Café Royal. I took it with appropriate reverence, in memory of Dowson and Arthur Symons’”(233). [Passing references to AS.]


AS’s comments on Dowson’s apparent drug use contributed to the latter’s reputation as a frequent drug user (81). AS understood Dowson’s love of Adelaide because he had a similar experience with a ballet dancer named Lydia (85). The *Yellow Book* was having a scandalous success, and making celebrities out of AS and Beardsley (96). Smithers, the “new king of the decadents,” agreed to publish AS’s *London Nights*, and thus found his way into Dowson’s circle (105). AS’s review of Dowson’s *Verses* in the *Savoy* is credited with creating the Dowson legend: “the swift, disastrous, and suicidal energy of genius” (132). AS’s memoir of
Dowson is “unashamedly a piece of journalism,” but since Dowson read it before publication, “[i]f it is inaccurate, therefore, it contains inaccuracies with which Dowson himself concurred” (133–34). AS wrote Dowson’s obituary in the *Athenaeum*, and a longer, more thoughtful tribute in the *Fortnightly Review* (170).


In the ’nineties it was the ballet of the music-halls that influenced poetry. AS spent his ’nineties evenings in the Empire and the Alhambra discoursing in his high voice on the artistic merits of the dance. In *London Nights* and *Silhouettes* AS came near to creating a poetry of ballet, but failed because his fetishisms, his obsessive pose of Don Juanism, and his self-conscious revolt against his Puritan upbringing all intruded themselves into his verse. [Informative article; well documented.]


[References to AS are slight, but the inclusion of AS’s ms., “A Study in the Fantastic,” on Stenbock makes the book valuable to the AS scholar despite the fact that the essay is imperfect, written when AS’s faculties were somewhat impaired.]


[Discusses AS’s short stories in *Spiritual Adventures* as representative of impressionism and symbolism in the 1890s. Attention is given to “The Death of Peter Waydelin,” “Christian Trevalga,” “Esther Kahn,” and “An Autumn City” (253). AS’s stories are compared to those of Frederick Wedmore, particularly his “A Chemist in the Suburbs” (254), and to stories by Henry Dowson Lowry and Richard Le Gallienne. (In German.)]


Yeats attempted to change the Irish heart through the revival of mythology. He and A.E. founded the Dublin Hermetic Society. AS shared rooms at the time with Yeats and they “decided to dress in black” (332). AS was grateful for Yeats’s help on *The Symbolist Movement in Literature*.


AS’s introduction to *The Golden Threshold* identifies Decadent passions and concerns. Naidu does seem to portray a kind of “stasis … not so far from that of a Dowson or Symons enthralled by the deathly passivity in which a woman must be fixed” (53). However, “the irony is that she should learn from Symons or Dowson, carrying her diction back to India, using in her poetry images of exhausted
women, hermetically sealed, a double colonization that the interchange of cultures drew her to” (53). [Brief mention of AS, 52–53, 58.]


The Rhymers’ Club “was unlike its French counterparts in not being a ‘school’ of writers; it comprised men of differing outlook and purpose who met simply from a shared concern for the craft of poetry at a time when it was out of fashion. The label ‘decadent,’ often applied to the group as a whole, is seen as appropriate to only a few members, but it is these: Dowson, Symons, and (with certain reservations) Johnson, who have remained uppermost in the memory of those, like Yeats, who survived to write of their early years as members or associates of the Rhymers’ Club. The Aestheticism, which some of the Rhymers had imbibed from Pater, led to a deification of the poetic imagination more extreme than in those earlier Romantics who had generally been restrained by some form of social idealism. The demand for an intensity of living made by Pater led to a confusion of art and life which was detrimental to both.” [Annotation edited from DAI 27 (1966): 451A.]


AS’s “account of the Club is disparaging… His attendance at meetings was sporadic but he is incorrect in surmising that Dowson also did not go very often” (14). Richard Le Gallienne found “inspiration in the nights of London … but with a moralizing strain” rather than AS’s “gay abandon and *mystique* of the curious” (34). Lionel Johnson and AS “brought to bear on the Rhymers the influence of Walter Pater” (49). [Chapter V, 57–78, is on AS.] AS “more than any other Rhymer” was cured of his “provincialism” even though his “childhood and youth … had been provincial to the point of torture” (57). His poetry and that of the French Symbolists “expresses the cultural and spiritual breakdown of the time” but he “goes too far in describing the literature itself as a disease” (65). AS and Dowson “differed considerably from their [French] models, as nearly all imitators do” (66). AS “contributed to the shocking-power of the first volume [of the *Yellow Book*] with his poem ‘Stella Maris’ in which he dared to describe physical love” (69–70). For AS “the failure of the *Savoy* represented the futility of trying to combat the increasingly Philistine and Imperialistic spirit of the times” (72). Although AS’s “biographical sketch” of Dowson in the *Savoy* (August 1896) is “a lurid depiction” (79), “it is as true as any impressionistic portrait can be” (80).


AS contended that Dowson was a “demoralized” Keats (248). “Flos Lunae” by Dowson can be compared with AS’s “Idealism” (255).


“Charles Clinch Bubb, an Episcopalian priest who operated the Clerk’s Press in Cleveland, Ohio between 1908 and 1917, has remained an obscure footnote to those Imagist poets whom he published…. Certainly, Bubb needs more
investigating; evidence uncovered in this study indicates that Bubb was in touch with Arthur Symons, Amy Lowell, May Sinclair, and perhaps, with William Carlos Williams and T. S. Eliot.” [Annotation edited from DAI 47 (1987): 3756A.]

14. Alpers, Antony. *Katherine Mansfield: A Biography.* New York: Knopf, 1953. 63. “The idol of the German class, the polished, persuasive Professor Rippmann, was not merely a brilliant teacher of languages. He had infallible social charm besides, and something more: a zeal for stimulating youthful minds. At the literary evenings that he held at his home in Ladbroke Grove he introduced a select and envied group [including Katherine Mansfield] to the heady wine of the decadents—to Walter Pater, Arthur Symons, Ernest Dowson, Paul Verlaine, and of course to Oscar Wilde” (63). [Brief mention of AS, but important in documenting Mansfield’s introduction to the work of AS.]

15. Alter, Megan Early. “Provocative Contours: Tracing the Female Performer’s Body in Victorian Literature and the Aesthetics of Performance.” Diss. U of Iowa, 2004. [“Provocative Contours” is an interdisciplinary project that combines literary and cultural analyses with performance studies to examine Victorian writers’ fascination with theatrical performance and its female performers. I consider significant performances, theatrical criticism, and literature that explicitly promote the aesthetic merit of the performing arts, and within that framework, also promote the integrity of female performers as artists. I argue that while the paradigm linking the performing arts to femininity—and femininity to performance—functions as a central premise in these texts, and complicates the female performer’s representation in her culture, authors attempted to cast this relationship in a positive register. These writers include the lesser known Henry Chorley and Albert Smith as well as G. H. Lewes, George Eliot, George Du Maurier, and Arthur Symons. I focus on the challenges these writers faced in writing about “living texts” and examine the effects that Romantic, Realist, and Decadent stylistics had on their impressions of embodied discourse, the female performer, and the aesthetic value of performance…. This project offers an historical perspective of the relationship between textual and embodied discourses that positions the female performer at the center of both.] [Annotation edited from Digital Dissertations, DAI 65 (2005): 2611A.]

16. Anderson, Chester G. *James Joyce and His World.* New York: Viking, 1968. 36, 37, 66. In 1902 Yeats introduced Joyce to AS who was “to prove helpful, by placing some of Joyce’s poems in periodicals and helping him, four years later, to publish *Chamber Music,* his first book.” (Stern)

17. Anderson, Chester G. “Joyce’s Verses.” *A Companion to Joyce Studies.* Ed. Zack Bower and James F. Carens. Westport, CT: Greenwood, 1983. 16, 60, 77, 129–55, 132, 133, 140, 166, 263. “Was Joyce simply a ‘minor poet’—a favorite term in the 1890s for poets of the quality of Arthur Symons, Ernest Dowson, or Sturge Moore—or is there more to the poems than first meets the eye and the ear?” (132). One way Joyce thought to make his way as a poet was “purloining the vocabulary of love” from AS,
Shakespeare, and others. [Minor mentions of AS and passing praise of AS’s criticism.]


AS’s and George Dillon’s translations of Baudelaire’s “Correspondances” reveal the limitations of translating poetry. Both translators fail to capture fully Baudelaire’s poem metrically or semantically. AS “seems more intent on conveying the impact that Baudelaire’s poem had on him personally, rather than in reproducing the poem in English” (445).


