Arthur Symons, Critic Among Critic

Symons, Arthur

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“When Acis [Acis and Galatea] was transformed into a fountain in the last scene, the tent of grey streamers slowly disappeared, and in the vast expanse of blue sky, a ‘Water God’ gradually materialized in the form of a great fountain where the sparkling beads of water rose and fell” (152). AS and others “were carried away by the beauty and the ‘suggestion that strikes straight to the nerves of delight’” (153). AS was thought to have been seen “wildly applauding” (153). [Brief mention of AS.]


AS “has always written well, and he writes of books even better, I think, than when he writes of actors and acting. Books are such grand things. When he comes to acting he falls in love with it. He loses his heart to the performer and he sometimes grows confused. I have said how impossible it is to write on an actor’s performance of a passion. So how write on the passion itself. Yet Mr Symons sometimes attempts to do this too. He writes of Duse and her performances and he writes of Signora Duse and her lovers. I don’t see how it can be done, and so I am not surprised as I have read to come across some slips…. For who knows about such things, who can know? Not I, not you, and not he” (366). [Craig is referring to AS’s *Eleonora Duse*.]


After Coleridge, associationist theory, such as that advocated by Archibald Alison, was generally considered uninfluential on the development of literature. This typical version of literary history does not take into account the presence of associationist theory throughout the development of modern literature. This is particularly evident in AS’s *The Symbolist Movement in Literature* which resembles much of Arthur Hallam’s critical vocabulary in its discussion of “sensations.” “[W]hen British writers came to explain symbolism to themselves they did it largely through their inheritance from associationism …” (30). AS’s analysis of the way Mallarmé removes connections in his poetry resembles “an explanation, in Alison, of how people actually experience poetry,” and can be traced “through the work of Hallam, Mill, Yeats and Symons” (31). In addition, the traditional division between AS and the Imagists breaks down when examining Ezra Pound: “Pound’s actual technique as an Imagist seems to correspond to Symons’s description of Mallarmé…” (32).


Beckson’s biography “is detailed, yet less than gripping” (394). This weakness plays out in the chapters on *The Symbolist Movement in Literature* and on AS’s mental breakdown. Although AS appears to have lived a life full of sensations and acquaintances, these experiences do not catch or hold the reader’s attention (395). Regardless it exhibits “careful scholarship” and is a valuable document on the Decadent period due to the breadth of AS’s literary acquaintances (394). Beckson’s claims about the importance of AS’s poetry and his role in develop-
ing modernism do not seem to match with contemporary scholarship and do not have enough evidence in the text to truly convince the reader.

[Passing mention that AS “considered that Pater’s ‘Aesthetic Poetry’ (1868) was ‘written under the influence of Baudelaire…” (850). 850, 876.]

“Most of the valid poetry of the Nineties could have been written and published ten years earlier or later and only some of the pre-comedy writings of Wilde, Beardsley’s Under the Hill, some minor poetry and a number of passages in the critical work of Arthur Symons who tried to speak for the period, have distinct if superficial characteristics” (166). AS “wrote a short sensational but inaccurate article on him [Count Eric Stenbock] after his own period of insanity which tells us almost nothing” (251). AS had a “tendency to inflate and colour Stenbock’s reputation” (255).

[Includes a reprint of AS’s seven-page account of his first meeting with Olive Schreiner in June 1889 and citations from her journal on visits with AS.] (Stern)

AS’s muse is “the powdered charmer”; he writes “flat-verse.” AS has a genius for embroidering impropriety, a remarkable myopia which makes him confuse his flat next to the stage door for the world. [Unfavorable review of AS’s Poems (1902).] (Stern) [See Item 1184.]

[Disputes Kermode’s assertion in The Romantic Image (1957) that the poetic theories of Pater and AS furnished Yeats with all he needed to “formulate his own poetic theory,” and calls it a gross oversimplification.] (Stern)

[Cites works by AS on Yeats with brief annotations and also cites a number of articles on AS and Yeats. The latter list is necessarily partial; the former is complete. Items on AS incorporated in the present bibliography.] (Stern)

“Thomson, John Davidson, Ernest Dowson and Arthur Symons wrote the poetry of urban romance in a distinctively English vein. They not only refashioned the Baudelairian speaker and narrator into a more particularly English flaneur, but they localized their poetry by endowing it with English settings, English dialects, and English concerns. These Nineties poets, Eliot wrote in 1961, inspired him not only in rhythm and idiom, but in the greatness of their theme” (85).


Wagner’s, Verlaine’s, and AS’s versions of “Parsifal” reflect a development of genres in the Parsifal legend. Wagner adapts longer medieval sources and Verlaine and AS further develop lyric versions that focus on issues found in Wagner. AS in particular focuses on paradox and “finds a compatible belief in the continuing efficacy of legendary narratives and in a type of religious experience generated by a provisional acceptance of the powers of inherited symbols” (73).


