Arthur Symons, Critic Among Critic

Symons, Arthur

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[AS’s “Maeterlink as a Mystic” is mentioned as a piece of fantasy criticism published in Contemporary Review in 1897 (84).]

Within the English aesthetic movement, the use of hashish “was part of the self-conscious aping of French literary and artistic fashion. Arthur Symons was in many ways the mediating influence” (55). “Arthur Symons was, in fact, familiar with other forms of recreational drug use” [or example, “The Opium Smoker”] (55). “One other drug—mescal—was part of experimentation at this time. Again, Symons’ rooms in Fountain Court in the Temple were the scene” (56).

[Refers to Verlaine’s lecture tour in London (1893) which was sponsored by AS and Rothenstein; reports on AS’s and Horne’s travels on the Continent.] (Stern)

[Favorable review of Plays, Acting, and Music, revised ed.] AS is interesting. AS confuses the man with his achievement and lacks distance in his treatment of his contemporaries, but he brings a personal touch to his criticism. (Stern)

The editors have done well to include in their anthology the most important representatives of the time period, and the book is ideal for personal as well as scholarly study. Lacking, however, are selections from Hofmannsthal, Richard Le Gallienne, or Flaubert. AS’s comments on Villiers de l’Isle-Adam and Gerard de Nerval in The Symbolist Movement in Literature are included in the anthology. [In German.]

AS “was simply minor, a point which, but for his biographer’s strenuous endeavours to promote him to major status, it would be invidious to stress.” “Lhommeaud makes lofty claims” for AS’s “literary reputation” but “they do not now, even upon his showing, amount to much.” “Those pages of the book which deal with Symons’s relations with his greater contemporaries—Verlaine, Yeats and Swinburne—are of much interest, and it is a pity that Professor Lhommeaud should all too soon be shepherding us back to our sternner task of critical evaluation. Pitiful, likewise, is the proof-reading.” [Originally appeared in TLS as an unsigned review; TLS Online now adds the contributor’s name.]

“The Journal of the Gypsy Lore Society initially foundered in 1892 but was revived in 1907. A related journal, The Romanitshels, Didakais, and Folk-Lore Gazette, aimed for a wider circulation but does not seem to have succeeded, despite the support of such eminent literary figures as Arthur Symons, Theodore Watts-Dunton, and H. G. Wells” (145). [Passing reference to AS.]


AS “and I were Beardsley’s attentive audience in Dieppe in 1895.” [Reminiscences about the Savoy circle and their trips to Dieppe.] [In French.] (Stern)


“George Moore dedicated the first edition of Evelyn Innes ‘to Arthur Symons and W. B. Yeats, Two Contemporary Writers with whom I am in sympathy.’ Moore followed Yeats back to their native land, and Symons too was to discover that he was a Celt and to visit Ireland in 1896 and in the early years of the new century, to the delight of the young intellectuals whose darling he was. Symons was perhaps the most influential critic of his day, and played a part equal to Moore’s own in mediating French influence in the English-speaking world. And, as in Moore’s case, his musical Wagnerism developed from literature” (199).


Beckson’s biography accomplishes “a great deal more than in any previous full-length biography” (97) and efficiently organizes details of AS’s life and travels. However, Beckson “lacks the narrative gift” (97) in handling these details. In addition, his knowledge of AS’s post-breakdown period colors his analysis of AS during his years as a critic. Other weaknesses include a survey of AS’s works and an explanation of the 1910–1945 period that do not add significantly new information to previous studies. “A more comprehensive view of the transition from Victorian to Modernist critical practice” would strengthen future studies of AS’s life (100).


Four poems, “Alla Dogana” by AS, “The Cloak, the Boat, and the Shoes” and “The Fish” by Yeats, and “Above the Dock” by T. E. Hulme, are examples that “as early as 1896 and 1898 poets were building the foundation for the modern reader’s role, as imaginative co-creator” (154). These poets moved away from the “lyric-I” voice of the Victorian era towards the first voice T. S. Eliot described in “The Three Voices of Poetry” as “the voice of the poet talking to himself—or to nobody” (156). In the four poems, distance is created by developing the first voice in terms of “greater perceptual and ‘speech situation,’” allowing “an increase in the part the reader has to play” (155). AS, in “Alla Dogana,” uses general statements to create a “perceptual” relationship that breaks with the “lyric-
I” voice and demands participation and reevaluation by the reader. AS excelled in the form of landscape poems, as exemplified by “Alla Dogana.” The landscape model would later be developed by poets such as Rilke, Pound, Auden, Williams, and Roethke throughout the course of modern poetry.


Two poems, “Venedig” by Friedrich Nietzsche and “Alla Dogana” by AS, as well as J. M. Whistler’s The Lagoon: Nocturne in Blue and Silver reflect “modernist and postmodernist preoccupations” in their “play with images of sound and light, shadow and reflection, foreground and background” (227). AS’s poem as well as the other two pieces are “character pieces that blend the feeling of the artist with the depiction or creation of form and mood” (241). They have many similarities with Romantic conceptions of boundaries, music, communication, etc., blending these in ways that anticipate modernistic developments. Ultimately, this “impressionistic experiment,” like Whistler’s painting, “manifests the effect that Symons is evoking, and proves in a vivid way that Symons’s poem is conveying a subtle and sophisticated visual impression that has clear analogues in the art of the period” (243).


“A neo-Gothic trend exists in late nineteenth-century British literature” (192), characterized by such long and short fiction as Wells’s The Island of Dr. Moreau and Pater’s “Apollo in Picardy,” the paradigm being a “representative hero discovers ‘dark truth’ which threatens his or her society’s values” (192)—AS’s 1905 story, “Extracts from the Journal of Henry Luxulyan,” “provides a typical example” (192).


“For a brief period the psychomythic tale flourished. In their contributions to the genre, Paget, Pater, Yeats, and Symons reveal a unique blending of the psychological, the mythic and the occult” (xvi). “Some, like Symons, used this idiom as almost the only fictional language for speaking about the self” (6). AS’s story “‘Rosa Alchemica’ is a psychomythic tale, modified by the tradition of the artist’s parable begun in Rossetti’s ‘Hand and Soul’ and carried on by some of Pater’s and Symons’s imaginary portraits” (132). Critics usually see AS’s stories in Spiritual Adventures as autobiography. “Few critics, however, have paid much attention to the genre or the larger artistic purpose of individual stories” (163). “‘Extracts from the Journal of Henry Luxulyan,’ besides dramatizing aspects of Symons’s life, effectively criticizes the social structure and the hypocrisy of the fin de siècle” (163). “‘Extracts,’ in particular, combines personal revelation and social diagnosis in a complex and characteristically psychomythic fashion. The story is also transitional between Victorian and modern Gothic because of its concern with the causes, stages and significance of madness. While Symons’s treatment recalls the conventions in earlier stories of this study, it also recalls the meta-
phoric use of insanity made by Henry James and further anticipates the techniques of psychological writers in this century” (163–64). [Pp. 163–190, “The Demonic Family: Arthur Symons’s ‘Extracts From the Journal of Henry Luxulyan,’ 1905” is a detailed examination of AS’s story as psychomythic fiction.]


AS’s stylistic use of persona, along with that of W. B. Yeats, Walter Pater, and Hugo von Hofmannsthal, links Victorian to early twentieth-century literature. AS bridges “the Victorian essayists and the fiction and poetry writers of the early twentieth century” by slightly altering Walter Pater’s essayistic methods while maintaining many of the same philosophical themes (173). AS employs poetic perspective; that is to say, he writes his poetry from a variety of different viewpoints including: “the reporter, the reminiscent or admiring friend, the impressionistic critic and the moralist” oftentimes shifting perspectives in the same piece (182). This shifting perspective, especially when carried out “in a peculiarly impressionistic and associative manner,” distinguishes AS from Victorian essayists (183). Both AS’s “Extracts from the Journal of Henry Luxulyan” and W. B. Yeats’s “Rosa Alchemica” demonstrate that AS and Yeats successfully expanded Pater’s ideal “aesthetic persona” (267). AS’s “Extracts” and Yeats’s “Rosa Alchemica” share many of the same themes, such as demonic possession, the fear of and fascination with personal catastrophe, and alchemical formulations which hint at destruction or renovation of the established order (365). Because of his success with “one reduced form of the lyric-I,” AS achieves the status of minor poet as defined by W. H. Auden (394). [Source: DAI 36 (1975): 300A.]


Pater is responsible for adapting and developing in English the portrait essay of the nineteenth century into “a tentative, personal, synoptic view of the artistic personality, conveyed dialogically through a mixture of imaginative and discursive features” (767). AS and Yeats adopted the form Pater developed. Like Pater, AS used the structural “dialectic of attitudes, presented by several authorial perspectives” (769), in his essay on Verlaine as well as “direct representation,” and “the expressive manipulation of the critical survey” (769). Although AS varied in some degree from Pater’s model (i.e. his more personal voice), “[w]e have for so long formed our cultural sense of the Symbolists on Symons’s work that we find it difficult to determine the extent to which The Symbolist Movement in Literature is as schematic, perspective-dependent, and imaginative in its construction as the Paterian portrait” (771).