“The new spirit of the nineties expressed itself characteristically in the Rhymers’ Club [of which AS was a member] and the Yellow Book,” which excelled “in prose, rather than in poetry” and “also saw the first publication of some distinguished work” (7–8). In the 1890s, Walter Pater was a leader in the aesthetic movement, and “the true disciple of Walter Pater is the poet Arthur Symons. He has the scholarly, intellectual side of the great aesthete, as well as the sensitiveness to beauty, color, and emotion” (19). Not content to be merely an academic aesthete, AS lived in Paris and was influenced by Verlaine. “Symons loves to look at life for the sheer delight the impression gives his eyes—for, as he is fond of saying, the visible world exists for him; and he loves to experiment with life not merely for the sake of new emotions themselves, but for the sake of the intellectual pleasure of trying to understand them” (19–20). Such is AS’s development of Pater’s aestheticism. AS cherishes the impression: city scenes in twilight, familiar scents, and footlights on a dancer’s body. “The poems of Symons written toward the end of the decade have the sadness of the hedonist’s recollections of lovely moments” (20).


AS is one of the best critics of the nineteenth century and has unjustly fallen into anonymity. He is responsible for introducing the English to the best of French poetry and art contemporary to his time. In the 1900s he was in the middle of literary action and helped discover Conrad and Joyce. AS describes his 1908 breakdown in Confessions, which is a description of both AS’s symptoms and the literary history of the era. AS eventually recovered due to the help of friends. However, he could not stop searching to identify himself with authors he admired and his literary work after his reentry in 1920 was marked by the trial of his breakdown. [In French. A spirited and brief biography of AS focusing on his connection to French literature and on his illness. The description of AS’s breakdown is possibly overly dramatic. However, the portrait of him is compassionate.]


[Reprint of the introduction to AS’s Romantic Movement in English Poetry (14–33). A short biographical sketch adds that AS “occupies a position of authority. He is distinguished as a poet, as a prose writer and as a critic. He has also had
the great advantage of being thoroughly at home in other languages and literatures than his own” (238).


AS’s poetry has been shaped by two masters, Browning and Verlaine. *Days and Nights* falls under the spell of the first; *Silhouettes, London Nights*, and *Amoris Vicitima*, the second. AS’s poetry is competent, but lacks passion. [Portions of this article originally appeared in “Three Poets of the Younger Generation,” *London Quarterly Review* 81 (October 1893): 44–47.] (Stern)


[Reprinted in a greatly expanded and revised form in *Poets of the Younger Generation* (London: John Lane, 1902): 409–20. Favorable review of *Silhouettes* with several references to *Days and Nights*.] (Stern)


“A more familiar view, or at least one held by more conventionally literary critics, is that Yeats is not the last Romantic, but the first Irish Symbolist poet, tutored by George Moore and then Arthur Symons, befriended by the Rhymers and watching them become ‘the Tragic Generation,’ struggling to understand Mallarmé in spite of inadequate French. For such a poet, necessarily isolated or estranged from ordinary society, symbols do not contain truth; they are truth, ‘radiant truth out of space and time’” (6).


[Considers to what extent Britain experienced a phase of symbolism in its art, suggesting that art history has allotted it one merely to unify art practice around the turn of the 20th century with that of other countries. The author mentions artists deemed to fit into the Symbolist movement by the writer Arthur Symons in his collection of essays *Studies in Seven Arts* (1906), including Simeon Solomon, Aubrey Beardsley, Dante Gabriel Rossetti, and George Frederick Watts, and suggests that such artists should rather be spoken of as embodying “Symbolist tendencies,” as Lothar Honnighausen does in *The Symbolist Tradition in English Literature* (1988). She concludes by outlining aspects of the work of Edward Burne-Jones, Frederic Leighton, and William Holman Hunt which could be interpreted either as Symbolist or highly literalist.] [Abstract from Cambridge Scientific Abstracts, *Art Bibliographies Modern*.


[Unpublished M. Phil Thesis. Not seen.]


AS’s *The Symbolist Movement in Literature* figures importantly in the literary background that shaped *Finnegans Wake*. AS’s book provides the reader with all he needs to know about French Symbolism in order to understand Joyce. Joyce relied on AS’s account of Mallarmé’s theories, rather than on Mallarmé’s own
practice, to shape his style. He also drew on AS’s Hermetic sayings rather than going himself to the “Smaragdine Tablet.” (Stern)

   To Charles Whibley, 28 May 1892, Henley wrote: “I note, from the Fortnightly announcement, that Symons is still in the womb of time; & that I’ve a month of self-respect still let me anyhow” (210). On 5 November 1894, also to Whibley, he wrote, “Frank Harris has bought the Saturday.” “He wants me to write for him” (232). “It’s worth noting that Selwyn Image is retained; also Herbert Horne; also Arthur Symons & B. Shaw! What I should do in such a gallery I know not” (233).

   Beerbohm’s later fiction “might be seen as aligning itself with Arthur Symons’s more complex definition” (32) of Decadence as expounded in “The Decadent Movement in Literature.”

   Beckson’s book is “welcome,” well supported, but “somewhat disappointing” because he does not portray AS as the “living and colourful person he must have been” (95). AS’s “persistence, ambition, and intellectual gifts are well documented by Professor Beckson, but he omits the sense of struggle which must have been experienced by a man whose physical instincts were clearly at variance with a strict Methodist upbringing” (96). Beckson does an excellent job portraying AS’s intellectual abilities, describing his contribution to modernism, and using data to support his conclusions, but the book could have more effectively reestablished AS in the literary world of his time.

   “In a comparison of ‘Neutral Tones’ (1867) with Arthur Symons’s ‘Gray and Green’ (1895) fairly late in the book, Persoon entertains the idea of a Symbolist Hardy who created a body of early work actually written in the 1890s, but he does not long pursue the effects of this manipulation on existing literary history” (550).
   AS, in his poetry and criticism, seeks spiritual and aesthetic beauty, and on these
   he writes “with soundness of judgment and the most refined and delicate appre-
   ciation.” His most important work of literary criticism is *The Romantic Movement in English Poetry*. In *Cities and Sea-Coasts and Islands* he practices his brand of
   impressionism to perfection. [Passing remarks on AS’s other critical and poetic
   works published prior to 1912.] (Stern)

   “Chapter four's contrast of Wilde’s and Arthur Symons’s readings of the Roman-
   tic poets reveals the uniqueness of Wilde’s facility in both parodying and paying
   homage to genius and individualism” (501).

   Conrad deplored the obtuseness of AS’s criticism of *The Nigger of the ‘Narcis-
   sus’* which appeared in *Saturday Review* 85 (1898): 145–46. AS compared Con-
   rad unfavorably with d’Annunzio. Conrad retorted in an essay which was never
   printed. (Stern)

35. Bakanova, T. P. “Artur Saimonz v russkikh zhurnalakh rubezha XIX–XXvv. (Ar-
   thur Symons in Russian Journals at the Turn of the Nineteenth and Twentieth Cen-
   AS appeared in the history of English literature as the leading theoretic and pro-
   pagandist of the artistic Decadence of the 1890s. AS was a contemporary and
   close friend to many famous authors and artists: Aubrey Beardsley, Joseph Con-
   rad, James Joyce, Toulouse-Lautrec, Degas, Paul Verlaine, and Auguste Rodin.
   AS’s interesting essays regarding the creativity of these artists attracted atten-
   tion from contemporary Russian critics. His articles expressed his theory that
   symbolism is the most important aspect not only of literature, but art as well.
   These theories were published in Russian pre-revolutionary journals. In 1897,
   AS visited Moscow and St. Petersburg and published his essay “Moscow” in
   the international journal “Cosmo polis” expressing his vast knowledge of Russian
   history and culture. Russian critics, such as Z. A. Vengerova, considered AS’s
   critical essays very smart and fine evaluations of artistic works. Despite his pop-
   ularity among Russian critics, AS’s poems and biography of Aubrey Beardsley
   were never translated into Russian. AS’s critical and theoretical works trace the
   sources of contemporary aesthetic thought from Robert Browning through the
   French Symbolists to T. S. Eliot, Ezra Pound, and James Joyce. AS’s work is often
   considered the link between literature of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.
   [In Russian.]