“Whether thanks to Symons or not, Joyce had acquaintance with Baudelaire, Verlaine and the Symbolists in his earliest college years.” Later, Joyce is introduced to AS by Yeats, and AS assists him in getting a publisher for Chamber Music. AS, too, took Joyce to D’Annunzio. Joyce’s fascination with the latter’s exploration of the hidden, inner self almost certainly affected his style. [Traces interesting parallels between AS’s words on d’Annunzio and Joyce’s d’Annunzian mask. Gives AS less credit for introducing Joyce to Symbolism than Ellmann, Tindall, and Colum do. See Ellmann’s James Joyce (1959), Tindall’s Forces in Modern British Literature (1947), and Mary Colum’s Life and Dream (1947).] (Stern)


[“Impressionist criticism” has often been disparaged but seldom investigated. This dissertation discusses first the inadequacies of current definitions given for impressionism, providing some historical and lexicographic information about the term’s usage; then presents separate studies of fourteen critics who have been called impressionists—Diderot, Hazlitt, Charles Lamb, Sainte-Beuve, Renan, Anatole France and Jules Lemaître, Pater, Wilde, James Huneker, Virginia Woolf, D. H. Lawrence, Arthur Symons, and Remy de Gourmont—trying to answer the questions: what is the label “impressionist” meant to signify about the work of certain critics? How accurate and adequate is the signification? These studies constitute the bulk of the dissertation and supply evidence for subsequent conclusions. The last chapter gives some generalizations about the impressionists, suggesting ways in which they form a group. It points out their main aesthetic assumption, an expressive theory of art and criticism, and summarizes the several ways in which they practiced self-expression: by personal reference, argument in favor of self-expression, the development of personal aesthetic theories, and the ingenious use of imagery. Further, this chapter argues against the most common
complaints about impressionist criticism, revealing, in the process, more of its
general characteristics, and, finally, attempts to explain impressionism’s value for
twentieth-century readers.”] [Annotation from DAI 33 (1973): 5673A.]

   “Others that I see are Sir Frank Swettenham looking like Mephistopheles, Le
   Gallienne, looking like Narcissus, Arthur Symons looking like a girl, with yellow
   hair, and pink and white cheeks” (37).

251. Daly, Nicholas. Modernism, Romance and the Fin de Siècle: Popular Fiction and
   J. M. Synge met W. B. Yeats in Paris in December 1896. In Yeats’s account, he
   advises Synge: “I said, ‘Give up Paris, you will never create anything by reading
   Racine, and Arthur Symons will always be a better critic of French literature’” (129).

252. Daly, Saralyn R. Katherine Mansfield, Revised Edition. Twayne’s English Authors
   “Mansfield shared technical kinship with Joyce. Both authors’ use of “suggest-
   tiveness reflects their symbolist heritage, their youthful reading of Wilde, Pater,
   and Symons” (110–11). [Brief mention of AS, linking Mansfield to AS and Symbolism.]

   AS’s introduction to Poe’s “The Fall of the House of Usher” “is an early landmark
   in criticism that finds in Poe the techniques and concerns of the Decadent
   movement” (46). AS clearly understood Decadence as exemplified by his article
   “The Decadent Movement in Literature.” He elaborates on the elements of
   such Decadence and Symbolism in Poe’s work as well as upon the illustrations
   by Alastair. In the introduction, “Symons is largely in line with recent Poe critics
   who find Roderick Usher to be a contemporary man struggling in a hostile envi-
   ronment” (46).

The Review of the Association of Literary Scholars and Critics 7.2 (Spring 2005):
   165–93.
   “The Savoy’s poetry and critical contents particularly reflect Symons’ own ruling
   passions: symbolisme, and his complete obsession with the decadent (which con-
   tinued until his death)…. Most of the original poems appearing in The Savoy are
   of the (decadent) Dowsonian gone-with-the-wind and (symboliste) Yeatsian long-
   hair-and-mysterious-roses variety; not surprisingly, most are indeed by Dowson,
   Yeats, and Symons himself” (166). “The Savoy’s fiction and prose contents have
   more variety than any of the other literary and artistic genres in the magazine, but
   all the stories and essays are on subjects near and dear to Symons himself.” AS’s
“selection of such works for The Savoy made possible the publication of young authors and artists, male and female, whose work had no other venue because they were not known or were considered too controversial for other periodicals and whose work might otherwise have gone unseen” (167). “Yet the most exact and comprehensive term to describe the little magazine he edited in 1896 is ‘decadent.’ The literary and stylistic course of The Savoy, never smooth and often varied, may be most broadly, and yet most aptly, characterized by that word. In The Savoy there is a generous openness, due to Symons alone, to other contemporary literary styles of the 1890s, but there is, finally and conclusively, an inability to give up the symbol, the impression or sensation, and indeed a continued and increasing reaffirmation of that very decadence that the magazine sought, initially, to deny” (193). [Provides a detailed account of AS’s work on the magazine.]

255. Danielson, Henry. Bibliographies of Modern Authors. New York: Drake, 1921. The entire bibliography of AS’s work has not been published before this work. A list of AS’s work follows.


257. Davis, E. Yeats’s Early Contacts With French Poetry. Pretoria: U of South Africa, 1961. 27, 29, 36, 46, 51–55. Yeats was more directly influenced by the French Symbolists and particularly Baudelaire than has been generally acknowledged. His introduction to them dates back to when he was fifteen. By 1894, before he became intimate with AS, he was well acquainted with his French contemporaries and a conscious disciple of theirs. AS was “only a belated contributor to an affinity which had been growing in Yeats since his teens,” an affinity which had been encouraged by his affair with Maude Gonne and reinforced by the worship of Baudelaire and Verlaine by his elders at both Bedford Park and London. [Well-documented article.] (Stern)

258. De Casseres, Benjamin. “Arthur Symons: An Impression.” Forty Immortals. By Benjamin De Casseres. Freeport, NY: Books for Libraries P, 1972. 57–64. As a poet, he occupies an elite arena from which he realizes the transitory nature of the material world and is so able to optimize each moment by absorbing rapidly changing impressions. Thus he is the protector of a spiritual intensity threatened by an egotistical world.