AS originally intended to write The Decadent Movement in Literature and then dropped the project and wrote The Symbolist Movement in Literature instead. There are several theories as to why AS changed his plan in a short period of time—the decline of the Decadent movement in England after the fall of Oscar Wilde, Yeats’s influence in persuading Symons of the centrality of Symbolism
over Decadence, and AS’s critical attention to Mallarmé’s criticism. While all of these factors contributed in part, there is an additional factor: “the context of French literary criticism of the 1880s and 90s, in which ‘symbolism’ came to displace the notion of ‘decadence’ as the dominant literary force” (12). By 1886 Symbolist labels were being used but the notion of a Symbolist movement did not begin to congeal until the 1890s when the terms “les symbolistes” and “le symbolisme” became widely used. AS was intimately familiar not only with French writers but with contemporary French critics, particularly Remy de Gourmont who had probably the largest influence of any one critic in AS’s change of direction. “Yeats also had some awareness of developments in French literature of the later nineteenth century, but he had almost none of the intimate familiarity with major authors that Symons displays in The Symbolist Movement in Literature” (14). Although there is no evidence that Yeats ever actually saw the drafts, “Yeats’s contribution to the book is to be found mainly in the ‘Introduction’ and the ‘Conclusion,’ in Symons’s attempt to connect symbolism and mysticism and to redefine literature as a religious act” (14). Clearly, “If Symons drew upon Yeats, he also contributed to Yeats’s critical development … [and] the interaction in its time and place was mutually productive” (16).


A study of Yeats’s relation to the English poetic tradition, particularly to the Romantics, Blake and Shelley. AS, Johnson, and Dowson, each lacking a mature style and vision, stood as examples to Yeats, but their principal effect upon him was in the style of their lives rather than in their work. The elaborately constructed poems in The Wind Among the Reeds show very “indirect influence of Mallarmé through the mediumship of” AS. [References to AS are slight, simply describing him as a friend to Yeats and a disciple of Pater. Bloom uncritically accepts Yeats’s characterization of AS set forth in Autobiographies.] (Stern)


AS’s Days and Nights reflects the “dramatic and mature character of his verse” (405). Love’s Cruelty reflects the same strengths: “even his rhetoric is distinguished; but the prevailing themes are not those which command a wide sympathy…. He is far and away to-day’s master of the sensuous and exotic region” (405). Both Walter Pater and the Athenaeum have seen promise in AS.


[Brief references to the relationship of James McNeill Whistler’s paintings and the poetry of Oscar Wilde, W. E. Henley, and AS (383); and to AS’s role in fostering ideas from the French symbolists when he was editor of the Savoy. (In German.)]

“Assessments of the quality of … [Symonds’s] work have continued to come from within a line of responses that, at its inception, was closely connected to a phobic response to Symonds’s sexuality. Arthur Symons’s review of Horatio Brown’s biography can stand as a founding text in this response. But Arthur Symons’s central claim there—of a ‘certain disarray of faculties’ as both a man and a writer—had been aired in Symonds’s own lifetime” (155). “In his review, Arthur Symons, an important figure in establishing the critical grounds for modernism (and a great admirer of Pater), cleverly seeks to nail Symonds as man and author using the literary tenets of this nascent modernism” (156).


Traditionally, in an effort to locate the source of Eliot’s “bit of romantic nature description and an image of human sickness and suffering,” critics have pointed to the French Symbolist movement (9). Specifically, they have identified AS’s The Symbolist Movement in Literature as the origin of the “patient etherised upon a table.” The poetry of Laforgue and Baudelaire confirms this theory. Between the years 1873 and 1875, William Ernest Henley was confined to an infirmary in Edinburgh. During his stay he composed a collection of 28 separate poems entitled “In Hospital.” Evidence suggests that Henley’s “In Hospital,” especially section V: “Operation,” must have provided Eliot with a basis for writing “Prufrock.” In his book Studies in Two Literatures, AS identifies Henley as one of the initial English writers to shift to modernist techniques. Not only that, but AS carries out an in-depth study of “In Hospital,” at one point, even citing the entire “Operation” section. Furthermore, in his article “The Decadent Movement in Literature,” AS labels Henley as the English equivalent of Paul Verlaine and then goes on to name “In Hospital” as the epitome of Impressionist poetry. Because Eliot was familiar with AS’s works and because of his interest in “modern poetic developments,” it seems very likely that he learned of Henley by way of Symons (12). That we find similarities between Eliot and Henley suggests that “In Hospital” “must have contained a special appeal to T. S. Eliot” (13).


“Moore, indeed, posed in England as an expert on French literature, and in Impressions and Opinions he set out to instruct the British public on the latest movements from Paris. He was not well fitted for the task. Not only was he incurably inaccurate, as in his account of Rimbaud, but he did not really understand what an original genius like Mallarmé was trying to do. He was always much too interested in his own work to read the books of others with the attention that they deserved, and the most perfunctory glance would often prompt him to make reckless and unjustifiable statements about them. He did almost nothing to introduce French authors to England, and even in such a Francophile period as the ’nineties it was Arthur Symons, and not Moore, who first made the new names known” (373).

from his translations from Mallarmé, I seized upon everything that at all resembled my own thought; here at last was something I could talk about. My symbolism came from actual experiments in vision, made by my friends or myself, in the society which called itself ‘The Hermetic Students,’ and continually talked over by myself and my friends” (240). Bowra then stated: “I took Yeats’ advice about the nineties and about the spiritualism of his relations, but I regret that I did not make more of his difference from the French Symbolistes. I was not quite convinced about it, but felt that, though he went very much his own way, it was partly determined by Symons’ translations and that it was very much in accord with the spirit of the time in more than one European country” (241).


“If there was a ‘natural’ transition from ‘decadence’ to ‘symbolism’ (and Arthur Symons famously changed the title of his book, The Symbolist Movement in Literature [1899], which became a biblical source for Modernism, to reflect it), then that could be traced back through Baudelaire to Poe” (xiii). [From the Introduction. Other page references to AS in this edition are: 39, 40, 48, 55, 56, 59, 65–67, 73, 84, 97, 102, 110, 113–14, 116, 127, 135–37, 157, 161, 172, 192, 195–96.]


The decade of the 1890s which began “with George Moore’s Impressions and Opinions and ended with AS’s The Symbolist Movement in Literature … is unmistakably cosmopolitan” (175). It was during the transition period’s “vast commercial expansion of literature and literacy, that the cult of the serious artist grew, and the search for purified language and form intensified. Over successive decades the entire motion of English literary culture began to be redirected. The hospitality of English writers to foreign tendencies is partly the consequence of this directional change, part of a larger breakdown of inherited beliefs and aesthetic and moral conventions. While writers who came in from elsewhere had an important catalytic effect, their presence coincided with the emergence of two, perhaps three, of the most remarkable English literary generations to emerge since the Romantic and early Victorian periods, stirred into mental ferment by the need for a great revaluation. Thomas Hardy, Samuel Butler, George Gissing, Ernest Dowson, Arthur Symons, D. H. Lawrence, E. M. Forster, Ford Madox Hueffer, Arnold Bennett, H. G. Wells, T. E. Hulme, Lytton Strachey, Virginia Woolf, Dorothy Richardson, the names are an exceptional roster by any stan-
standards. And what, despite their extraordinary differences of temper and intention, unites them is a prevailing sense of dislocation from the past, and a commitment to the active remaking of art” (178). AS “led T. S. Eliot to Laforgue, Rimbaud, Verlaine. Pound also invokes this group in *Mauberley* and suggests its relation to later events” (184).


“This at least is the basis, if not the full realization, of the growing view that it is art that *creates* the world.... This could lead to the idea of art as the only ‘orderly product’ that man could possess; in short, to symbolism, the theory that the world is made by the crucial word or image.... Both tendencies looked, of course, to France; and one essential feature of the period is its new internationalism. George Moore, Wilde and Arthur Symons all brought back and adapted the modes of symbolism to England for the support and extension of what they had begun to do; even as the realist writers had (80) themselves been looking to French authors, and notably to Zola, as a source for their own ways of writing. And hence a number of other developments of the French scene—the emphasis on self-conscious art and the associated patterns of bohemianism, cosmopolitanism and consciously urbanized literature began, in a selective way, to be important in the English tradition too. The decadent symbolist phase was fairly short-lived, and its end-of-time, end-of-a-movement feeling did not last. But other aspects of the general tendency did last” (81).