36. Bakanova, T. P. “Pol’ Verlen i Artur Saimonz: Iz istorii anglo-frantsuzskikh liter-
AS kept close contact with the French poet Paul Verlaine. This contact greatly influenced English literature and art, and also played an important role in English/French cultural relations. AS is known in the history of English literature primarily as a leader and theoretic in the literary/artistic movements of Decadence, Impressionism and Symbolism. It was AS who introduced the creativity of Paul Verlaine to the English. AS’s works about Verlaine had great success among the artistic youth of the “New English Renaissance,” artists such as Ernest Dowson, Lionel Johnson, and William Butler Yeats. AS was not only well known in England and France, but was also well known within Russian literary circles. Critics unanimously praise AS’s work as a translator not only because he tried to translate ideo-thematic content but also for the rhythmic intonation of the original works. AS’s translations are considered some of the best examples of English translation of the works of Paul Verlaine. [In Russian.]


[“Aestheticism” has become a charge rather than a useful critical term, and it is a charge most often leveled against the writers of the last third of the nineteenth century. The word “aestheticism” evokes a verbal mosaic that includes terms like “unhealthy,” “pervasive,” “solipsistic,” and “sensual,” and many critics have been willing to write off the bulk of the work of the aesthetic movement as the mindless, exception-to-the-rule product of Grosvenor-Gallery young men. But at the heart of the work of the five writers included in this study, there is always a sound idea—a meaningful, philosophical conception of the most desirable life—and the idea is not one that stresses an airy, palace-of-art existence. When we turn to the actual works of Swinburne, Rossetti, Pater, Wilde, and Dowson, we can see that a picture of the aesthetic movement that attempts to minimize or to ignore the “fundamental brainwork” of the authors in question can only be a partial and somewhat distorted representation…. For the five writers were not only “anti-Victorian” in their ideas, but also in many respects, modern.] [No mention of AS in the abstract. Annotation edited from DA 29 (1968): 1862A.] (Stern)


“Symons was associated by reputation with drink and hashish, but he had only a slight experience of them. Havelock Ellis believes Symons to have drunk absinthe only once, with Ellis himself outside a Paris café. This is probably an underestimate, but Symons was certainly no addict.” AS’s “absinthe-free lifestyle did not protect him from a catastrophic nervous breakdown in 1907, but it may have contributed to his longevity, compared to his absinthe-drinking comrades” (29). “Dowson’s melancholy and self-destructive absinthe-drinking life has been extensively mythologized and romanticised, beginning with Arthur Symons’ 1896 piece on him in The Savoy” (45). In AS’s “‘The Opium Smoker,’ the point is that nothing is really altered” (52). [Also published Sawtry [UK]: Dedalus, 2001, 2005, under the title The Dedalus Book of Absinthe, and translated into Russian as Absent, Moskva: Novoe Literaturnoe Obozrenie, 2002.]

“Alford attempts to capture the biographical and literary history of the members of the Rhymers’ Club, including such figures as W. B. Yeats, Arthur Symons, Ernest Dowson, Lionel Johnson, and John Davidson, and their collective and separate roles in their creation of the new and experimental modernist literary aesthetic. Alford affords special emphasis to the disparity between the narrative interests of the club and the general mood of the popular press during the 1890s, arguing that such issues ultimately ensured the demise of the Rhymers’ Club in the new century” (649–50).

40. Balakian, Anna. “Conclusion.” The Symbolist Movement in the Literature of European Languages. Ed. Anna Balakian. Budapest: Akadémia Kiadó, 1982. Symbolism is not “the tail-end of Romanticism” but a “revised notion of the nature and function of poetic language” (681). One aspect of Symbolist poetry is the shift from “expected connotations” which creates, as observed by Ezra Pound in AS’s poetry, “a new modus in the sequence of words” (695). [Passing mention of AS.]

41. Balakian, Anna. The Symbolist Movement: A Critical Appraisal. New York: Random House, 1968. 3, 10, 68, 95, 97, 102, 149, 157. There is a need to disentangle the various meanings attributed to the term “symbolism” and separate the French movement from the broader movement that encompasses poetry produced in England, Germany, Italy, Spain, and the United States since the late nineteenth century. AS is guilty of using the term in this broad sense. [Passing and slight references to AS. Critical of his essays on Rimbaud and Mallarmé.] (Stern) [Published New York: New York UP, 1977, with identical index references to AS.]

42. Banville, John. “Swan’s Way.” Rev. of W. B. Yeats: A Life, Vol. 1: The Apprentice Mage, by R. F. Foster. New Republic 216.25 (1997): 31–35. R. F. Foster’s “splendidly exhaustive account” of Yeats’s silliness and intensity (31). Foster includes in his work Max Beerbohm’s famous account of a dinner given by Leonard Smithers in celebration of the first edition of the Savoy. Attending the dinner were Yeats, Beardsley, and AS. While Yeats was heatedly discussing “Dyahbolism,” he overheard AS say that the “nomadic life was the best for an artist” (33). Yeats gently overpowered AS, perhaps not in content, but in “voice, and manner, and countenance,” claiming that an artist works best “among his own people” (33). Beerbohm wished AS had been the victor because Yeats would have recovered from the defeat more swiftly and gracefully (33). [Brief mention of AS.]

43. Barber, R. W. Arthur of Albion. London: Barrie & Rockliff with the Pall Mall P, 1961. 63–64, 168, 186. “Arthurian legend recurs throughout our literature from the twelfth to the twentieth century.” In his play Tristan and Iseult (1917), AS drew on a German medieval poem by Gottfried of Strassbourg and Wagner’s libretto for his own play. He makes Tristan more pathetic than tragic; he portrays the bitterness and frustration of the love rather than the ecstasy it brings. Tennyson had exploited the moral side of the legend; the twentieth-century writers, AS and E. A. Robinson included, were drawn to the innate psychological drama the legend manifested. (Stern)

“The standard stage histories bow to the ’epoch-making,’ ’revolutionary’ impact of Granville-Barker’s Shakespeare productions, yet there is little, if any, close analysis of the Savoy Shakespeare in print…. A Midsummer Night’s Dream was the last and most controversial of his Savoy Shakespeare productions” (521). “As theory at least, many of the ’avant-garde,’ ’post impressionist’ elements of the Savoy Dream mentioned in contemporary reviews were in the air long before 1914. As early as 1897, in a letter to Fiona Macleod, Yeats outlines an approach to staging similar to that used at the Savoy: ’A forest, for instance, should be represented by a forest pattern and not by a forest painting. One should design a scene, which would be an accompaniment, not a reflection of the text.’ In ’New Art of the Stage,’ a review of Gordon Craig’s The Art of the Theatre (1905), Arthur Symons describes the new stagecraft which ’aims at taking us beyond reality’ by replacing ’the pattern of the thing itself by the pattern which the thing evokes in the mind … in this new convention of the stage, a plain cloth modulated by light, can stand for space or limit, may be the tight walls of a tent or the sky and the clouds’” (521–22).


While dancing in AS’s poems has been considerably discussed, the equally important aspect of the music-hall has been either lumped together with the dancing theme or dealt with insufficiently. “Symons’ music-hall poems were original and were influential” (189). The music-hall poems, of which there are at least thirteen, reflect AS’s “quest of fresh new sensations” (189). In the music-hall poems, the “unexplained craving, the desire for the ‘glitter’ and ‘the violent animality,’ the juxtaposition of reality and artificiality, and the momentary loss of self are symptomatic of Symons’ own personality in the nineties” (191). The poems can mainly be divided into personal and impressionistic poems. The personal poems show his attempts to escape and the impressionistic poems reflect that “Symons was trying to achieve in verse what painters such as Degas and Whistler had achieved on canvas” (196). Ultimately, AS’s poetry reflects a number of modern tendencies but in the end they represent his failure to escape from life itself.


The writers of the 1890s “wished to épater les bourgeois and were unconcerned whether they succeeded by their lives or works between which they themselves often failed to make a distinction. Wilde’s love of attention has already been mentioned, but others also proclaimed the decadent creed. One such is Arthur Symons, the publicist of the movement, who could write in 1893 that ‘this representative literature of to-day, interesting, beautiful, novel as it is, is really a new and beautiful and interesting disease.’ In the same essay, ‘The Decadent Movement in Literature,’ he writes of ‘this unreason of the soul’ present in decadence, a phrase calculated to shock any good Philistine. Three years later, in his preface to the second edition of Silhouettes, he openly states the essential position of the decadents on art: ‘a work of art can be judged only from two standpoints: the
standpoint from which its art is measured entirely by its morality, and the standpoint from which its morality is measured entirely by its art—Symons’ view is emphatically the latter” (25).

“In form Christie’s poems are traditional.” “The general tone of the poems is reminiscent of such poets of the 1890s and early twentieth century as Ernest Dowson, Arthur Symons, Alfred Noyes, Walter de la Mare, and James Elroy Flecker” (104).