259. De Casseres, Benjamin. “Arthur Symons: An Interpretation.” Critic (New York) 8 (October 1903): 353–56. AS’s poetical nature is the antithesis of Kipling’s: Kipling’s reflects the materialism of his country while AS’s expresses the “dark, dreamy, pessimistic, skeptical side” of the Englishman’s nature. His poetry worships beauty not decadently, as is often alleged, but through the prism of the Neo-Platonist who treats beauty as “an idea independent of the object in which it is reflected.” It is “supremely great
poetry—the apotheosis of soul and flesh.” [Laudatory review of AS’s *Images of Good and Evil.*] (Stern)


AS’s term “Romantic” is elusive, and his principles of inclusion seem arbitrary, but in practicing his criticism, in bringing his personality to bear on the poetry of others, he proves reflective, insightful, and always a master stylist himself. [Review of *The Romantic Movement in English Poetry.*] (Stern)


“Baudelaire can be mentioned with relevance,... certainly not as a source (for whatever contact Yeats had with French symbolism occurred later and even then Baudelaire was not the major influence), but because the conception of imagery, at the beginning of Yeats’s work, places him so clearly within the general European tradition of symbolism. None of Yeats’s immediate predecessors or contemporaries in England, even those, like Symons or Dowson, who came into much closer contact with France, is as closely akin to the symbolic language of Baudelaire and his successors” (153).


Ada Leverson’s [1862–1933] “Skits, satirical letters, and dialogues for *Punch*, the *Sketch*, *Black and White*, and other periodicals parody friends and acquaintances, aesthetes like Aubrey Beardsley (‘Weirdsley’), Arthur Symons (‘Simple Symons’), Max Beerbohm (‘Mereboom’), Henry James, and others” (193). [Passing mention of AS.]


“Despite Arthur Symons’ early connection with the Realistic and Naturalistic movements, and despite his sympathy for their efforts to produce a vital art, the whole tone of his later criticism is impressionist. Although profoundly affected by the Naturalists, by temperament he was more the aesthete than the scientist. Unlike Wilde, he never fully escaped the influence of the Naturalists and consequently he was not led into the blind alley of pure aestheticism, but, like Pater and James and Moore and Stevenson, he sought constantly to convey the spirit of a work of art through a prose style that would express every nuance of meaning. In Symons, Aestheticism and Naturalism are united in Symbolism” (171). [Decker’s book was first published by Twayne, 1952.]


AS was a frequent visitor of the Café Royal from 1894 on through the decade. Often one could see “Havelock Ellis apparently asleep in the company of Arthur Symons.” In the declining days of the Café, AS wrote nostalgic reminiscences of the heyday of the Café. [Informal, chatty, with passing references to AS.] (Stern)
   Pater’s study of Leonardo “investigates the nature of the creative process” and “implies norms for the modern artist—for writers like Symons, Wilde, and Yeats” (135).

   AS’s “The Decadent Movement in Literature” was published in the same issue of Harper’s as Pater’s “homoerotic” short story “Apollo in Picardy.” “Pater could not have been pleased by the juxtaposition, not only because his is a study of the origin of the Renaissance in the decadence of the Middle Ages but also because Symons included a discussion of Pater along with a description of Des Esseintes, the protagonist of Huysmans’ A Rebours (1884): ‘In the sensations and ideas of Des Esseintes we see the sensations and ideas of the effeminate, overcivilized, deliberately abnormal creature who is the last product of our society; partly the father, partly the offspring, of the perverse art that he adores’” (271). [Reviewed together with The Wilde Century: Effeminacy, Oscar Wilde and the Queer Moment by Alan Sinfield (no mention of AS in the index), and Hellenism and Homosexuality in Victorian Oxford by Linda Dowling (no mention of AS in the index).]

   [“This dissertation explores the figure of the vampire in the nineteenth century as a metaphor of disorder, especially as interpreted through the root metaphor of the second law of thermodynamics, also known as entropy,… Chapter Three is a study of the vampire and disorder in the poetry of Charles Baudelaire and his followers, including Gabriele D’Annunzio, Maurice Rollinat, and Arthur Symons…. In the Conclusion there is a brief discussion of the survival of the figure of the vampire as personification of a remnant culture of Decadence in twentieth-century film and popular fiction.”] [Annotation edited from DAI 58 (1997): 156A.]

   In November 1895, AE wrote to Yeats saying that he should “clear out” of AS’s “vicinity, and come over here. It will be much better for you morally, and as a place to get inspiration” (16). On February 10, 1898, AE wrote to Yeats, “It is curious that Symons should like The Earth Breath. I am forced to the conclusion that he has a soul or has only lately lost it, or else on an application of the principle ‘that the devils also believe and tremble’ his inverted spiritual nature finds some application of the divine laws. ‘The devil can quote scripture.’ Anyhow he is not a bad devil and if he was confined in a hermitage on the top of Mount Nephin with no women near he might get purified after a twelvemonth” (27). [Two letters mention AS.]