Psychoses and symbolic literature each deal “with the cultivation of private fantasies in the face of contemporary reality.” A psychological study of AS’s personality reveals that it epitomizes the psychology of abnormal literature. AS spent his childhood trying to escape the Methodism of his parents. He learned to place literature as a barrier between himself and people. In his late adolescence he went to London where he lived for five years in the most “wanton and wicked quarters of cities with their depraved and perverted inhabitants.” Throughout his writings he expressed his fascination with madness; at the age of 41 he learned for the first time what true madness was like. He was committed to an asylum which he later described bitterly, likening his experiences to those of Charles Reade, Nerval, and characters in the asylum in *Nightmare Abbey*. It was through morbid stimulation that AS, a schizoid, “obtained his satisfaction as an antidote for the harshness of life.” In this fashion a psychopathic literature complements a psychopathic personality. [Article relies very heavily upon AS’s own accounts of his sickness and does not attempt to acquire outside evaluations of his illness, nor does it recognize that AS’s father was a Wesleyan minister.] (Stern)


AS’s poem “Stella Maris,” published in the first volume, exemplifies the male-oriented perception of gender prevalent in the *Yellow Book*, a perception which embodies the journal as much as aestheticism (39). The fact that AS shifted his
original definition of Decadence in “The Decadent Movement in Literature” to form a subcategory of Symbolism in his later work The Symbolist Movement in Literature attests to the varying nature of the meaning of Decadence (47). The defining tone of AS’s “The Decadent Movement in Literature” and its relative proximity to the advent of the Yellow Book suggest that the journal “was a self-conscious player in the performance of Decadence” (47). In January of 1896 Aubrey Beardsley and AS began publishing the Savoy, a less expensive, higher quality, and more entertaining rival of the Yellow Book (48). The naturalist basis for AS’s “Stella Maris” and other fiction in the Yellow Book reinforces the motif of promiscuity between aristocratic men and lower-class women (53). In spite of an attempt to appear reputable, the Yellow Book used sensational tactics such as lumping in one volume AS’s “Stella Maris,” Beardsley’s illustrations, and a number of additional provocative articles (59).


Walter Pater significantly influenced the writers of the 1890s and the “production of 90s Decadence” (279) even though he died in 1894. One way to examine Pater’s presence is through the treatment he received at the hands of his “pro-tégé,” AS. AS frequently included Pater in his works, notably in his 1893 article in Harper’s on Decadence as well as in the projected contents for a book on Decadence. However, after Oscar Wilde’s trials, Pater’s name disappeared from this contents list for “The Decadent Movement in Literature.” Instead AS attempted to “heroise Pater and sanitise his reputation,” by separating him from the discussion of Decadence and praising him in the last issue of the Savoy: “Situated as the article is in the last issue of The Savoy, the high profile accorded Pater’s work, the heightened praise, the link with French literature and the exclusive appeal to aesthetic criteria, indelibly associate Pater with the radical project of The Savoy … on the twin peaks of autonomy/supremacy of art and the masculine assertion of sexuality, from aggressive heterosexuality to the homosocial” (287).


In his article, Joseph Bristow examines the shift “between aesthetic and erotic topoi in Arthur Symons’s poetry of male heterosexuality” (iix).


“The early Yellow Book, despite its deployment of Ella d’Arcy in an editorial capacity and its regular contributions by women, is so suffused with male discourses of gender, in work by women and men, that these male discourses characterize the early volumes of the journal as much as its ‘aestheticism.’ Two pieces in Volume I, the homage to the prostitute in Arthur Symons’ poem ‘Stella Maris’ and Ella d’Arcy’s vituperative portrait of an ‘irremediable’ marriage between a vacuous working-class bride and her despairing middle-class husband, suggest the parameters of such discourses” (146). “In this cultural economy, as throughout, Symons, Beardsley and Smithers, editors and publisher, are in dif-
ferent positions that remain discrete, however they overlap. Symons and Beard-
sley define the *Savoy* as an artistic project, and Smithers, as a commercial one”
(175). “Two years after Pater’s death, in the wake of the Wilde trials, the contents
list of the projected *Decadent Movement in Literature*, as listed in the *Savoy* advert,
already excludes Pater and any indication of allusions to English literature, con-
fining itself to five Continental authors, four of them French” (271). “When in
1912 the parent article ‘The Decadent Movement in Literature’ was reprinted, it
too excluded Pater. Symons’ decoupling of Pater and Decadence was complete”
(272). “Symons’ defiant construction of Pater as a ‘pure man’ in the face of the
Wilde trials may be seen as comparable to Hardy’s pre-trial portrait of Tess as a
‘pure woman’” (273).

149. Brake, Laurel. *Subjugated Knowledges: Journalism, Gender and Literature in the

AS’s “The Decadent Movement in Literature” was announced in a trailer for
*Harper’s New Monthly Magazine* in 1893, with Pater’s “Apollo in Picardy” given
as the example of “the highest order of this class of literature, not ‘decadent,’
however, in any proper sense, but rather poetically interpretive” (115). AS’s essay
“is an annotated catalogue of the main writers in the French and English dec-
adent tradition” but “it is likely that without knowledge of the work (and per-
haps lives) in question, readers would not be offended by the presence of a text
probably negotiated between Symons and the editor of *HNMM*” (118). “How-
ever, there is an unmistakable effort to domesticate and gentrify this material
by way of illustrations; this can be seen in the Symons article which includes
drawings of the Decadents in reassuring and familiar surroundings” (118–19).

“Moreover, the appearance of these pieces by Symons and Pater in the pages of
an established family magazine such as *HNMM* indicates the elasticity of this
cultural formation, and the parameters if not the absence of American censor-
ship” (122). In 1896, the *Savoy* was started to “surpass and displace” the *Yellow
Book*, but “the *Savoy* team of Arthur Symons and Aubrey Beardsley, literary and
art director respectively, had provoked vociferous criticism precisely two years
before when Symons’ poem ‘Stella Maris’ … and Beardsley’s accompanying
drawing, ‘A Night Piece’ had appeared in the first number of *The Yellow Book* in
April 1894” (148). “Most nineteenth-century women readers would have found
the contents of” the *Savoy* to be “offensive, and at the very least unrespectable”
(150). “Symons, Beardsley, and Smithers were, by any contemporary perception,
an unholy if talented trinity” (151). “For Symons and Beardsley, as for other con-
tributors to *The Savoy*, characteristically, detailed attention to clothes takes over
and substitutes for discourse of the body…” (153). [Also published Houndmills,
Basingstoke, Hampshire : Macmillan, 1994.]

150. Brake, Laurel, and Oliver Knowles. “The Nineteenth Century: Victorian Peri-

In Karl Beckson’s *Memoirs of Arthur Symons: Life and Art in the 1890s*, “Diverse
writings by Arthur Symons, largely on his contemporaries, have been painstak-
ingly and usefully collected from recondite sources, about half unpublished”
(333). AS’s “reminiscences are always evocative and affectionate, without blun-
ting their critical edge by nostalgia. This collection provides a detailed portrait of
the artistic life at the turn of the century, and should become, like Holbrook Jackson’s *The Eighteen Nineties*, a standard work for the study of the period” (334).


In examining the influence Nietzsche had on British literature, it is “with Walter Pater and his disciple Arthur Symons that our study must begin” (21). Even though Pater never mentioned Nietzsche, there are many parallels between the two, particularly in the Apollo and Dionysus concepts about the opposition of art. These ideas appear in Pater before Nietzsche’s works and so represent a similarity in their ideas, not an influence (22). In a similar fashion, AS identified with but was not necessarily heavily influenced by Nietzsche’s works. Regardless, AS stands as the writer “who enthused over Nietzsche more than any other writer of the “nineties generation” (29). Roger Lhombreaud’s implication that AS “knew of Nietzsche by 1891” lacks evidence and seems improbable. Once AS did become acquainted with Nietzsche, probably as editor of the *Savoy* (1896), he enthusiastically identified with much of Nietzsche’s philosophy. AS’s *William Blake* most clearly exemplifies his thoughtful reading of Nietzsche’s works as “Nietzsche is used to explain and even justify Blake to the reader of 1907” (33). AS’s *William Blake* is also one of the first comparisons between the two authors. However, “it is much more likely that Nietzsche simply helped Symons to clarify and express more forcefully ideas which he already held…” (34). An example in which AS “parallels” Nietzsche, rather than being influenced by him, is the theoretical similarity of AS’s dance poetry and Nietzsche’s *The Birth of Tragedy*.


“Nonetheless, as [Holbrook] Jackson fully recognized, no account of the ‘idea of the 1890s’ would be complete unless the survivors are brought on to the stage also. Among them are Arthur Symons, the first English champion of the French symbolist poets, who was to stand out as the representative voice of the 1890s” (171). “In the previous decade, before the ‘new journalism’ had developed its exciting but disturbing potential, J.-K. Huysmans’s *A rebours (Against Nature)* depicted characters who had lost faith in themselves and their times, and Robert Louis Stevenson’s *The Suicide Club* and Emil Durkheim’s study *Le Suicide* had appeared. In such a setting Arthur Symons was doubtless right to use the phrase ‘swift, disastrous and suicidal energy of genius’ in referring to Dowson, whose poem in memory of Crackanthorpe, ‘Vesperal,’ vividly evokes the death wish” (173).