“While fine art may be objective, it is the intimate quality of the poetry of Arthur Symons that causes its intense reactions upon the reader.” “Of the young men who thus pursued experience and made verses about their quest, Arthur Symons is the finest type” (xiv). “To Symons, the experience itself was the essential thing, the statement of that experience the sole necessity. Moreover he had the felicity of phrase to make himself understood.” “Although Arthur Symons still lives, it is significant that his period of poetical creation practically closed with the close of the nineteenth century” (xiv). [Introduction to AS’s London Nights.]

“In this broad-ranging study of nineteenth-century culture, Gail Marshall explores the intriguing phenomenon of the Victorian celebration of statuary, in particular of the female body, with reference principally to theatre but also to prose fiction” (426). “[S]he offers Eleonora Duse, on the basis of the opinions of William Archer, Bernard Shaw, and Arthur Symons on her acting, as an example of an actress who broke through the Galatea myth” (427–28).

Although Yeats once claimed to not have an “accurate knowledge” of French Symbolism, he “was better acquainted with the Symbolist aesthetic than has hitherto been recognised and the influence was crucial to his own poetic and intellectual development” (1214). AS was very influential on Yeats’s development in terms of Symbolism, yet AS remains “an unjustly neglected figure” (1215). “Nevertheless, the importance of Symons’s version of Mallarmé and Verlaine is undeniable” (1216). In addition, “Yeats lived with Symons during a period crucial to his poetic development. There was an element of cross-fertilisation between them in poetic technique—for example, their shared sense of the poem as a dramatised quarrel with oneself—as well as Symbolist theory” (1219).

“Mes Souvenirs’ consists of three essays, each quite short, on Paul Verlaine, Bohemian Chelsea, and the Magic of the east, the last a brief appreciation of the Indian poet Mrs. Sarojini Naidu, which is interesting chiefly for the light it
throws on the origin of Mr. Symons’s own poem ‘The Return.’… And how admirable is this summary of Verlaine’s poetical development: ‘All his verse is a confession of what was beautiful and dreadful and merely troublesome to him in life, at first under courtly disguises, and then gradually with more and more sincerity to fact as well as to emotion and sensation, and at the end, in a pitiful enough way, a sort of nakedness in rags.’ It is this fine sensitiveness which places [AS], in spite of a certain leaning towards flamboyancy of expression (much less noticeable in this book than in others) in the first rank of interpretive critics” (140). [Originally appeared in TLS as an unsigned review; TLS Online now adds the contributor’s name.]

In Studies in Strange Souls “we find two essays, on Rossetti and Swinburne, which, though discursive, desultory, almost fragmentary in character, can yet be read with genuine enjoyment for their delicate discernment and generous appreciation.” In the Rossetti essay, “it is interesting to turn to Mr. Symons’s reasoned enthusiasm, vivified as it is by personal reminiscence.” “In his treatment of the supernatural Mr. Symons places Rossetti next to Coleridge.” “The second study, that of Swinburne, is even more desultory than the former, and proportionately less satisfying, though many striking things are said in the course of it.” “This book, disconnected as it is, is the expression of one of the most sensitive and discriminating critics” (471). [Originally appeared in TLS as an unsigned review; TLS Online now adds the contributor’s name.]

AS “recognizes the ‘manifest inferiority’ of this play to its forerunners” and “discovers ‘no stress of action, no pulse of emotion, no really dramatic effects.’ This judgment is rather severe, but a careful reader of the play cannot do other than endorse it.” [Originally appeared in TLS as an unsigned review; TLS Online now adds the contributor’s name.]

“The exquisite grace and urbane artificiality of decadent prose at its best is seen in the essays of Max Beerbohm…. More characteristic, however, is the work in verse and prose of Arthur Symons (1865–1945). In his poetry there is a remoteness from contemporary society that expresses the point of view of the entire group of ‘Decadents.’ The substitution of suggestion for statement; the effects of ‘correspondences’ of words and music and color; the dim sadness and misty unwholesomeness; the profound sensuality; and the reliance upon symbols—these are characteristics which Symons shares with his French masters, Verlaine and Mallarmé. His critical study, The Symbolist Movement in Literature (1899), though inadequate from the historian’s point of view, is of historical importance as a sort of belated manifesto” (1483).

Contrary to Munro’s contention, the “symphonic” structure is maintained throughout the poem. This can be demonstrated by looking at AS’s notes on his visit to the Jardin des Plantes and observing how he selected from them to create a poem whose movement was like that of a piece of music. Munro argues falsely when he suggests that AS’s “symbolist” concerns predate his meeting with Yeats. They met not after 1892, as Munro asserts, but in early 1891. [Response to John M. Munro’s “Arthur Symons, ‘The Symphony of Snakes’ and the Development of the Romantic Image,” English Literature in Transition (ELT) 7.3 (1964): 143–45. Munro’s rejoinder follows Baugh’s piece in ELT 7.4 (1964): 229–30. Baugh is right in dating AS’s meeting with Yeats to 1891 and the Rhymers’ Club, but he is wrong to imply that there was any close friendship between the two men at that time.] (Stern)

   Since Temple’s The Critic’s Alchemy (1953), there has been a modest but steady revival of interest in AS, but it has stressed his critical achievement to the neglect of his poetic talents. His most distinctive verse is found in Silhouettes and London Nights where he contributed to the development of English poetry, making the music-hall and the demimonde proper subjects of poetry. [Offers a resumé of the critical writings on AS in the 1950s and early 1960s.] (Stern)

   “Slovak Gypsy,” published by AS in Saturday Review (London) 105 (6 June 1908): 723, is his only translation from Romany. He was a self-confessed Borrovian and occasionally contributed to the Journal of the Gypsy Lore Society. (Stern)


   “For a generation after his death, the figure of Ernest Dowson appeared in numerous volumes of reminiscences about the nineties as stereotyped example of the decadent poet, a ragged, child-like victim of drink, drugs, and tuberculosis. The originator of the portrait was Arthur Symons, who first sketched it in an obituary notice of the poet, reprinted as the preface to the first collection of Dowson’s poems (1905) and in various volumes of Symons’ essays” (264). [From the section “The Later Victorian Poets,” written by Lionel Stevenson. Comments on AS’s work on W. E. Henley, Francis Thompson, and Ernest Dowson; provides a bibliographic summary of attempts to correct the misconception of “The Dowson Legend” attributed to AS.]

AS, associated with the Symbolists, sought in art a retreat from reality. [One other slight reference to AS’s friendship with Yeats.] (Stern)


Joyce gave one of the 13 large paper copies of Pomes Penyeach (1927) to AS. AS wrote the epilogue for the Joyce Book and shortly afterwards Joyce joined Ellis and AS in Beach’s bookstore to show his appreciation for the man who had obtained him a publisher for Chamber Music. (Stern)


AS wrote in his Studies in Seven Arts: “Ruskin did more than any man of our century to interest Englishmen in beautiful things.” (28.) [Many other writers, including George Eliot, Charlotte Brontë and Henry James, are cited in an attempt to give John Ruskin “his full due as a critic.”]


Like Whistler, but with less vehemence, AS thought poorly of Ruskin’s knowledge of art. However, Ruskin’s censure of Whistler concerning their differing views on an artist’s status in society is often misunderstood, but important in assessing Whistler’s aesthetic and intellectual values as a spokesman for a new modernity of art (27). [Symons mentioned in passing.]


Regarding Diarmuid and Grania, “Neither Yeats nor Moore thought the play worthy of publication at the time of its original (and only) production, though both have left long and amusing accounts of its composition… How much of the writing is Yeats’s and how much Moore’s is now impossible to tell. In fact, there is every possibility that Lady Gregory and Arthur Symons had their fingers in the pie in a small way” (2).


“It was Mallarmé who said, ‘There must always be enigma in poetry’; and when Arthur Symons explained le Symbolisme to British readers in 1899, he was to write that the poet must ‘start with an enigma.’ In this passage Symons is referring specifically to the way Mallarmé structures his poems. Correspondingly, the structure of [Amy Levy’s] ‘London in July’ is in part what makes it puzzling. But Levy’s poem is enigmatic for several other reasons” (211). “When Symons writes about the French poet’s method, he could be describing Levy’s” (215). “Yet, almost every literary history or handbook says that the French symbolists began to influence English poets only in the 1890s, with the poems of Arthur Symons, Ernest Dowson, and W. B. Yeats; with The Picture of Dorian Gray … by Oscar Wilde; and with Symons’s explanations of symbolist poetry. There are probably
other writers besides Levy who used symbolist techniques earlier than is usually supposed, and some of these would have been women, whose innovations often go unrecognized” (224).