Mrs. Campbell appeared in *Electra*, translated by AS from a German version by Hugo von Hofmannsthal. She was quite taken with the beauty of the translation. (Stern)


Julia Marlowe, who was an American star of Shakespearean drama, teamed with E. H. Sothern in 1904 to play the role of Ophelia to highlight his role as Hamlet in William Shakespeare’s tragedy. Marlowe added strength and complexity to the character. Although her performance could be considered transitional in that it was progressive and innovative, it was also considered traditional due to its verbal purity. Marlowe wanted audiences to see Ophelia’s feminine strength. Throughout the years, the role came to represent ideal womanhood: “she could be pure and chaste, obedient and submissive, and her madness and death could evoke images of sublime beauty.” AS “reports similar impressions of this mad Ophelia” (41). A detailed description of Marlowe’s performance as Ophelia in *Hamlet* is presented, beginning with her first appearance in Act 1, Scene 3, and continuing throughout the play. Her character struggled intensely, but ultimately failed to break the mold of true womanhood. [Abstract edited from *International Index to Performing Arts*.]


[Film adaptation of AS’s short story “Esther Kahn” from his collection *Spiritual Adventures*. Script was written by Emmanuel Bourdieau and Arnaud Desplechin, and stars Summer Phoenix and Ian Holm. Other than occasional praise of Eric Gautier’s cinematography, most reviews are negative, citing stilted dialogue, uneven performances by the actors, and too much voice-over narration without enough depiction of the action. Most reviews of the film do not contain material mentioning AS. See the *International Index to Performing Arts* for lists of reviews of this film including in some instances abstracts of the reviews and some full texts. The Internet Movie Database, imdb.com, also contains lists of reviews, cast, and production details.]


[Examines the AS, Verlaine, Yeats, and Eliot relationships, with comparisons of AS’s poetry with Verlaine’s. Also uses ideas from AS’s prose to elucidate the relationship with Verlaine’s work. In Italian.]


Browning, in a letter of 5 November 1882 to Furnivall, returns a letter of AS and disclaims authorship of the poem that AS sent him. [The letter was actually to AS himself.] (Stern)


AS helped and encouraged Sarojini Naidu, political leader in India and friend of Ghandi, by publishing her poetry, which he described as having “a bird-like quality” (19). He had met her in England, and like many writers in England at the

67
time, AS was “overwhelmed by her gifts as a writer of English.” He also wrote the introduction to her selection of poems The Golden Threshold (19).


“The prevalent trend of the Nineties for a stylistically attenuated, and orally muted, verse policed by the standards of Pater and a Symbolism promulgated by” AS “was a major negative factor, but another was the idea of the poet as a detached, uninvolved messenger of the muse” (75). When Yeats “spoke on Symbolism he was speaking about form, for he considered form to be one of Symbolism’s ‘disguises’—just as word rhythms are another: ‘Symbolism … would have no value if it were not seen also, under one disguise or another, in every great imaginative writer.’ He puts those words of Symons in the leading position in his essay, ‘The Symbolism of Poetry’ (1900), and earlier in 1898 made it clear that symbolim meant rhythm: ‘pattern and rhythm are the road to open symbolism’” (262).


[“This dissertation examines the relationship between fin-de-siècle Victorian aestheticism and commodity culture, the culture of the modern marketplace. This is not, however, a study of how authors sold books: it is a study of how fin-de-siècle texts responded to commodity culture as a means of communicating ideas and shaping an audience. In 1869, Matthew Arnold set ‘culture’ against ‘anarchy.’ By the end of the nineteenth century, however, with the growth of commodity culture and the refinement of its sophisticated techniques for attracting audiences, ‘culture’ looked out on an organized, efficient system for disseminating ideas and images. In examining how authors responded to this change, this dissertation observes a crucial moment in the development of the modern concepts of ‘high culture’ and ‘popular culture’ and a crucial moment in the history of the cultural role of the author in England. I discuss literary work in several genres as well as some extra-literary texts: the poetry of Arthur Symons, the fiction of Henry James and Oscar Wilde, the drawings of Aubrey Beardsley, and also the most famous aesthetic magazine of the period, The Yellow Book. Working with recent historical and cultural studies of the turn-of-the-century marketplace, I demonstrate that many aesthetic texts represent strategic efforts to restructure relationships among artist, artwork, and audience in order to engage with the conventions of commodity culture….”] [Annotation edited from DAI 57A (1996): 230A]


AS noted “an intense self consciousness” in Oscar Wilde’s fall that was “the most striking characteristic of the Yellow Nineties” (5).

Mathilde Blind (who wrote under the pen name of Claude Lake) was “one of the few Victorian women poets to be honored with posthumous collections, both edited by” AS (230n6). “[Richard] Garnett, who (along with Arthur Symons) became Blind’s literary executor, also helped her manage her small savings, even paying her landlady when she was out of town” (233n14). [The two editions referred to here are: A Selection from the Poems of Mathilde Blind. Ed. Arthur Symons. London: T. Fisher Unwin, 1897. The Poetical Works of Mathilde Blind. Ed. Arthur Symons. London: T. Fisher Unwin Paternost Square, 1900.]

[“This essay analyzes Arthur Symons' creative reception and adaptation of Stéphane Mallarmé’s Symbolist aesthetics, especially the Symbolist dancer figure, in Symons’ major theoretical writings and dance poems of the 1890s. I argue that Symons interpreted Mallarmé’s work through a decidedly Decadent lens, which reconfigured Symbolist themes of linguistic struggle, poetic evocation, and aesthetic dreaming, to express the sense of an acute spiritual as well as aesthetic crisis of fin de siècle literature and culture.” Abstract from beginning of the article.]