Owing to the presence of AS in the Literature Section and Beardsley in the Art Section, *Yellow Book* acquired a quite undeserved reputation of being decadent. AS contributed but two poems to the magazine, “Stella Maris” and “Credo”; both treat themes typical of AS: world-weariness, street-walkers, and a sense of despair. His poetry is little more than a pose and an affectation. (Stern)

In this collection “the contributors address a field of study that has for years been subject to extensive misrepresentation in widely circulated literary-historical accounts of the era. In my introduction, I show readers how and why poetry of the 1890s has seldom been well served by the trio of critical terms ‘aestheticism,’ ‘Decadence,’ and ‘fin-de-siècle’ that have for the most part cast such leading figures as Ernest Dowson, Arthur Symons, Lionel Johnson, and Oscar Wilde in unfavorable critical light. I reveal, too, how the traditional overconcentration on these male writers as representatives of a seemingly declining age has by and large occluded the recently acknowledged achievements of distinguished women writers” (ix). [From the “Preface.”] “Some of the most perverse products of these ostensibly deteriorating times [the 1890s] were the male poets whose manifest belief that their culture was suffering a fall became the subject of censure among reviewers…. On this view, a typical example would be Arthur Symons whose third collection, *London Nights* (1895), proved too undignified even for avant-garde publisher John Lane to add to his prestigious list” (2). “Countless poems in *London Nights* deepen the impression that every aspect of the poet’s life, especially his art, has been adulterated through contact with boisterous popular culture” (3). AS and other male writers of the time “are seldom well served by the critical terms such as ‘fin-de-siècle,’ ‘aesthetic,’ and ‘Decadent’ that have come to define their art” (4). “Even if the historians have for years rightly recognized Symons as one of the most distinctive late-century voices of a decidedly innovative city-based poetics, they have until recently been far less attentive to the comparable urban aesthetics of a writer such as his accomplished contemporary Amy Levy” (4). [This “Introduction” goes on to discuss briefly AS’s role in defining “Fin-de-Siècle,” “Aestheticism,” and “Decadence” (7).] [Index to the book lists AS on ix, xiv, 2–6, 10–11, 13, 31, 35–36, 48, 51–52, 57, 70–72, 84, 88, 132, 144, 198, 211, 215, 223–24, 232, 234–35, 238, 244–46, 251, 255, 278.


While AS originally heralded the Decadent movement, he “discovered that Decadence created more problems than it could categorically resolve” (65). As a result, AS later attempted to disassociate himself from the “depravity” of the Decadent movement arising from the accusations of Max Nordau’s *Degeneration* and Oscar Wilde’s trials. Not until after Wilde’s trials did “an identifiable queer stereotype” solidify and become associated with the Aesthete stereotype. Before Wilde’s trials, “Symons sought to legitimate a form of perversity that was sexual as well as stylistic” (67). Indeed, AS’s attraction to the dissimilar works he groups together in “The Decadent Movement in Literature” is not only cultural or stylistic, but also sensual in the writers’ attentions to the body. AS’s own preoccupation with sensual sensations “is caught in a striking double bind: for its claim to normality as an unstoppable and compulsive force rests on the assumption that it is also alienated, excessive, morbid, unhealthy” (73). Much of the criticism focused against AS, most especially against *London Nights*, arises not out of
the sexual emotions themselves but AS’s personal and vivid discussion of them. In AS’s poetry, this sexual tension usually plays itself out on the form of the female dancer who arouses and accepts the male’s passion as well as reflects his own “disembodiment.” “Symons wrote ceaselessly about the female performer as an emblem of perverse desire...” which, “[needs] to be considered for the erotic legacy that Decadence left not only to Yeats, but also to T. S. Eliot” (82). While AS found expression for male desire by reflecting it in the feminine, it was after Wilde’s trials that “categories of gender would become overlaid on the previously libertine impulses that characterized the leisure-class connoisseurship of Des Esseintes. And so the effeminate pervert and the virile pervert had to part company” (85–86).

“The new Saturday Review which burst on its old reading public sent a wave of interest through literary London.” In it AS “explained very advanced literary movements” (86). [Brief mention of AS.]

[Brief mention that AS “popularized in England and America” Mallarmé’s argument that “‘To name is to destroy, to suggest is to create’” (54–55)].

Lhombreaud’s biography is “inadequate not only as ‘critical biography’ but as straight biography” (83). Lhombreaud “is high handed in interpreting evidence,” and uses “ludicrously inept dusty clichés” (83). The biography highlights that, “As a man of letters Symons was a dud,” with, “a literary reputation achieved without talent,” and held onto by “making a personal friend of anyone who might have had the perception to give him a bad name or a bad notice” (83–84).

[Contains primary and secondary items relating to AS: A23, 88; B5, 63; C608, 705, 909, 914–15, 1037, 1044, 1130, 1508, 2534, 2803, 3433, 3486; CV347–48. Lists reviews of AS’s An Introduction to the Study of Browning.]

Four books, Arthur Symons: A Life by Karl Beckson, Arthur Symons: Critic of the Seven Arts by Lawrence W. Markert, Aubrey Beardsley by Ian Fletcher, and The Poems of John Gray edited by Ian Fletcher, recently printed on “poets of the 1890s … fascinate us because of their great talents and possibilities, unfulfilled in most cases” (202). Beckson’s bibliography “rightly draws attention to Symons’s ‘role in the development of Modernism and his influence on such writers as Yeats, Joyce, Pound, and particularly T. S. Eliot’” (202). Indeed, “Eliot might have derived more from Symons than an introduction to the modern French
poets” (202). In his criticism, “one does not have to justify Symons by saying that he knew how to pick a literary winner. He also moved with ease in the worlds of music, theater, and painting, and part of his charm is his instinctive and intelligent response to many artistic phenomena” (202). As a critic, although *The Symbolist Movement in Literature* “has long been superseded by other critical works in English…. It remains a document of advanced literary taste in its era…” (202). After AS’s breakdown, “one has to assert that he never made an effective transition to the work of another generation” (203).


The character of Guy Brissenden in Henry James’s *The Sacred Fount* is related to the Pierrot figure which appears in chapter four. This Pierrot figure “cannot be traced fully to a single source”; however, James certainly came across the clown figure while reading AS’s *The Symbolist Movement in Literature*, particularly the chapter on Laforgue. James said of *The Symbolist Movement in Literature*, “It is very intelligent & charming; & anything perceptive & liberal, in this desert of Boeotian bêtes, extremely appeals to one” (39). Indeed, “Evidence suggests that the characterization of Guy Brissenden profited from Symons’s rendering of the Laforguian pierrot…” (39). The Pierrot figure is characterized as “rejecting rather than rejected, this pierrot eludes the female importunity that means for Laforgue the degradations of sexual and emotional life” (40). While this figure attempts to reject and to hide, as did Guy and Laforgue himself, they may “repel [their] lover but not Arthur Symons, who easily divines ‘how much suffering and despair, and resignation to what is, after all, the inevitable, are hidden away under this disguise”’ (41).


Moore was “more authoritative and perceptive than his dedicated contemporary and friend,” AS. (Stern)


Without Lane’s publishing venture, “the movement known as the Decadence would not have taken the form it did.” He was a publisher who made poetry pay. Monetary realities caused him to publish beautiful, slight volumes by young, distinctive poets like AS. His capitulation to public opinion during the Wilde scandal brought an end to the Decadent movement. (Stern)


Yeats recalls a visit that he and AS made to the flat of Leonard Smithers, who Yeats terms “a most disreputable man” (59). Yeats “catches the quintessence of the Decadence [of ‘The Tragic Generation’]” in his picture of Smithers’s sweating at his hurdy-gurdy piano while Beardsley, ill and spitting blood, praises Smithers’ tone and touch (59). Decadence was the way for AS to escape his Welsh background and Wesleyan upbringing. Verlaine became for AS “his ideal of the poetic life” (60). “Certainly the blend of decadence and aestheticism associated with the bohemian figures of the age—Beardsley, Gray, Symons and Yeats himself—
constituted one of the most vital contemporary currents in late Victorian artistic life. Yet it remained more a matter of a coterie enthusiasm than a movement which could hope to compete with mass taste and the financial rewards it offered to those willing and able to satisfy it” (60). “It is telling that neither The Yellow Book nor The Savoy achieved long-term financial viability” (61). AS’s “admiration for Verlaine and his zest for café society enlivened the essentially journalistic work of synthesis on modern French poetry and drama which he published in 1899 as The Symbolist Movement in Literature” (71).

AS's poetry appeared frequently in Outlook (London) alongside of Crosland’s. The latter’s review of AS’s Poems sharply criticizes it as pornography, saying it savours of “the cesspool.” [Reprints Crosland’s review, “Mr. Symons’s Muse,” Outlook (London) 8 (11 January 1902): 818–19.] (Stern) [See Items 242 and 1184.]

From Toulouse-Lautrec to Rodin, although not AS’s best work, is a portrait of the decadence and literary life of Paris in the 1890s. The book is heavily dominated by the personal memoirs of a man fondly remembering his youth in Paris. Even though the 1890s was an influential period, particularly on AS’s best work, London Nights, the misfortune of such a portrait is that English readers will take this to represent the whole of France, rather than a small period that has since passed. [In French.]