“The series edited by Ian Fletcher and John Stokes, ‘The Decadent Consciousness: A Hidden Archive of Late Victorian Literature,’ published by Garland Publishing, offered 42 ‘rare and important titles’ published in 36 volumes, such as works by Henry Harland, Arthur Symons, George Moore, John Davidson, Ella D’Arcy, and George Egerton. (Such a disparate group, of course, inevitably raises the question whether the theme of the series—‘The Decadent Consciousness’—is an accurate description).” “The current series [R. K. R. Thornton and Ian Small, eds., Decadents, Symbolists, Anti-Decadents: Poetry of the 1890s.] … avoids duplicating the Fletcher-Stoke series except for one volume that contains the two books of the Rhymers’ Club” (116). “Thornton and Small provide a very brief introduction for each volume that contains biographical information with some discussion of the writer’s work and reputation—designed, clearly, for the general reader. Also included is a select bibliography of primary works and a secondary bibliography of fewer than a dozen items” (117).


“Some of the most famous poems of the 1890s appeared in the two Rhymers’ books [The Book of the Rhymers’ Club/ The Second Book of the Rhymers’ Club]; for example, Arthur Symons’s ‘Javanese Dancers’ and ‘Nora on the Pavement’” (241). AS “emerged as the most important critic of the decade, though as a poet his importance remains insufficiently appreciated: as the two titles included in the Woodstock volume indicate, in the 1890s Symons was imitating the French Symbolists in eliminating Victorian discourse from his verse in order to focus on impressions. Though London Nights has often been regarded as his ‘most Decadent volume,’ the volume also contains a number of Wordsworthian nature poems, an indication that his daring has perhaps been exaggerated”(241–42). “The editors have chosen the second edition of London Nights [to reprint] presumably to include the important preface, which Symons added in response to what he called the ‘singular unanimity of abuse’ by the English press when the volume first appeared.” “Likewise, the second edition of Silhouettes includes the important ‘Preface: Being a Word on Behalf of Patchouli,’ which defends the use of artifice against a critic’s complaint that Symons’s verses were ‘unwholesome’” (242). [Continued review of reprints in the series, R. K. R. Thornton and Ian Small, eds., Decadents, Symbolists, Anti-Decadents: Poetry of the 1890s.]


“The Decadent Movement in Literature” and The Symbolist Movement in Literature “solidified in Britain much of what was later called ‘Modernist.’ During
An Annotated Bibliography


“The confrontations of Decadent and anti-Decadent poets in this crop of Woodstock volumes again reveal what the editors have been pursuing throughout the series: that is, the complex state of fin-de-siècle verse from which Modernism emerged in the following century. The final grouping, including volumes by Wilde, Lord Alfred Douglas, Le Gallienne, Symons, Lionel Johnson, and Olive Custance, will bring the series to a conclusion”(270). [Continued review of reprints in the series, R. K. R. Thornton and Ian Small, eds., Decadents, Symbolists, Anti-Decadents: Poetry of the 1890s.]


Although AS’s “verse remains less appreciated … Yeats thought highly of it” (213). Images of Good and Evil centers around “Symons’s preoccupation with the dance as a symbolic icon of integrated art for art’s sake” (213). In addition, the poetry of this volume demonstrates the interconnectedness AS and Yeats shared in their work. Of AS’s translation of “Hérodiade,” Yeats said it was “one of the ‘most accomplished metrical translations of our time … which may have given elaborate form to my verses of those years” (214). This type of admiration and imitation occurs between AS and Yeats in other poems that are collected in Images of Good and Evil. [Continued review of reprints in the series, R. K. R. Thornton and Ian Small, eds., Decadents, Symbolists, Anti-Decadents: Poetry of the 1890s.]


In 1893 AS turned the pejorative suggestions raised by the word Decadence into praise by describing it as a “beautiful and interesting disease.” Later he limited the word to style alone. [Reprints with introductions to AS’s “The Decadent Movement in Literature,” “Being A Word on Behalf of Patchouli,” and “Preface to the Second Edition of London Nights,” along with several poems. Beckson focuses on the yellow stain in AS’s writings. He samples AS’s works, but his omissions leave only a partial picture of AS.] (Stern)


[ Gives an overview of AS’s life and includes “Sources” for the information; “Archives” of institutions that house correspondence and other manuscripts; “Likenesses,” listing paintings, drawings, and photographs of AS; and “Wealth at
death": £486] (606). [Also published online as the Oxford Dictionary of National Biography.]


[Karl Beckson in the “Preface” writes, “In preparing this volume for re-issue, I have expanded the bibliography in recognition of significant scholarship published since 1966, and I have provided selective annotations (especially where titles of works are inadequately descriptive) as a guide for students undertaking a study of Aestheticism and Decadence in the nineties” (viii).]


[Includes photos, a biographical sketch, a selected bibliography of AS’s works, references on letters, bibliographies, biographies, other secondary sources, and papers.]


“Since the appearance of Roger Lhombreau’s Arthur Symons: A Critical Biography (1963), a considerable number of Symons’s letters, hitherto unknown or unrestricted, have become available. This new material provides the documentation for a revision of our limited impressions of his personality, his conflicts, and his art” (v). “In addition to this extensive manuscript material, scholarship on figures closely associated with Symons has been considerable since 1963 … and critical studies and literary histories testify to the continuing interest in the ‘transitional period’ of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Because Symons, whose name appears frequently in these works, has re-emerged as a crucial figure in literary history, Lhombreau’s error-laden biography now stands in need of extensive correction and revision” (vi). [From the “Preface.”] After AS’s mental breakdown in 1908, he “not only resumed his career—though in vastly altered form—but he also outlived most of his friends and relatives. After 1908, he published almost thirty books (most of them containing material published or written before the breakdown) and dozens of articles and reviews, but his capacity for critical discernment was damaged permanently by chronic incoherence” (1). “Though Symons has generally been regarded as an impressionistic poet and critic who espoused Decadence in the 1890s, such a limited view ignores the wider importance and richness of his achievements, such as his role in the development of Modernism and his influence on such writers as Yeats, Joyce, Pound, and particularly T. S. Eliot” (1). “Though a ‘solitary soul,’ Symons was at the centre of the literary world” (2). “Before his breakdown, Symons was a friend or acquaintance of virtually every important French and British artist writer of the time, but after 1908—with rare exceptions—he seemed to take no interest in the newer artistic developments” (2). “The year 1908, therefore, marks the symbolic division of his life: the years leading up to that ‘fatal initiation of madness’ reveal a gifted man of letters who had earned his living by his pen. After that year, he was the wreck of a man, isolated from the mainstream of the literary world, struggling to resume a shattered career, and fearful of recurring madness” (3). [From
An Annotated Bibliography

For over fifty years, Symons had laboured in almost every literary genre, concerned as a critic with almost every form of art—a reluctant Modernist, despite his modernity, who, throughout his career as a poet, adhered to conventional rhyme and poetic form, avoiding the daring enigmatic art of the French Symbolists, convinced in later years that Modernist literature had lost its sense of beauty. His high seriousness and energy as a critic, his gift for paradox and eloquence in elucidating and advocating the autonomy and unique vision of aesthetic experience elevated him above most of his contemporaries who wrote on the seven arts; as a poet, he wrote many lyrics that still command our attention for their imaginative vision, craft, and power; as a writer of fiction, particularly in Spiritual Adventures, he revealed an original gift for characterization; and as a travel writer, he evoked the ‘soul’ of cities in a style rarely equalled—in short, with his translations, plays, and journalism, he was the complete homme de lettres’ (331). “Recent interest in the late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century development of Modernism … has done much to reveal Symons’s role as a conduit for fin de siècle aesthetics, as a major figure who helped stimulate the Modernist initiative” (332). “Though his place in literary history, we may safely assume, is assured, Symons’s mind and personality continue to be problematic” (332). “Above all, he cherished the mystery of human personality and art, and he professed that the creative process could never be explained” (332). [From the “Epilogue.”] [Carefully researched, thorough, and meticulously documented, this is the standard biography.]


In 1896 while staying with AS at the Hôtel Corneille in Paris, Yeats met John Millington Synge. While there is no actual record of a meeting between AS and Synge it seems likely they met. Regardless, Yeats told Synge, “You will never create anything by reading Racine, and Arthur Symons will always be a better critic of French literature” (77). In 1903, AS attempted to help Synge publish Riders to the Sea after hearing him read. Although AS and Synge did not meet again, after Synge’s death and his own mental breakdown, AS wrote a letter to Molly Allgood praising Synge. Later in 1914, AS composed a short piece, which he never published, praising Synge and his use of the Irish folk imagination and character.