[A review of Michael Holroyd’s Augustus John: The New Biography followed by a biographical commentary on Augustus John. Passing mention is made that John “supported” AS throughout the recovery from his mental breakdown. AS said, “Had it not been for John, whose formidable genius is combined with a warmth of heart, an ardent passion and will, at times deep, almost profound affection, which is one of those rare gifts of a genius such as his, I doubt if I could have survived these tortures that had been inflicted upon me” (29). Reviewed together with Portraits of Women: Gwen John & Her Forgotten Contemporaries by Alison Thomas, and Themes and Variations: The Drawings of Augustus John 1901–1931 with essays by Michael Holroyd, Mark Evans, and Rebecca John.]

“In 1894 the first issue of the Yellow Book … Arthur Symons contributed a risque poem, ‘Stella Maris,’ in which imagery traditionally associated with the Virgin Mary was attached to a common prostitute” (3). [Reviewed together with Letters of Max Beerbohm 1892–1956, edited by Rupert Hart-Davis—see below.]

AS “deserves revival … both as a personality and as an appealing biographical essayist, a chattier, less Olympian Edmund Wilson. This volume of letters, along with Karl Beckson’s superb Arthur Symons: A Life, should win him new readers.” AS’s “letters—really memos and field reports from Grub Street—reveal a steam-age dynamo.” His “essays have been dismissed as impressionistic, but, like his letters, they display wide reading, a lively sense of anecdote and a deep love of books and their creators.” “The real problem, though, for Symons' reputation as a critic
lies in his 1908 mental breakdown while in Italy.” “Like Beerbohm … but in a more pathetic fashion, Symons never lived beyond the 1890s” (10). [Reviewed together with Arthur Symons, Selected Letters, 1880–1935, edited by Karl Beckson and John M. Munro—see above.]


AS was a familiar figure at the Dolmetsch concerts. [Praises AS’s chapter in Plays, Acting and Music on Dolmetsch. Reproduces AS’s verse translation of a song from Sakuntala with Arnold Dolmetsch’s music.] (Stern)


“The mind of the symbolist either rejects the world and yearns to be shut of it or otherwise disengages the mind from worldly importunity. Symons expresses the first motive when he writes approvingly of ‘a literature in which the visible world is no longer a reality, and the unseen world no longer a dream’” (254–55).


“Yeats’s boldest gesture, I have come to think, was to join his work as a cultural nationalist with that of European Symbolism and the occult. By that designation I mean to include not only Mallarmé and the other poets and dramatists presented in Arthur Symons’s The Symbolist Movement in Literature but the whole neo-Platonic tradition with Blake as its greatest adept. Symons wrote of Symbolism that it is ‘a literature in which the visible world is no longer a reality, and the unseen world no longer a dream’” (364).


[Review of Joyce’s major critical interpretations, including the books reviewed. Passing mention that AS helped Joyce publish Chamber Music and that the poems even resemble AS’s at points.]


[Review gives a biographical summary of Yeats’s life in which passing mention is made that Yeats lived with AS and that after reading The Symbolist Movement in Literature, he “saw confirmed there what he already believed from instinct and his reading of Blake” (17). In addition Yeats participated with AS in a bohemian lifestyle in Paris and eventually incorporated AS, as he did many others, into his own myth where they “live … just as fully as in their own works and deeds” (19).]


[Reviewed with Foster’s W. B. Yeats: A Life, Volume 1: The Apprentice Mage, above.]

“Not that the distinction between beauty and prettiness is absolute. But Yeats and his friends had to think it was, and that their fate was tragic in serving such a goddess. Symons’s ‘Modern Beauty’ recites the myth and the grim conditions it had to face…. In this poem, from Symons’s *Images of Good and Evil* (1899), Beauty is a force of nature more than a force of culture. As in Pater’s *Studies in the History of the Renaissance*, she is a flame of being: torch, fire, image. Divine, it is her tragedy that she must consent to live in the ordinary world and seek her devotees among people who have, as a general habit, more terrestrial interests” (59–60).


Often the exuberance of Pater’s work makes it unlikely as a solid addition to the “tradition of criticism” (390), but the prolific work of Pater’s disciple, AS, has done just that. Like AS, Pater’s work moves beyond formal criticism to creation, but also like AS, Pater is criticized for resting at “the pure feeling,” as well as lacking, in Eliot’s words, “the expulsion, the ejection, the birth of creativeness” (400).


“In this volume of Yeats’s prose I have brought together his Journal, begun in December 1908, and the first draft of his Autobiography, begun in 1915…. The Autobiography and the Journal differ, however, in many respects. Written twenty-five or more years after the events described, the Autobiography required not merely an act of memory on Yeats’s part, but an approach to the meaning of the lives it recited, not least his own” (9). “Yeats’s style in the Autobiography is often rough, his first draft is imperfect, but for most of the way it moves with the freedom of reverie and meditation” (11). [As appears in the edition on pages listed above.]


“Pater had to write *Studies in the History of the Renaissance* before Arthur Symons could write *The Symbolist Movement in Literature*” (7). Along with Browning and Meredith, Pater was one of AS’s heroes (70). Although Pater commented positively on AS’s poetry, Pater “urged Symons to devote himself to the art of prose” (71–72). The cooling of their friendship probably came because Pater “disapproved of the frank, or decadent, eroticism of Symons’s poetry, and life” (74); however, even after Pater’s death, AS “continued to regard himself, and to be regarded, as Pater’s disciple” (74). “Symons’s *The Symbolist Movement in Literature* explained an aesthetic mode that Pater chose to divulge only in occasional hints and guesses” (319).