AS’s Wanderings, covering the period from 1891 to 1931, has its strengths and weaknesses. AS has a refined sensibility, clarity of observation, rich background of literary knowledge, and a mastery of style (449). Many of his descriptions are intensely beautiful whereas others are marred by the imposition of his own personality, errors in topography, or a “pseudo-Baudelairienne attitude” with which he sees “femme fatales désirables et damnées” everywhere (449). Regardless, AS's book is valuable for the “great passion” with which he infuses his portraits, not wanting to see the object itself but what lies hidden behind it. [In French.]

On 10 June 1889, AS first met Olive Schreiner and recorded his impressions of her. [Slight.] (Stern)

AS's sentimental studies of fallen women are merely vicarious flirtations with evil, not to be taken seriously. (Stern)

The Decadents emphasized rather than concealed the necessary artifice of art. AS found inspiration in fallen women, opium smokers, and the décor of a gas-lit café. Nonetheless, in “Credo” he echoes not Verlaine and the Decadents but his much earlier mentor, Browning, and his poem “The Statue and the Bust.” [Glosses over much of AS’s poetry and ignores his critical writings.] (Stern)

[Refers to AS’s review, “Mr. Henley’s Poetry,” Fortnightly Review 58 (1892): 183–84, 190. The eulogy was “too warm to despise.”] (Stern)

AS complained about the limits of realism in Wilde’s Ballad of Reading Gaol. [Passing reference to AS.]

In 1892, AS praised Henley as a poet, but in 1922 AS, “revising his eulogy of 1892, questioned Henley’s claim to remembrance; it would, he maintained, be a grave error to seek the origins of the new vers libre in the unrhymed Hospital poems or the cadenced ‘Rhymes and Rhythms,’ with which most of the ‘new poets’ were wholly unfamiliar” (210).

“Schreiner published a collection of allegories in 1890, shortly after her return to South Africa. Called Dreams, most were written during the second half of the 1880s, after the breakdown of her relationship with Pearson. As I have already noted, Schreiner sees them as resulting from a different and more unconscious mode of working. The poet Arthur Symons recalls Schreiner telling him of writing ‘Three Dreams in a Desert’ (which belonged in her original ‘sex book’” (78).
[Brief mention of AS.]

AS is a fine critic, but not born to poetry. Best verse is found in his translation of French poetry. AS has “an extraordinary power of giving definition to elusive qualities, which Pater, being less intellectually minded, was content to suggest emotionally. [Rehearses AS’s role in his decade; frequently quotes his opinions, but rarely comments on them.] (Stern)

AS’s book covers a broad number of cities but leaves the reader “assured afresh of the author’s remarkable descriptive power, his sense of colour and form, as well as of his limitations.” AS limits himself by superimposing himself and his ideas, which “have been trained too strenuously in one direction,” onto his descriptions. Regardless, AS “has that sense of place which is so rare and so delightful, so suggestive and so intimately mingled with human things.” Further, “this is a book to be read and treasured by those who recognise beauty in the art of sight and words” (437).

“The Decadent association of lasciviousness and continence found its extreme expression in the cult of the virgin as the logically preeminent lecher.” “[T]he virgin appeared supremely asexual and consequently supremely androgynous.” [AS discusses this fusion in his writings on Solomon’s and Moreau’s drawings. Excellent analysis of the characteristics of the Decadent androgyne.] (Stern)


AS’s new edition of Plays, Acting, and Music is dramatically changed from the first edition. “At its worst, Mr. Symons’s criticism has an effect of the higher journalism: it is a review done for an occasion…. At their best, on the other hand, these brief impressionistic talks on the great things of creative endeavor reveal a poet sensitive to beauty and insistent on testing all art … by the test of aesthetic pleasure and that higher pleasure that is of the soul. The pages fairly teem with suggestive, stimulating, and brilliant remarks, the style in which they are conveyed is noticeable for its warm sensuous simplicity” (70). AS conducts his criticism, varying his angle according to the discipline, in harmony with his theory that the value of art rests on “the creation of beauty” (70). Unfortunately, AS’s mental breakdown has shortened his career, which was at its height, as demonstrated by the impressionistic criticism of this volume. “Mr. Symons has come a long way forward since the Yellow Book days, when he was grouped with the extremists and degenerates” (71).


The parallel between Yeats’s “Solomon and the Witch” and AS’s “The Lover of the Queen of Sheba” (the latter first written in 1900) is very close. The Arabic flavor in both poems probably has its source in a French work translated from the Arabic. (Stern)


Ellis enlisted the help of AS, “one of the most brilliant and sensitive” of his contemporaries, to edit the Mermaid Series. The two men became close friends, traveled together, and shared quarters in the Temple. [Slight.] (Stern)


Hoping that travel might heal his lungs, Beardsley moved between France and London and found himself spending an increasing amount of time with AS and AS’s erratic friend and publisher, Leonard Smithers. In this circle, Beardsley
found direction for his art, especially when AS asked Beardsley to work with him on a new magazine, the Savoy, which they hoped would supplant the failed Yellow Book. AS and Beardsley worked well together and found themselves in agreement about art and literature most of the time. Though the magazine failed, AS was able to cleverly turn it to his advantage, turning the press’s criticism of the Savoy upside down. In the magazine’s last edition, AS “wrote all the literary contents” and Beardsley contributed a dozen illustrations (185). In failing health, Beardsley toyed with the idea of writing poetry, but he increasingly realized that AS “maintained a certain jealous hostility” (170). After Beardsley died, many obituaries, articles and books were published, though AS’s book on Beardsley was perhaps the first fully considered account of Beardsley’s art.


AS and Yeats were “both Dolmetsch’s close friends and frequently to be seen at his concerts.” (75). After one of his concerts, Dolmetsch wrote, “But Symmons did not go before 1 o’cl. and yet, by the first post this morning, I got a charming poem on Rameau. He must have spent all night on it” (119–20). After another concert, he wrote, “Everybody was in the highest enthusiasm especially Symons who remained with me until ab. 2 o’clock” (122). AS was a “close friend and supporter of Dolmetsch and his work” (128).


Interest in the 1890s has withstood “even the reversal of motivation that has occurred as post-Second-World-War English society has searched for its ideological sources” (7). “It is perhaps the most striking feature of Holbrook Jackson’s book that it has managed to survive all these changes of bias and provide material for all, as well as commenting shrewdly in its opening chapter on the reasons for it all” (8). [In this edition, references to AS appear on these pages: 35, 36, 42, 47, 48, 55–56, 70, 81, 85, 91, 95, 96–97, 106, 112–114, 130, 134, 142, 159, 161–62.]


AS gave an English cast to French decadence, the cancan dancer and her immorality. He perpetuated the legend of bohemianism that Murger wanted to destroy. AS is, ironically, the Puritan on holiday in France that he castigates in his writings. [Good source that sheds valuable light on the nineties.] (Stern)


“In 1892 Jane Avril is 24. She is no longer the perverse urchin that one would have wanted us to believe.” AS “sees her young, like a child, so much the more provocative as she gives herself airs of being a prude,” suggesting “a sort of depraved virginity” (87). [In French. Brief mention of AS.]

AS’s “Stella Maris” contributed to the Yellow Book’s notoriety. AS and Beardsley edited the Savoy, a magazine unique in its day and one that still remains unique. [Purpose of the study is twofold: to sift and reassess the “decadent” tendencies in the Yellow Book and the Savoy; to evaluate the role of these magazines in the literary history of their day and today. Sketchy and largely descriptive.] (Stern)


AS, a contributor to the Yellow Book and a founder of the Savoy, was one of the most penetrating theoreticians of the Decadent movement. He played a central role in his decade; and with George Moore, he deserves a place in literary history for his role as middleman between France and England. [Sketches AS’s entire career to 1933; biographical information is often inaccurate; occasionally fictitious, but the observations on AS’s writings and his role in literary history are often penetrating. Good piece of early criticism on AS.] [In French.] (Stern)


[Passing criticism of AS’s observation that Dowson “was quite Latin in his feeling” (37).]


[Brief mention of AS’s observation on the androgynous drawings of Simeon Solomon in relation to Swinburne’s handling of the hermaphrodite (73).]


Major entries on AS include: “London Nights” (364–65) by Bonnie J. Robinson; “Savoy” (531–32) by Arnold Fox; “Religion of Art” (498–500), “The Symbolist Movement in Literature” (602–604), and “Arthur Symons” (605–608) all by Karl Beckson. AS is also mentioned in related entries: “Ballad of Reading Gaol” (33–36) by Bruce Henderson; “Femme Fatal” (201–202) by Ted Billy; “Gérard de Nerval” (421); “Leonard Smithers” (562–63) by John Timpane.


J.-K. Huysmans’s A Rebours had an enormous impact on French and English writers of its time. AS labeled A Rebours the “‘breviary of the Decadence’” giving it the authority and importance of a religious text (193). [Only passing mention of AS in context of a discussion about A Rebours. The passage about AS is almost exactly the same as the third paragraph on p. 74 of Cevasco’s “Delineating Decadence: The Influence of J.-K. Huysmans on Arthur Symons.”]