AS’s association with Iseult Gonne stems from his acquaintance with her mother Maude Gonne before and after his mental breakdown. AS seems to have admired Iseult Gonne and tried to help her publish her “beautiful French prose.” He even went so far as to issue her a small loan in a time of need. AS “perceived her—as he did virtually everyone he became interested in—as a strange fusion of the perverse and the passionate, as a manifestation, in short, of his own psyche” (201). The memoir itself “reveals something of his mental impairment, the result of his breakdown,” and “appears to be in the form of a diary, but sections dated 1918 and 1919 are not in chronological order” (201). AS “may have wished to publish it (he had it typed, and he corrected the typescript)” (201).

Rhoda Symons’s devotion to AS after his mental breakdown in 1908 has been largely unattended. With the receipt of more than two thousand letters between Rhoda and AS in the Columbia University Library, Rhoda’s devotion to AS and her own declining hopes come to the surface. In addition, Rhoda’s failed attempts to establish herself as an actress, combined with AS’s altered condition, led her to view her life as a failure. After increasing depression and a heart attack, she died in 1936.


“In recent years, much scholarship has been expended on the subject of ‘decadence’ and ‘degeneration’ in cultural studies. Apparently, as the present volume testifies, Michael St. John believes that there is more to be said in Volume 3 of the Ashgate series, Studies in European Cultural Transition. In the nineteen essays, however, many of them are unclear as to the distinction between ‘Decadence’ and ‘decadence’ (the former referring to the new aesthetic in the late nineteenth century; the latter term characterizing, for example, moral and political decline.) … In the Ashgate volume, only one or two essays make an attempt to clarify what Symons and subsequent writers have established concerning Decadence” (220).


“It is with the term ‘decadence’ that confusion surfaces early on in this comprehensive study of absinthe. In The Breviary of the Decadence: J.-K. Huysmans’s A Rebours and English Literature (2001), G. A. Cevasco has taken care to distinguish ‘Decadence’ from ‘decadence.’ Throughout Adams’s book, ‘decadent’ and ‘decadence’ are exhaustively employed but defined only once—that is, when Adams cites Arthur Symons’s ‘The Decadent Movement in Literature’ (1893). However, Symons says the latest literary movement in Europe is ‘called by many names, none of them quite exact or comprehensive—Decadence, Symbolism, Impressionism…’. With ‘Decadence’ capitalized, Symons refers to a brilliant new literary accomplishment, whereas ‘decadence’ refers to a decline in morality or in art” (124–25).


Thornton inaccurately associates “the idea of ‘decline’” with Decadence. This problem is magnified by Thornton’s use of Decadence to refer to “cultural” and “biological” decadence, not just the literary form. At times he even “comes uncomfortably close to Max Nordau’s wild denunciations” (162). The Decadents “did not celebrate ‘decline’”; rather they saw themselves “as visionaries or prophets,” with AS acting as “the acknowledged spokesman of Decadence in the early 1890s” (162). In the end, Thornton “oversimplifies literary history” by claiming that Symbolism resolved and ended Decadence. Regardless, The Dec-
Advent Dilemma will, “despite lingering problems, inevitably provide stimulus for further study” (163).


AS “in his ability to obtain work from the leading Symbolists and Decadents of both France and Britain, was a brilliant editor who made The Savoy the first truly British avant-garde publication of the 1890s” (88). Later, AS “principally blamed the public for not supporting an artistic publication” (101). Like Walter Pater and AS, “who both stressed the essential nature of experience in terms of fleeting impressions that undergo artistic transformation into the symbolic ‘moments’ of a work of art, Harland suggests that an impression must be analyzed and studied before writing may proceed, until the impression is purified by the writer” (106).


“In 1893, in his seminal essay ‘The Decadent Movement in Literature,’ Arthur Symons wrote of *A Rebours*: ‘Elaborately and deliberately perverse, it is in its very perversity that Huysmans’ work—so fascinating, so repellent, so instinctively artificial—comes to represent, as the work of no other writer can be said to do, the main tendencies, the chief results, of the Decadent movement in literature.’ In a chapter on Symons, Cevasco traces Decadence to Symbolism, which Symons analyzed in his major critical work, *The Symbolist Movement in Literature* … including a chapter on ‘Huysmans as a Symbolist.’ Cevasco writes that Symons, who alluded to *A Rebours* as the ‘breviary’ of the Decadence, was struck by the term, which refers to ‘a special prayer book of psalms, hymns, and selected parts of Holy Scriptures. Huysmans employs, as did writers at the time, the notion of the Religion of Art (the use of religious imagery and rhetoric for aesthetic purposes)” (203–204).


No mention is made that, “as Frank Kermode has written in *Romantic Image*, Symons was ‘crucial’ in the development of Modernism, ‘always at the centre of his period and herald of its successor’” (91). The “level of discussion … is that of the undergraduate review” (90). Housman, Wilde, and Yeats are excluded to make room for less accomplished minor poets and familiar literary definitions such as decadence are purposefully avoided but to the detriment of the overall understanding of these poets’ actual place and influence on their time.


“In June 1895,… [Smithers] published Arthur Symons’s *London Nights*, a book that had been rejected by Heinemann and by the Bodley Head (the publisher of the *Yellow Book*). With Symons as editor of the *Savoy* and Beardsley as its princi-
pal illustrator, Smithers was confident that his magazine would surpass the Yellow Book. Furthermore, as Nelson states: ‘He appears to have been a tactful, patient, and open-minded publisher who listened to both his editor and chief illustrator while acting as mediator between them. Consequently, the significant successes by the journal as well as its signal failures must be attributed largely to Smithers’” (214).


Alford considers AS to be one of the Rhymers “of most interest” (404); however, the biography’s “accuracy and scholarship suffer” (404).


AS “envisioned a magical London in which two lovers, dancer and poet, are entwined in each other’s dreams, oblivious to the industrialism, poverty, and despair of the city” (xviii). Richard Le Gallienne saw decadence as “moral, mental, and spiritual disease,” whereas AS “offered a corrective interpretation” in his 1893 “The Decadent Movement in Literature” (60). AS’s London Nights (1895), frequently seen as AS’s “most Decadent work,” received “virulent abuse by reviewers” but AS wrote in a later preface that they “had confused art and morality” (67). Although the volume contains poems about harlotry, it also includes poems “that express Romantic attitudes toward nature” (68). Yeats was attracted to the symbolism in AS’s dance poems. “Symons had written that ‘the test of poetry which professes to be modern’ was ‘its capacity for dealing with London’” (85). AS’s “On Reading of Women Rioting for Their Rights” (1907) “reveals his orthodox view of women’s moral purity and superiority, traditionally an argument against women’s suffrage” (155–56). AS argued that, to be regarded as modern, the poet (and by extension, the painter, such as Whistler) had to include the less attractive aspects of the city, a means of eliminating conventional nature imagery and sentiments associated with popular poetry” (266). The impressionistic poetry of AS and others “prepared the way in the fin de siècle for the symbolic vision of the modern city’s sterility and death, particularly in Eliot’s The Waste Land” (268). “In his major work, The Symbolist Movement in Literature (1900), Symons not only made clear to the British the importance and complexity of Symbolism but also its relationship to Wagnerism” (286). Yeats’s [“The Symbolism of Poetry’] and AS’s books are “unquestionably the two most important discussions regarding Symbolism in fin de siècle Britain” (342). [See Holbrook Jackson, The Eighteen Nineties (1913) for an earlier, limited history of the 1890s.]

Because his literary career brought him in contact with most of “the great literary and artistic personalities of his time,” AS was able to produce telling and descriptive essays of his subjects (1). While AS lacked the wit of other critics, his essays betray an uncanny ability to understand the mental workings of these subjects. Indeed, “Symons has a strikingly pre-Freudian awareness of those unconscious forces … that shape both the artist’s personality and his work” (2). As the incoherence of his later work confirms, AS never fully recovered from his mental illness. Somewhere between the late 1920s and the first few years of the 1930s, AS began compiling his Memoirs. The Memoirs were to include “a record of [his] life from [his] youth to maturity,” a selection of essays on a number of different artistic figures, and finally “Two Confessions” reviewed by Mrs. Symons (2–3). Even once AS submitted the Memoirs, the manuscript suffered from innumerable gaps and nagging incoherence. In desperation, editors turned to T. Earle Welby for any suggested improvements. AS objected to this measure and in so doing “substantially blocked any chance of Memoirs being published” (4). Recognizing it would never reach print, AS broke up the manuscript to the point that “not even a table of contents has survived” (4). Because AS’s Memoirs were never published due to their incoherence, this work has attempted to omit the weightier incoherence without losing the overall spirit of the original Memoirs. This book also includes new essays “on such figures as Walter Pater, John Addington Symonds, Ernest Dowson, Paul Verlaine, and Aubrey Beardsley” (5).