“Eliot acknowledged, several times, his debt to Arthur Symons’s *The Symbolist Movement in Literature*, which he read at Harvard in the second, revised edition of 1908. Years later he appreciated the book as ‘an introduction to wholly new feel-
ings, as a revelation.' It is hard to say how seriously he took Symons's claim that in the literature of French Symbolism 'the visible world is no longer a reality, and the unseen world no longer a dream.' But he was ready to believe that Symbolism was 'an attempt to spiritualise literature, to evade the old bondage of rhetoric, the old bondage of exteriority'” (43). “The chapter of Symons’s book that meant most to Eliot was the one on Laforgue” (44). Yeats seems to have paid most attention to its first chapters, Eliot to its last” (60). “Even when [Yeats] felt it desirable to distinguish a symbol from an emblem, he remained Symons's pupil. He decided that a symbol differed from an emblem in being a gift of nature” (60). “Symons assured Yeats that in reaching for the old symbols he was being modern in Mallarmé’s way” (62). When Eliot read AS’s “Symbolist Movement in Literature, he saw that the modern French form of Symbolism effected yet another disjunction between existence and essence. The motives were secular, chiefly a refusal of the conventions, the positivist syntax, of everyday life” (259).


In his relationship with Symbolism, “it would be wrong to present Yeats as if he were Mallarmé's pupil in all things, or merely a more robust Symons” (292). At first, Yeats did not display interest in French Symbolism but became acquainted with it during a critical period of his development through his friend AS. What AS provided him was not “the pure French of Paris, not even pure Mallarmé, but reverberations congenially impure; mistranslations … but mistranslations perhaps more stimulating to an Irish poet than the real thing” (280). Yeats's attention to symbolism formed more of a phase in his early writing, which he reconciled with elements of the real in his later mythical and experience-oriented stages.


Like AS, who laments the materialism of contemporary society in his introduction to The Symbolist Movement, Wilde turns from “inauthentic” conventional forms of art toward a private art, an art that is paradoxically a mask of self (90). AS’s definition of Symbolism in his essays “Huysmans as Symbolist” describes well Wilde’s work, which “not only establishes links that reify an invisible world,” but also, as AS describes, establishes links between Wilde’s own work with other writers (95).


AS wrote “very luminously” on Watts-Dunton’s history of poetry, which was to “be an essay on the principles of poetic art in relation to all other arts, as exemplified by the poetry of the great literatures” (257). “He tells us that, wide as is the sweep of the treatise, it is but a brilliant fragment, owing to the treatise having vastly overflowed the space that could be given to it. The truth is that the essay is but the introduction to an exhaustive discussion” (257).

The Goncourts’ *écriture artistique* shaped AS’s criticism of art. The English Parnassian movement of the 1870s was a reaction against Victorianism. “In much the same way, the eighteenth century appealed to young writers of the nineties because … its eroticism offered intriguing possibilities for expression which had been frustrated by official mores” (371), and because “it seemed at once young and yet prematurely old, thus ‘Decadent’” (372).


 “[T]his limited [599 entries] bibliography has no covert designs on definition, whether of aestheticism or decadence or fin de siècle. If it should seem to ratify older, more limited notions of ‘fin de siècle’ or ‘the nineties,’ it is simply because such treatments predominate historically, while the scholarly and critical work that will extend and deepen our understanding of that period has, for the most part, only begun [1977] to be written” (xxiii–xxiv). The “principles of selection” are “(1) to include works that deal in a general or specific way with these topics while omitting works that concern themselves exclusively with a single figure or single work without reference to the period as a whole or to the topics of aestheticism and decadence … [and] (2) to favor recent [1977] analytical studies over purely biographical or evaluative accounts” (xxiv). [Includes a subject index with 27 items that refer to AS: 30, 35, 52, 135, 149, 169, 199, 203, 207, 208, 214, 218, 257, 316, 354, 359, 360, 361, 397, 403, 413, 478, 491, 492, 540, 548, 553.]


 “Nor was the New Woman unmoved by the sexual allure of the lower-class male. She did not, it is true, embrace déclassé amours with the same abandon shown by some of Arthur Symons’s poetic speakers; but within rather carefully limited fictional circumstances some heroines of New Woman fiction did experience the *frisson* that would later more completely overpower Forster’s Helen Schlegel and Lawrence’s Lady Chatterley” (442). “This is precisely the sense in which the pastoralism of so much Edwardian and Georgian literature is not so much a repudiation as a belated fulfillment of the new primitivism of the fin de siècle avant-garde. For when what we mean by pastoral is less a matter of shepherdesses and sheep than a mode by which the civilized imagination exempts itself from the claims of its own culture, pastoral from the conventional form we find in the work of Norman Gale or the early Yeats to the ‘urban pastoral’ we meet in the London poems of Wilde, Henley, Symons, Dowson, Le Gallienne, Wratislaw, and Horne is the characteristic mode of fin de siècle avant-gardism” (449).