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Huysmans’s influence on AS “has not received special focus … especially in the formation of Symons’s views on Decadence, which later he came to modify and label Symbolism” (92). *A Rebours* “turned” AS “into a Francophile and devotee of Continental literature; shortly thereafter, it profoundly influenced his concept of literature and his delineation of Decadence” (93). AS saw Huysmans as “the figure who best represented the new literature, the main tendencies, the chief results of a Decadent Movement” and AS “prophesied, Huysmans’s fame would come to rest on *A Rebours*” (99). However, in *The Symbolist Movement in Literature* AS entitles his essay “Huysmans as Symbolist.” “Not especially taken up with Yeats’s interest in the occult,” AS “was moved more by Huysmans’s concepts of mysticism as expressed in *En Route* and *La Cathédrale*” (102). “Perplexed by Huysmans’s quest for the transcendental, Symons found it easier to treat of Huysmans’s prose style” (104). Questions regarding Huysmans’s style led to the more important question of whether he should be categorized a Decadent or a Symbolist” (105). AS maintained that “it was while reading *En Route* that Joyce made the sudden discovery that the novel could compete with poetry, that it could reach its consummation in the revelation of the subconscious” (183). [Study also contains passing references to AS’s views on Walter Pater, Count Eric Stenbock, and other figures.]


“When Arthur Symons in 1893 labeled J.-K. Huysmans’s *A Rebours* ‘the breviary of the Decadence,’ the term Decadence held special meaning for him and certain poets and painters who considered themselves members of an aesthetic elite. Today, it would seem, the term obscures thought. Like many other literary labels, Decadence has acquired multiple meanings. Some prefer to regard it as a matter of style. Others use the term as descriptive of perverse behavior. Then there are those who consider it mainly as a manifestation of extreme aestheticism requiring new and unique sensations. In his introduction to this anthology of English literary Decadence, Nassaar takes a run at Decadence through an examination of what he regards are the central themes that dominate Pater’s *Studies in the History of the Renaissance*, a ‘corrupt volume’ that so influenced young men of his day who devoured it” (74). “To exemplify his concept of Decadence, Nassaar divides his material into three categories. In ‘The Inception,’ he provides ten selections from the *Renaissance.* “In the second part, ‘The Early Nineties,’ he includes poems from Barlas, Dowson, Gray, Johnson and others of similar ideological fit and literary merit, plus prose pieces from Beerbohm and Symons and from Wilde’s *Salomé* in its entirety. ‘The Aftermath’ is given over to Conrad’s most popular and widely read work, the *Heart of Darkness*, which was ‘heavily influenced by the Decadent movement and is in fact a restatement of its major themes against an African-Darwinian background … in a non-artificial, communicative style’” (74).


AS was one of the first to meet and write about J.-K. Huysmans in his generation. In labeling Huysmans’s *A Rebours* the “breviary of the decadence,” he struck a
metaphor that “helped it become exactly that” (74). AS originally went to Paris because “He wanted to experience firsthand the wealth and fermentation of the Decadence” (75). AS had earlier received critical attention for his *Introduction to the Study of Browning* and *Days and Nights* of which Pater wrote, “In this poet ... the rich poetic vintage of our time has run clear at last” (75). However, AS still felt disappointed in the overall lack of attention to his work. After his visit to Huysmans while in Paris, he wrote an essay which, after it was published, established AS as the appropriate figure to review Huysmans’s further work for British periodicals. AS used these reviews as material for his article on Huysmans in *The Symbolist Movement in Literature*. Though AS received criticism that he had not sufficiently disclosed a philosophy of Symbolism, the book “came to be widely regarded as one of the most significant works of literary criticism ever written” (82). The book was particularly influential in Ireland where AS became “a sort of God of the younger college set,” and elsewhere, influencing writers such as Joyce and Eliot (83).


“Had Dowson or Symons read an article that Gray had contributed to the *Dial* about the same time as his *Spiritual Poems* was published, they would have been aware that their friend was inclining more and more toward the mystical” (14). “Foremost, in focusing on the work of the Goncourts as he did, Gray properly stressed the value of what was being done by French writers; and he did so ten full years before Arthur Symons published his *Symbolist Movement in Literature* (1899)” (28). AS’s translation of Charles Baudelaire’s “Voyage à Cythère” may have been influenced by Gray’s earlier translation.


“When Arthur Symons labeled J.-K. Huysmans’ *A Rebours* ‘the breviary of the Decadence,’ the term Decadence had special meaning for him and for all those writers who considered themselves part of a literary elite. Symons could have labeled Huysmans’ novel a primer or a guide, a manual or a textbook, a compilation or a miscellany, or even an anthology; for all such terms are properly descriptive of *A Rebours*. ‘Breviary,’ however, seemed the exact word to Symons, aware that a breviary is a special prayer book of psalms, hymns, and selected parts of Holy Scripture read daily by ordained clergyman of the Roman Catholic Church. *A Rebours*, he also knew, was a ‘Bible’ of sorts, its scripture being one of art, music, flowers, gems, liqueurs, and books that Decadent individuals who consecrated their lives to a religion of beauty read day in and day out” (1). [From the Introduction. In the Dowson Index (384), the following items refer to AS: 14, 18, 28, 35, 37, 40, 49, 50, 60, 69, 70, 83, 103, 107, 142, 154, 157, 158, 161, 200, 208, 218, 230, 236, 248, 251, 253, 257, 259, 275, 288, 291, 295, 312, 356, 359, 368, 376; From the Gray Index (391), the following items refer to AS: 23, 93, 119, 153, 160, 162, 193, 202, 205; from the Johnson Index (400), the following items refer to AS: 30, 37, 212, 231, 241, 265, 268, 269, 310, 314.]

Embodying the aesthetic movement’s desire to redefine the relation of art and life, AS argues that art should not only act as a mirror of nature, but that “art should transform life” (23). AS notes that this is the dominant theme of Huysmans’s *A Rebours*, which is, as he calls it, “the breviary of the decadence” (23). AS also claims that art can become a kind of religion, a spiritual ritual (227).


“Decorative and other similarly abstract forms of art were in a way a defence against the perversions of representative art; just as symbolism, with its isolation of the elements of a numinous reality, was (in Arthur Symons’ view) a defence against materialism” (598). “And when Symons associated the style of Mallarmé with ‘the kind of deprivation undergone by the Latin language in its decadence,’ and suggested that this deprivation was necessary to the kind of ‘exact noting of sensation’ to which Mallarmé and his contemporaries aspired, he was also inviting Mallarmé’s readers to fancy themselves ripe with indulgence of Rome in its decline, in which any act is freed of its association with a motive, and instead attaches itself to an effect” (600).


“This is neither a history nor a literary history of the period 1880–1920. It is a book intended to bring out the many and fascinating ways in which history can be connected with literature” (1). Beardsley’s “‘Et in Arcadia Ego’ is taken up with the tomb, the funeral urn and the dark yew. But there is nothing like a reaction of shock or sadness as far as the figure is concerned. Is the aging dandy even aware that death is in his Arcady? He positively dances over the grass and flowers; elegant, stylish, hardly touching the common earth and, if aware of death, defiantly bent on self-fulfillment. He seems to represent certain aspects of a whole generation of writers and artists in the last decade of the nineteenth century, men like Lionel Johnson, Ernest Dowson, Arthur Symons and Beardsley himself” (227). AS’s poem “The Dance of the Daughters of Herodias” will help us appreciate Yeats’s last poem of “Nineteen Hundred and Nineteen” and T. S. Eliot’s “famous dictum … that great poetry can communicate before it is understood” (253).


AS lost his reason because “he could not find a ‘mask’ which would adequately define his intense self-consciousness.” His search for an ideal outside of himself took him to religion, love, “the perfect moment,” and the doctrines of Symbolism, but all failed him and he finally went mad. [Psychological study of AS’s quasi-autobiographical writings. Probes his fear of death and his attitude towards the feminine principle. Good discussion of *Spiritual Adventures.*] (Stern)


“The realists, the disciples of Zola for example, Hubert Crackanthorpe, and George Moore in his earliest stage tried in vain to acclimate in England the
‘slice of life,’ sordid life, that was suited neither to British taste nor tempera-
ment.… The psychologists of the school of Paul Bourget and Henry James suc-
cceeded in making themselves not less unreadable than the realists.… Horrified
and dismayed by all these wheels within wheels, certain authors like Harland and
Symons, and later Hewlett, turned away toward an impressionism, a symbolism
that had nothing in common with real life, and which consequently offered to fic-
tion only an aliment of fantasy” (78).

Modern Language Notes 34 (1919): 512.
In comparing this “greatly enlarged and somewhat revised” edition with the or-
iginal printed in 1898, weaknesses as well as strengths emerge. Though the change
in sequence of the articles proves “for the most part [better]” with the opening
article on Balzac, “others of the new essays are weak and thin” with chapters
on Flaubert and Gautier “not much above the standard of the articles in Vanity 
Fair.” Another interesting development is the omission of the dedication to Yeats
which makes one wonder if AS’s critical interests have turned aside from the
direction implied in the original introduction. AS does close the “beautiful, sub-
tle, often intangible book” well with translations of Mallarmé and Verlaine.