89. Beckson, Karl. “A Mythology of Aestheticism.” English Literature in Transition 17.4 (1974): 233–49. The “Religion of Art and Beauty” was “the most comprehensive and revealing mythology of the Aesthetic Movement” (233). It embodies the “transformation of art into a ‘substitute religion’” (233), focusing on the artist as a priest/prophet, even a martyr enacting sacred rituals. The artist/priest is separated from mainstream society as AS described: “The artist, it cannot be too clearly understood, has no more part in society than a monk in domestic life” (235). In addition, the “Religion of Art” has sacred texts, such as A Rebours which AS called the “breviary” of the Decadence or Axël which Yeats identified as the “Sacred Book.” AS and Yeats participated in “Mallarmé’s Tuesday evenings in the Rue de Rome” and were “impressed by the religious solemnity of the proceedings” (236). In terms of literary projects, the work of Lionel Johnson, Ernest Dowson, Walter Pater, and James Joyce’s A Portrait exemplify the “Religion of Art” and “the poet-priest has the secret knowledge with which to create eternal forms” (241).

90. Beckson, Karl. “New Dates for the Rhymers’ Club.” English Literature in Transition 13.1 (1970): 37–38. Recent critics have dated the origins of the Rhymers’ Club to the early 1890s, usually 1891. On the basis of letters by Rhys, the Club seems to have certainly been in existence in January of 1890, if not earlier. [Argument based on sound evidence.] (Stern)

91. Beckson, Karl. The Oscar Wilde Encyclopedia. New York: AMS, 1998. 2, 17, 21, 23, 33, 53, 64, 163–64, 243, 262, 301, 305, 345, 365–67, 400. Although AS “thought little of Wilde’s ability in the late 1880’s, when he referred to him as a ‘flighty-brained enthusiast and poseur’ (Selected Letters 58), he did
regard him as a ‘perfect representative of all that is meant by the modern use of the word Decadence’” (365). “When Wilde’s Collected Edition appeared in 1908, Symons reviewed it at length in the Athenaeum (16 May 1908). Wilde, he said, was a ‘prodigious entertainer’ who created an ‘artificial world’ of art” (366). AS “contends that ‘Wilde was never concerned with fundamental ideas, except perhaps in “The Soul of Man under Socialism,” which contains his best and sanest and most valuable thinking, yet is almost as entertaining as Intentions … the most amusing book of criticism in English’” (366). “In 1930, Symons published A Study of Oscar Wilde, consisting of revised or cannibalized portions of his previously published reviews and articles on Wilde. The lingering effect of Symons’s mental breakdown is obvious in this study, which suffers at times from incoherence and irrelevance, though occasionally revealing flashes of brilliance” (366). “When Wilde was editing Woman’s World, he published Symons’s poem ‘Charity’ in September 1888. He also asked him to contribute a critical article after having read his review of Walter Pater’s Imaginary Portraits (1887)” (365). “In his only surviving letter to Symons, Wilde wrote in October 1890: ‘It was a great pleasure meeting you, as I had admired your work for a long time’” (365). “Though Wilde had admired Symons’s early work, he became increasingly scornful of his voluminous journalistic writings” (366).


AS’ s unsigned review of Intentions [Speaker 4 (July 1891)] treats Wilde with a sympathy that was rare at the time. Later AS wrote the most enthusiastic review of the Ballad of Reading Gaol [Saturday Review (London) 85 (12 March 1898)] to appear. [Includes reprints of reviews mentioned above as well as one other, “The Works of Oscar Wilde,” from the Athenaeum 4203 (16 May 1908): 598–600.] (Stern)


“Although, for most critics, Joyce’s A Portrait is indebted for its view of the artist as a rebellious young man to Butler’s The Way of All Flesh (1903) and other such Künstlerromane, an equal (perhaps more significant) indebtedness may exist to Arthur Symons’ thinly disguised self-portrait, ‘A Prelude to Life’” (222). AS’s The Symbolist Movement in Literature was “widely read” in Ireland at the same time “Joyce was talking about Baudelaire, Verlaine, and other Symbolist poets” (222). In addition, AS helped Joyce publish his early work and “Joyce continued to ask Symons for advice or help with his work” through the years (222). Lastly, Spiritual Adventures (the collection containing “A Prelude to Life”) received, “considerable attention” at the same time Joyce was working on Stephen Hero. A Portrait shows similarities to “A Prelude to Life,” specifically in the development of the “religion of art.” Both main characters experience the epiphany “when correspondences … occur between […] inner and outer worlds” (223), both suffer the “dread of hell” (224), both throw off their traditional religion and family associations taking “flight into the world of art” (224), both experience the “‘torment’ of sex” in a similar fashion (225), and both become involved with what AS labeled “the ‘spiritualising of the word’” through art (227). In the end,
both the protagonists in _A Portrait_ and “A Prelude to Life” are priest-like figures, not of religion, but of a new “religion of art.”


Ian Fletcher (“Symons and Beardsley” 18 August 1966) erroneously dates AS’s piece on Beardsley to 1898 when in fact he is referring to a revised version of the essay which did not appear until 1905. AS’s “failure in memory seems nothing more than normal human error.” [Also see Martin Secker, “Symons and Beardsley,” _TLS_ (London) 25 August 1966: 770.] (Stern)


The relationship between Yeats and AS has often been portrayed, particularly by Richard Ellmann, in terms of Yeats persuading and leading AS away from Decadence and into Symbolism. However, there is “no apparent evidence” for this view (125). Rather, AS appears to have been ambivalent and suspicious of the Symbolist movement as evidenced by the fact that “Symons’ verse rarely had such Decadent qualities prior to his mental breakdown in 1908” (127). In the Rhymers’ Club, AS never joined enthusiastically with Yeats’s perspectives and activities as Ellmann implies in his introduction to _The Symbolist Movement in Literature_. Rather, AS veers away from the obscurity of Symbolist poetry towards what he often reiterates as “a clear, lucid, ultimately ‘simple’ style” (131). In discussing Yeats’s verse, AS praised the simple and human elements rather than mystical and idealistic components. In fact, it was soon after “Symons’ review of _The Shadowy Waters_ had appeared, that Yeats was urging Fiona Macleod ‘to seek the delights of style in utter simplicity, in a self-effacing rhythm and language’” (132).


“What is proposed here, therefore, is an inside view of the Rhymers’ Club and particularly Yeats’s function as catalyst of various causes rather than the usual rehearsal of received opinion and error which has marked virtually all discussions of the group. Simplistic formulations of the club, to some extent based on Yeats’s unhistorical accounts, have resulted in casual dismissals of the Rhymers as decadent poets whose only significance lay in their capacity to fascinate a greater mind” (22). AS was one of the “Celts” who belonged to the Rhymers’ Club (23). “To Yeats, clearly, the Celts, not the French, could provide fresh vision” (28). “Thus, the Rhymers passed into history to be transformed by Yeats into the most celebrated tragic cénacle of the century. Though he learned little from them in the way of poetic technique or doctrine (aside from Symons’s insights into symbolism, which but confirmed and deepened his own understanding achieved through his study of Blake and the Theosophists), he remained deeply impressed by their devotion to craft” (41).


AS “published his first article in 1882, when he was seventeen, his last article in 1942, when he was seventy-seven (a total of some 1300 articles, reviews, and notes); in addition, he published some sixty books and pamphlets and edited or
contributed to more than seventy-five books in his lifetime; since his death, previously unpublished essays, stories, translations, as well as previously published material have appeared in many books and periodicals” (ix). A bibliography of AS’s work is especially challenging because he “customarily cannibalized his own writings.” This “practice is particularly evident after the period of his mental collapse (1908–1910)” (x). The bibliography does not describe the “collation (or size and signatures), typography, paper, binding, and dust jacket” of the items. “Since this volume is dedicated to Symons’s published works, we have omitted lists of the literary manuscripts and letters held by many libraries and private collectors” (xi). [First full-length bibliography of AS’s works. Notes on his writings as well as “information relating to the publishing history” of those works are included. Sections include “Books and Pamphlets, Edited Books and Contributions to Books, Contributions to Periodicals and Newspapers, and Translations.” Indexed.]