 Traditionally Decadence has been cast as a literary movement concerned with the artificial and yet overshadowed by a “lurid and sensational” image. However, such a view does not recognize “that Decadence, even on the cultural level, emerged from a linguistic crisis, a crisis in Victorian attitudes towards language brought about by the new comparative philology … that raised a spectre of autonomous language…” (xi–xii). AS’s work breaks from the Victorian tradition stylistically. He uses “a ‘primitive’ mode focused on gesture, a mode we
now recognize as one of the heralds of literary modernism” (214). AS’s “primitive poetic syntax is, we may say, the deep structure underlying his characteristic thematic concerns: artifice, light love, vagrant moods” (217). AS can be linked to Whitman’s attempt at a “democracy of the body,’ that recognition of the common experience of all flesh” and the “urban pastoral” (221). AS’s attention to the music-halls is often a setting for his poetic gestures. In terms of the Decadent movement, “Symons’s part was crucial and he fulfilled it largely because he found in the art of the music-hall a new model for poetic language, one that freed it from the paralyzing choice between Pater’s Euphuism and shapeless colloquial speech” (238). AS’s “anti-linguistic” dance poetry shifts authority from the “intellectual to the sensuous just as Keats did in his ‘Ode on a Grecian Urn.’” His poetry challenges verbal communication as a pre-eminent form of communication. Later Yeats could criticize “modern’ poets like Symons” for “choosing to speak ‘in vulgar types and symbols’” (251).


AS’s criticism of Beardsley’s *Venus and Tannhäuser*—that it “never could have been finished”—reflects Beardsley’s “erratic inspiration” and “self-exhausting ambitions” rather than his failing health—a view “shared by Beardsley’s other early critics…” (26). At the same time Beardsley’s work, like that of AS and Wilde, depended on its opposition to Victorian values of good and evil. [Passing mentions: 26, 31–32, 36, 40, 41.]


AS reinforces [Enrico] Panzacchi’s “style theory” in his description of Decadence as affecting only style. “Symons had a glimpse of [Walter] Binni’s insight on the distinctions between decadence and decadentism, even to the point of recognizing D’Annunzio as an exponent of ‘decadent’ morals and symbolist literary techniques…” (79). [Brief mention of AS.]


AS particularly admired and studied Huysmans, to such a great extent that Symons’s own development in writing followed a similar path to the Frenchman’s. Each had his own phase of naturalism, decadence, symbolism, and *la littérature selon l’ésprit*, which loosely translates to “literature according to the spirit,” or mysticism. AS thought Huysmans as extremely important for an English audience in aesthetic and narration style. Symons will imitate these styles later, eventually leading him to explore realism and symbolism. Again, the literary histories of Huysmans and AS are very similar: their trains of philosophical thought follow a similar path, as does their style of writing. Both play the double role of
critic and poet. A few years later, both authors become symbolistic in their writing. [In French.]


“Music and Memory, To K. W.” (Silhouettes) was dedicated to Katherine Willard, a woman AS met in England in the 1890s and who remained a friend of his through his mental breakdown. (Stern)


The revival of interest in Donne (1872 to 1912) grew from an awakened appreciation of his works and a growing fascination with his personality. Gosse and AS portrayed Donne as a divided man, morbidly sensitive and enigmatical. In the 1890s they saw Donne as a practitioner of psychological realism and a forerunner of Naturalism in England. Reflecting his critical theories, AS’s poetry imitated Donne’s idiom, subtlety, and casuistry. AS made comparatively little use of Donne’s paradox and verbal wit. AS’s interest in metaphysical poetry sparked the later interest in it of Yeats and Eliot. [Informative study.] (Stern)


Raymond Pettibon’s 1999 exhibition is a catalogue titled Raymond Pettibon: A Reader, which complements Pettibon’s own “world-besotted aesthetic” (107). It reflects his imaginative world of the “whimsy, vibrant rhetoric and poetic nuances of the classic Western Tradition,” and includes a mention of AS’s compulsive appreciation for bookbinding, along with Coleridge’s obsession with “proper ink wells” (107). [Brief mention of AS.]


For AS “whose rare gifts of intuition and sympathy, whose alert and inquisitive intelligence and whose patient exactitude of transcription have made him an altogether exceptional interpreter—it is clear that the deliberate method and definite faith of which Stéphane Mallarmé was the aesthetic and Maurice Maeterlinck is the ethical or psychical theorist, are henceforth the only faith and the only method possible” (702). If AS shows “too little sense of proportion in his treatment of this very interesting subject, if he is disposed to exaggerate the importance of some writers and to attribute too readily to others an intimate connection with the school, it must be remembered, on the one hand, that his attitude is frankly that of a neophyte, not of a critic; and on the other, that (though the unity of his book is by no means perfunctory) these are independent studies of different authors, some of which may very well have been conceived quite apart from the general scheme of tracing the development of symbolism in contempo-
The “biographical (and almost autobiographical) details” of the essays are “the most attractive feature of the volume in the eyes of certain readers” (703). “The chapter on Maeterlinck, in some respects the most admirable of all, shows clearly the relations between the dramatist and the philosopher.” AS’s “prose, though it is indefinably exotic and rather obviously betrays its models, is adequate for its purpose, having lucidity, resourcefulness and sometimes eloquence” (704).


“The intelligentsia often romanticized prostitutes, even the less expensive ones, ‘the chance romances of the streets,’ as Arthur Symons called them. Symons was a poet inspired by Baudelaire and other French ‘decadents’” (238).


The Aesthetic movement included a number of authors as early as Keats up until George Moore and W. B. Yeats. While the movement in general reflected a disdain for the age which AS shared, AS may have begun to move “away from the ivory tower, and back to life” (33).