“Algernon Charles Swinburne and Arthur Symons were of the same opinion,
as was William Morris who felt that the Japanese lacked a decorative sense, and
therefore disapproved of its [Japanese art’s] influence on Western art” (8). “From
Pre-Raphaelites to French Impressionists, from Aesthetes to Symbolists, from
Oscar Wilde to Beardsley, and from Gilbert and Sullivan to Puccini, Japonisme
was a major force in unsettling the old values and preparing the way for Mod-
ernism” (19).

AS attended performances of Shogun and Zingoro by Otojiro Kawakami’s troupe
in London in the summer of 1901, and later wrote “When I first saw the Japa-
nese players, I suddenly discovered the meaning of Japanese art, so far as it re-
presents human beings” (48). AS was also impressed with the acting style of Soshi
Shibai in Sairoku, and compared the actress Sada Yacco favorably with Sarah
Bernhardt. Sada Yacco’s art “embraced Symons’s ideal of dancing and acting as
a means of evoking the inner soul, rather than representing the scene naturalis-
tically. Symons’s overall impression of the Japanese players was one of ‘painted
puppets.’ … For Symons, Kawakami’s theatre represented one of mixed pueril-
ity and charm” (49).

204. Child, Harold Hannyngton. “Arthur Symons.” Times Literary Supplement (Lon-
don) (3 February 1945): 55.
Art was a refuge for the aesthete. AS, in bringing Symbolism from France, offered
the English artist a new way to shut out reality. As Desmond MacCarthy put it in
“An Aesthetic Traveler,” Albany Review 2 (May 1907): 580, AS’s poetry sought
beauty “anxiously, sadly, and even perversely, in moods and perceptions which
are generally regarded as trivial or base.” If his poetry is lacking, his subtle crit-
ical writings are still to be admired. [Article occasioned by AS’s death.] (Stern) [Originally appeared in TLS as an unsigned review; TLS Online now adds the contributor's name.]


“These studies are the work of Mr. Symons’s prime” and afford him “an unassailable place among aesthetic critics.” AS’s “distinction … as critic lies in the sensitiveness of his receptivity and the exactness of his statement.… Yet at the same time his criticism, like all criticism of this kind, has its limits. It seems a momentary affair. It is an immediate and apparently disconnected response to stimulus.” “The happiest things in the volume are the three or four studies of plays by Shakespeare which touch Mr. Symons’s sense of beauty. When he is not touched, when he experiences no peculiar and intimate pleasure, he is still perceptive, just, and learned enough to be a safe guide.” AS “is, as critic, always rather the aesthete, or epicure, than the philosopher.” [Originally appeared in TLS as an unsigned review; TLS Online now adds the contributor's name.]


AS’s book “is chiefly made up of extracts from Mr. Symons’s previous writing about Pater.” AS “is peculiarly fitted to understand one side of Pater: his subtle sensibility to sensuous and aesthetic impressions and his skill in making new beauty out of them (423),… though he has little to say about the prose of ‘Plato’ and the ‘Greek Studies,’ which, no less than the more perfumed, ornate and intricate prose of ‘The Renaissance’ is a good illustration of Pater’s skill in fitting means and ends” (424). [Originally appeared in TLS as an unsigned review; TLS Online now adds the contributor’s name.]


After the 1890s, AS’s savouring after strange and subtle beauty was treated unsympathetically. While his criticism improved, his reputation suffered. “To find the true stature of Symons as a writer, it would be no bad plan to neglect all his poetry, his plays … and his stories, and to concentrate on his prose.” [Inaccurate in the dates ascribed to many of his publications. Simon Jesty in TLS 24 (February 1945): 91 corrects one error in this notice and correctly identifies AS’s father as a Wesleyan, not Baptist, minister.] (Stern) [Originally appeared in TLS as an unsigned review; TLS Online now adds the contributor’s name.]


“Fine craftsmanship and cultivated taste will save a man from writing nonsense, but they do not take the place of enthusiasm or inspiration.” [Review of Tragedies.] (Stern) [Originally appeared in TLS as an unsigned review; TLS Online now adds the contributor’s name as Harold Hannyngton Child. Has also been attributed to Percy Pinkerton.]
AS was the most persistent literary exponent of aestheticism. Pater was critical of those poems of AS's that stress the sordid aspects of life. [Insignificant.] (Stern)

In 1899 AS found Casanova manuscripts at Dux. [Childs’s bibliography includes descriptions of editions of Casanova’s work, including those with introductions by AS and the “rare unabridged London edition of 1894 translated by Arthur Machen to which has been added the chapters discovered by” AS (180–81).]

Though Lionel Johnson argued that AS was a “slave to impressionism” (140), AS also appreciated classicism. AS praises the classical strains in Walter Savage Landor and Robert Bridges, claiming the balanced temperament and the “calm rapture” of Bridges and the solemnity of Landor are just as important as the “wilder music” (140). This praise of classicism shows the vitality of classicism, albeit, for AS, classicism with a French influence. AS’s critique of classicism in his Romantic Movement in English Poetry is as fine as his essay on Ernest Dowson and his “perfect” interpretation of Pachman at the Piano (Plays, Acting, and Music), both of which are comparable to Pater’s art (141).

Regardless of AS's mental breakdown and the effect it had on his career afterwards, “reviewing his entire work, it is now easy to see that he has made his own original and valuable contribution to English criticism” (517). Though “he is not at his best in dealing with principles and theories,... he has a peculiar sensitivity to poetry in the concrete” (517). AS “belongs” in the circle of fellow critics like Lamb and Palgrave “whose appreciation is a touchstone of what is good in poetry” (517). From this “least academic of critics” comes more than 300 pages of “illuminating concrete criticism” on the Romantic poets, the length of which AS explains: “My plan allows me no choice between good or bad writers in verse; I give each his due consideration” (518). AS “recalls to memory many a respectable versifier, now half or wholly forgotten,” including the grandfather of Charles Darwin and some other “queer fishes” (518).

“Since his introduction to English readers and writers, Baudelaire has also drawn the critical attention” of a number of critics including AS who not only translated his work, but addressed Baudelaire’s techniques in his The Symbolist Movement in Literature (5). After reviewing AS’s translations of Baudelaire, T. S. Eliot “violently” objected to the subject matter (9). AS’s criticism and poetry fall into three separate categories. In his first and most distinguished period, AS made an
effort to “define ‘modernity’ in his criticism and to achieve it in his verse” (185). During this stage, AS regarded Baudelaire as the premiere critical and poetical guide on art during the modern age. In the second stage, the period between The Symbolist Movement and his mental illness, AS forsook poetry and devoted his energies to writing “flexible, fluid, and sensuous prose” (186). At this point, Baudelaire’s prose became a model for the only appropriate “medium for modernity” (186). In the stage following his mental illness, AS wrote, at times incoherently, both poetry and prose. During these years Baudelaire transformed into a “Satanic figure who earned for Symons the sharp reproof of the new generation” (186). AS regarded Baudelaire as the forefather of modern poetry because he found beauty in new areas. By defining strangeness as beauty in “The Decadent Movement,” AS “gave the sexual, psychological, self-analytical subjects of his modernism their theoretical justification” (191). As his repeated borrowing from and alluding to Baudelaire suggests, Les Fleurs du Mal weighed heavy on AS’s mind during the period prior to writing The Symbolist Movement in Literature. Early on, AS followed Pater and Baudelaire by seeking realism and sensuousness in his work. The Symbolist Movement in Literature, however, marks a reversal. In this work, he not only excluded Baudelaire from “Symbolist company,” but AS also “outlined an aesthetic sharply opposed to Pater’s” (201–202). With prose as his medium, AS makes cities, specifically Baudelaire’s “villes énormes,” the subject of his Cities. AS borrows many of Baudelaire’s images, such as “the central roving figure,” to invent “the modern romance of cities” (214). In his final stage, AS became so obsessed with Baudelaire that he felt that he personally identified with “Baudelaire’s Satanic genius.”


[From the index: “Symons, Arthur: GM’s letters to, II: 770; 786; 830(2); 849; 884; 954–5. His review of Diana, ii. 770 & n; his book on Browning dedicated to GM, 830 n; 847; 864; his article on GM’s poetry, 884 & n; is thanked by GM for Days and Nights, 954; iii. 1265 n; article on GM, 1281 & n” (1780).]

AS dedicated his An Introduction to the Study of Browning (1886) to Meredith. Meredith wrote to AS on 18 September 1886: “I will not leave it to silence to say that the Dedication with which you compliment me seems in its form entirely acceptable” (830). And later on 19 January 1887 he wrote to AS: “I am glad to hear from friends of the pleasure and help they have had from your book on Browning. I too have gone through it with advantage.” “You have done knightly service to a brave leader. It rejoices me to think that his following will be enlarged by your good work” (849). Of AS’s Days and Nights, he wrote to AS: “This has the promise of a copious vigour, with the sensitiveness which moulds poetic language. Considering the youthful years you name, it is remarkable. I do not see any young writers who are equal or near to you in the race” (954). Later, in a letter to W. M. Meredith dated 3 November 1897, Meredith objects to AS’s classifying him as a “Decadent” (1281). [AS mentioned in 9 letters.]