“As personal documents, Symons’s letters are of particular interest, for in them we may trace the growth of his personality, understand something of the nature of the disaster that struck him in 1908, and follow the painful decline of his powers in the long years following. The record is not as detailed as one would wish. The period when Symons and Yeats were most intimate is not exhaustively detailed in their correspondence; indeed, relatively few letters seem to have been written to Yeats by Symons” (xi). Only a few letters between AS and Havelock Ellis have been found and are not included in this volume. Letters to Lydia, to Aubrey Beardsley (for 1896 when AS edited the *Savoy*) and from Beardsley to AS “have vanished”; also AS’s “letters to his immediate family are not extant” (xii). Letters were selected based on “the importance of the person to whom the letter was addressed; the importance of the persons mentioned in the letter; the letter’s significance as a literary document, in so far as it illuminates the work of a particular writer or the nature of literature; the letter’s importance as a record of the contemporary social or cultural milieu; and, finally, its biographical significance” with “the intrinsic interest of the letter for the general reader” (xi–xv) also as a guideline. [The volume includes 154 letters plus Introduction, Biographical Chronology, Select Bibliography of Symons’s Works, and Appendices: “Index of Recipients and Writers of Letters (other than Symons)”; “Index of Sources”; “Havelock Ellis: An Unpublished Letter on Symons.” Letters are in five groups: “The Shaping of Talent: 1880–9,” “Achievement and Dissipation: 1890–6,” “Triumph and Disaster: 1897–1908,” “Years of Decline: 1909–35,” and “Epilogue.” Each group has useful introductory commentary by the editors. Indexed.]


[Reviews the AS–Joyce relationship, concentrating on AS’s efforts to find a publisher for *Chamber Music.*] (Stern) Of all the authors indebted to AS, Joyce “owes more to him than any other contemporary” (91). Only after reviewing or reading their correspondence, will we gain a true appreciation for AS’s contribution to Joyce’s success as an author. Although he first visited AS in 1902, Joyce didn’t actually seek AS’s assistance until 1903. From Joyce’s collection of poems
(then entitled *A Book of Thirty Songs for Lovers*; later, when published, *Chamber Music*), AS placed one in the *Saturday Review* and two in the *Venture*. AS repeatedly pressed Grant Richards to publish the entire collection, “but Richards, in financial difficulty, refused to commit himself” (94). In 1905 AS approached an undisclosed publisher, most likely Constable, with the intent to publish Joyce’s collection of poems as well as his short story collection *Dubliners*. Constable declined to publish either of the manuscripts; however, in the meantime Richards “agreed to consider *Dubliners*” (95). AS finally convinced Elkin Mathews to publish *Chamber Music* for which AS also wrote a glowing review in the *Nation*. Later in November of 1915, Joyce again enlisted the help of AS to publish his novel *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*. By this time, however, AS was effectively cut off from the publishing world and unable to help. In 1917 AS signed a petition censuring Samuel Roth’s pirating of *Ulysses*. Finally, *The Joyce Book* included Symons’s rambling essay on Joyce as ‘Epilogue’” (99). Certainly, AS’s persistent efforts to publish Joyce’s early work “helped launch a remarkable career” (100).


“Arthur Symons, who occupies a central place in the development of the modern aesthetic, derived his idea of the symbolic moment from his understanding of Pater, the French Symbolists, and Browning. Symons’s admiration of Pater and the French Symbolists is, of course, well known, but less widely known is his devotion to Browning’s verse, which, indeed, he imitated early in his career and about which he wrote a full-length study in 1886. In this work, Symons established connections between Browning’s technique of revealing the ‘soul to itself’ in a single moment and Pater’s belief that significant moments embody ‘the greatest number of vital forces’ in their ‘purest energy.’ Both Browning and Pater prepared Symons for his understanding of what the French Symbolists intended. In formulating his aesthetic, Symons thus anticipated such later concepts as Joyce’s ‘epiphany,’ Pound’s ‘image,’ and Virginia Woolf’s ‘moment of being’” (687). [Abstract from the beginning of the article. Informative article; surprising that it takes no notice of W. S. Peterson’s “Arthur Symons as a Browningite,” *Review of English Studies* 19 (May 1968): 148–57.] (Stern)


“Despite the fact that Volume I represented, as Stanley Weintraub has called the *Yellow Book*, the ‘Quintessence of the Nineties,’ reviewers attacked it by singling out the art and literature that particularly provoked them. Thus Arthur Symons’s poem, ‘Stella Maris,’ distressed many reviewers by its title and daring content, as did Aubrey Beardsley’s illustrations, particularly his ‘L’ Education Sentimentale,’ depicting an aged prostitute teaching a young girl the tricks of the trade” (403). [From Letter 3 from Harland to Lane.]

AS was a “specimen of thermal conductivity in letters, through which the ideas of French artists passed into English perception with little change.” (Stern)


AS is an “occasional critic” of theatre, but his estimates of mime are meticulous and knowledgeable. *Plays, Acting and Music* applies the “Pateresque manner and method of criticism” to current dramatic art. AS cannot write about actual things; like Pater, he ruminates and it is art, not life, that interests him. [Review of *Plays, Acting and Music*. Reprinted in *Around Theatres* (London: Heinemann, 1924), I, 479–85.] (Stern)


AS corrected Beerbohm, saying it was Lady Barclay, not he, who translated *La Revolte*. [Review of AS’s play *The Fool of the World* and Villiers de l’Isle-Adam’s play *La Revolte*. In *Saturday Review* (London) 101 (21 April 1906): 492.] (Stern)


[AS secured the “Laureateship” of the music halls.] (Stern)


“Presently I heard him [AS] saying he thought the nomadic life was the best of all lives for an artist. Yeats, in a pause of his own music, heard this too, and seemed a little pained by it. Shaking back the lock from his brow, he turned to Symons and declared that an artist worked best among his own folk and in the land of his fathers. Symons seemed rather daunted, but he stuck to his point. He argued that new sights and sounds and odours braced the whole intelligence of a man and quickened his powers of creation. Yeats, gently but firmly, would have none of this. His own arguments may not have been better than Symons’s; but, in voice and manner and countenance, Symons was no match for him at all” (109).


[Includes a caricature of AS.] (Stern)


In 1902, Yeats introduced the young James Joyce to AS, the key figure in the French Symbolist movement in England. AS later helped Joyce publish *Chamber Music* (15).


[Passing mention that Rodin “discovered, as Arthur Symons said, la femme idole in la femme animale.”]


[Passing mention of Yeats’s housekeeper, Mrs. Sarah Martha Old, who “had been ‘inherited’ from Arthur Symons.”]

“Mabel Beardsley took credit for naming it ‘The Savoy,’ but Symons said it was Aubrey’s suggestion, made when he first consulted with Beardsley” (133). “Although Beardsley at least once referred to Symons as ‘Simple Symons’ and later came to resent his behavior in the matter of a Beardsley contribution, they began by working well together, accepting each other’s suggestions and one providing material for the other to illustrate” (138). AS “was a better editor than Henry Harland, and Beardsley’s drawings were among his finest” (148). Beardsley thought AS had made an “arbitrary” decision about a submission he made to the Savoy and “His verses very likely could not have appeared without his illustrations in a periodical such as *The Savoy*. “ “Beardsley thereafter distrusted” AS. “It was an ungenerous attitude, rare in Beardsley, but it was bred in part by his illness and the long, slow days” (158). Beardsley “disparaged the editorial policies of both” AS and Henry Harland (190).


“In the absence of any official biography of Walter Pater, it has been necessary to collect information as to the events of his life from his relatives and friends” (v). “He told Mr. Arthur Symons at the end of his life that he intended to bring out a new volume of *Imaginary Portraits*. ‘Apollo in Picardy,’ the work of 1893, was to have been included, as well as ‘Emerald Uthwart’ (1892), of which we have spoken. He added that he meant to write one on the picture by Moroni known as *The Tailor*, which he thought a very fine and dignified figure” (123).


[Reprints AS’s “A New Art of the Stage,” “The Ideas of Richard Wagner,” and “A Theory of the Stage.” Critical apparatus is negligible, but the reprints of the articles make them more accessible. All appear in AS’s published works.] (Stern)


AS “was the finest critic of his day” (24). As “an entrepreneur of foreign literary influences … [AS] was of crucial importance” (26). AS “was an intensely visual poet, who often anticipates the effects demanded by the Imagists of c. 1912” (29). “Johnson was, if anything, a more accomplished verbal artist than Dowson or Symons, but compared with theirs, his poetry is somewhat stiff and lacking in human interest” (32). In *London Nights* AS’s “treatment ranges between the romantic and the intensely realistic; he is usually most effective when he is most purely descriptive” (34). He “was writing Imagist poems in the early nineties. The proto-modernist Hulme recalled Symons in his own Imagist poems, and another propagandist for the Modern Movement, Ford Madox Ford, spoke of Symons with respect” (151–52).