W. E. Henley's *In Hospital* came to be associated with literary realism at the time of its publication; however, Henley's subject matter, the hospital and its patients, pushed the envelope of that realism. Many critics unfavorably reviewed his work as unfit subject matter for poetry. At the same time there were critics such as AS who applauded Henley's experiment. AS's reviews were particularly "perceptive interpretations of Henley's poetic practice," in that AS "discerned his affinities with impressionist poets and painters" (5).


“The bad luck of Ernest Dowson has pursued him after death, for about the last persons to be entrusted with any man's memory were Mr. Arthur Symons, who wrote the biographical sketch of Dowson in the first edition of the poems some fifteen years ago, and Mr. Victor Plarr, the author of a recent volume of Dowson memorabilia. Not but that they meant well. Both knew Dowson personally, or at least they thought they did, and both were staunch admirers of his talent, but while their hearts were conspicuously in the right place neither of them had any head for biography. A wretch so far gone as the Dowson depicted by Mr. Arthur Symons would not have had enough sound fiber in him to achieve poetry; he could have achieved only delirium tremens" (288).


Some of the early editions of Laforgue’s work “were quickly forgotten, except, that is, by” AS and “there are still modern critics who either neglect Dujardin’s editions altogether or confuse the two, apparently without understanding the textual significance of that of 1894. This makes Arthur Symons’s early appreciation of Laforgue all the more remarkable. Yet his was a lone voice; another decade elapsed before Laforgue’s real significance was appreciated” (82). “There was consequently a longish period during which he was somewhat ignored by students of literature, who perhaps could not have obtained his books even if they had tried, while writers in France but more particularly in England were discovering and rediscovering him with excitement, often because they had come across the early critical reports by George Moore and Arthur Symons which were without parallel in France” (84).


AS's *The Symbolist Movement in Literature* was read avidly in Dublin. It occasioned a public debate in University College, attended by Yeats, in which a group of students tried to make nonsense of the Symbolists. AS’s warm criticism of the new Irish literature and theater helped create the enthusiastic response it gained among Irish intellectuals. Later, Hart Crane, upon hearing of AS’s book, immersed himself in it. (Stern)


AS's gift of interpretation coupled with his great knowledge and interesting method make him “the most influential critic since Walter Pater.” [Review of the
revised and enlarged version of The Symbolist Movement in Literature and Cities and Sea-Coasts and Islands.] (Stern)


Recently we have seen a “renaissance” in AS studies. Selected Letters is a significant contribution in portraying a personal picture of AS, showing him “eager, enthusiastic, personal, even indiscreet” (346). The volume has many strengths, primarily the insightful notes and commentary on the letters. Some of the most interesting perspectives reveal AS’s relationship with other writers after his breakdown. Its weaknesses are the limitation of the number of letters and the impossibility of obtaining letters to characters such as Lydia and Beardsley. Lastly, the letters themselves do not bring us any closer to the question posed by Alan Johnson, “Why … did Symons go mad?” (347).


AS’s “whole life was to be dominated by this poet [Baudelaire], who became an obsession with him through his forties and fifties and whom he has translated so extensively” (195). AS “and Beardsley formed the true Nineties; Wilde has stolen their thunder by capturing the public imagination; in fact he was more derivative and less original in his literary work, though enormously talented as a comic dramatist” (196). “As a prose writer” AS “was better than as a poet” (197). AS “would have been fond” of Lhombreaud as a biographer, “who has amassed an American-style thesis, as far as humourless documentation is concerned, but without the suffocating rawness. He writes with understanding and sympathy and seems unaware of the mediocrity of so many of his quotations from Symons’s poems, books and letters, or from those of some of his contemporaries” (198). “Yes, the true poets of the Nineties are Dowson and” AS (204). AS “is an under-estimated poet, his book on the symbolist movement influenced both Yeats and Eliot and he had a genuine erotic vein, nurtured on Verlaine” (206). [No index.]


As demonstrated by its presence in his personal library, James Joyce had a copy of AS’s Confessions: A Study in Pathology (1930).


AS in his “mystical moods” often used to visit the Capel house. In a letter Conrad wrote to AS in 1911 he shows the real regard and appreciation he felt for his works. “The great dissimilarity between the two artists, Arthur Symons and Joseph Conrad, may have been the reason of the close bond that existed between them. I believe Symons’s verse was almost the only verse that my husband ever read, I mean with any real appreciation and pleasure” (154). (Stern) [Second edition with same pagination: Joseph Conrad and His Circle. Port Washington, NY: Kennikat P, 1964. 153, 154, 165, 253.]
After translating D’Annunzio’s Francesca, AS wrote his own version of Tristan and Isolde, “sorting out the neurotic contradictions within the Wagnerian character” by creating two Isoldes (15A). [Passing reference to AS.]

To identify “decadence” as a school or movement in England is a “matter of considerable debate” (29). The only work that comes close to articulating a coherent “manifesto” is AS’s “The Decadent Movement in Literature,” which mainly deals with French writers and was later surpassed by his book on Symbolism. Though AS was the first to suggest that the Decadent Movement in England “was a perverse product of ‘lesser men’ and ‘a straying aside from the main road of literature’” (4), approaching Decadence afresh reveals its continuing importance for contemporary literary and cultural studies.

The American “dance boom” of the 1970s has its roots in turn-of-the-century views of art. [Passing reference to AS’s The World as Ballet, 12, 13.]

227. Deleted.

Paul Fort’s Vers et prose consistently reproduced the best poetic productions of the Symbolist period. It included AS’s translations of Verlaine, Mallarmé, and Laforgue and some of his own poetry. Stuart Merrill’s “L’oeuvre poétique d’Arthur Symons,” L’Antée, June 1907, was “one of the first attempts to define the effect of Symbolism on the English poet’s verse.” (Stern)

April 1890 Charles Morice introduced AS to Verlaine; later, AS sponsored Verlaine’s lecture tour in England and the two men exchanged translations of their poems. AS’s writings on French writers, which began as early as 1891, culminated in The Symbolist Movement in Literature. (Stern)

“In December 1896, Yeats had met Synge in a students’ hostel in Paris. He had just come from the Aran Islands and his imagination was full of those grey islands ‘where men must reap with knives because of the stones.’ In a moment of inspired insight, he told Synge: ‘Give up Paris, you will never create anything by reading Racine, and Arthur Symons will always be a better critic of French literature. Go to the Aran Islands’” (30). “As an artist [Edward] Martyn was an amateur. ‘A beginner,’ Moore thought, ‘in danger of remaining a beginner.’ His first
plays, *The Heather Field* and *Maeve*, were pulled into better dramatic shape with the help of Yeats and Arthur Symons” (43).


Early reviews of Pater’s *Marius* varied widely and often revealed just as much about the reviewer as they did the literary quality of Pater’s work (125). Among other self-referential and predictable reviews, AS’s review would better meet the standards of twentieth-century criticism. Though he was a loyal disciple of Pater, describing him as “the most exquisite critic of the time” (129), his admiration did not blind AS from what he thought were flaws in Pater’s work. Particularly, AS notes Pater’s stylistic blunders, lack of narrative appeal, and “lack of dramatic power” (135), though, as AS notes, Pater did attempt to “give a concrete form to abstract ideas” (130). Like Browning’s “Sordello,” AS thought *Marius* was hard to read and not representative of the author’s best work (129), though still not unattractive. In a critical biography of AS, John Munro argues that AS apparently did not grasp the ethical implications of Pater’s aestheticism until after 1900 when he reread Pater’s works (130). In 1893, AS’s critical approach had widened enough to allow AS to make a case for labeling Pater “decadent,” which Pater may have found discomforting (130). But, while AS was later able to evaluate Pater’s work from a wider perspective, he never provided much more than a “facile generalization” of Pater’s Epicureanism and “stoic sense of duty” (130).


In conveying the mixed acceptance of realism in Gissing’s works, AS is listed as a critic associated with those who find it matter-of-fact, flatfooted and inartistic” (63). AS “viewed Gissing’s fiction very harshly because he was incapable of appreciating one large area of fictional narratives” (63).


Like Algernon Swinburne, AS reduces the Tristan Legend (*Tristan and Iseult*) to an aesthetic tale. Functioning in a Wagnerian context, both interpret the tale as a commentary on “the beauty of passionate love.” While recognizing the separate beauty of domestic love, AS privileges passionate love. Furthermore, AS finds love in a state of conflict: “passionate love in conflict with honor” and “domestic love in conflict with generosity and selflessness” (7139-A). [Source: *DAI* 37 (1977): 7138A.]


“This book does not pretend to be the documented biography that must be written one day, when all the materials are available. That is work for a scholar, preferably an Irish scholar, who can set her into the whole complicated perspective of the Irish literary revival, too close to us to be properly appreciated” (vi). Regarding Lady Gregory’s play *The White Cockade*, Yeats told AS, “Lady Gregory has done a very original play, at once merry and beautiful!” (98). [Brief mention of AS. Index lists Symonds, Arthur for AS (241).]