[On Aesthetic movement. Some mention of AS.] [In Norwegian.] (Stern)


Mr. Quennell did for his generation what AS did for ours. “I myself owe Mr. Symons a great debt: but for having read his book, I should not, in the year 1908, have heard of Laforgue or Rimbaud; I should probably not have begun to read Verlaine, and but for reading Verlaine, I should not have heard of Corbière. So the Symons book is one of those which have affected the course of my life.” [Review of Quennell’s book.] (Stern)


AS’s translations of Baudelaire exaggerate his Satanism and make him too much a creature of the nineties. [One of Eliot’s harsher estimates of AS. Review of Baudelaire’s *Prose and Poetry*, translated by AS.] (Stern)


AS’s criticism is “etiolated creation.” (Stern)


“Symons did perform the function of bringing important poets to the attention of English readers; and for that reason his book [The Symbolist Movement in Literature] will remain a landmark. As criticism I cannot say that Symons’s book stands the test of time. He omitted one or two poets of the first importance—notably Tristan Corbière; included one or two writers—Maeterlinck and Villiers
An Annotated Bibliography

de l’Isle Adam—whose reputation is now somewhat diminished; and even when he admired the right authors, one cannot say that it was always for the right reason” (viii).

   “I remember getting hold of Laforgue years ago at Harvard, purely through reading Symons, and then sending to Paris for the texts. I puzzled it out as best I could, not finding half the words in my dictionary, and it was several years later before I came across anyone who had read him or could be persuaded to read him. I do feel more grateful to him than to anyone else, and I do not think that I have come across any other writer since who has meant so much to me as he did at that particular moment, or that particular year” (191). [AS referred to in 4 letters.]

   Regarding the nineteenth century, “As for there being a ‘movement’ or my being of it, the conception of poetry as a ‘pure art’ in the sense in which I use the term, revived with Swinburne. From the puritanical revolt to Swinburne, poetry had been merely the vehicle yes, definitely, Arthur Symon’s [sic] scruples and feelings about the world not withholding the ox-cart and post-chaise for transmitting thoughts poetic or otherwise” (11). “The cult of Poe is an exotic introduced via Mallarmé and Arthur Symons” (218). “Symons: A singular power of technique, and a certain imaginativeness of conception, mostly wasted upon insincere obscurities…. He can be pleasant and cleanly when he chooses: has written things of power and things of charm. But is a slave to impressionism, whether the impression be previous or no…. And in nearly every poem, one line or phrase of absolutely pure and fine imagination. If he would wash and be clean, he might be of the elect” (365).

   AS “is a representative of what is always called ‘aesthetic criticism’ or ‘impressionistic criticism.’ And it is this form of criticism which I propose to examine at once. Mr. Symons, the critical successor of Pater and partly of Swinburne … is the ‘impressionistic critic’” (40). “But if we can recall the time when we were ignorant of the French symbolists, and met with ‘The Symbolist Movement in Literature,’ we remember that book as an introduction to wholly new feelings, as a revelation. After we have read Verlaine and Laforgue and Rimbaud and return to Mr. Symons’ book, we may find that our own impressions dissent from his. The book has not, perhaps, a permanent value for the one reader, but it has led to results of permanent importance for him” (41).

   In The Symbolist Movement in Literature AS’s “impressions” opened “wholly new feelings” in the reader. [Defines the “aesthetic” or “impressionistic” critic and weighs how far such criticism is “feeling” and how far “thought.” Arthur Symons is an “impressionistic critic.” Printed from the Athenaeum 9 July 1920: 40–41. Eliot acknowledges his debt to AS and shows his admiration for his kind of crit-
icism at the same time as he points out that AS’s poetry, being unfulfilled, leaves his creative activity to pour over into his critical prose.] (Stern)


AS's translation is commendable but limited by the overriding influence of the nineties: “his translation is, from his own point of view, almost perfect.... His translation of Baudelaire is a permanent part of literature. Only it is what Baudelaire means to Mr. Symons’ generation; it is not what Baudelaire means to us” (428). In particular, AS’s obsession with religion and vice dominates the valuable introduction. In its entirety, “the present volume should perhaps ... be read as a document expiatory of the ‘nineties,’ rather than as a current interpretation of Baudelaire” (425).


[A biographical account of Ellis’s trip to Paris in 1890 with AS where they met many literary figures, notably Verlaine and Mallarmé.]


“In 1889 AS made his first trip to Paris in my company. In 1890 we took a more extended trip and met, among others, such notables as Verlaine, Huysmans and Mallarmé.” (Stern)


“Upon reading AS’s article on Mistral, I invited him to edit Massinger for the Mermaid Series and entered into what became a long and fast friendship with him. Travelled throughout Europe with him in the nineties and met the prominent poets and artists of the time. In 1894 shared quarters with AS in the Temple.” [Invaluable source of biographical information from one of AS’s closest friends; reliable and very readable.] (Stern)


[Brief mention of AS in a footnote: “In an interesting study of Greco (“A Study of Toledo,” Monthly Review, March 1901) Mr. Arthur Symons has finely characterised these portraits” (118).]


[“This study seeks to investigate the manner in which the drama of W. B. Yeats was influenced by the notion of dance and the figure of the dancer by considering the increasing interest that they aroused in the 1890s in France and England. It examines the way in which a scholarly writer like Mallarmé responded to music-hall performers such as Loie Fuller in prose of a highly theoretical nature, the argument of which linked the view of the dancer as embodying the fusion of humanity with abstraction, emotion with intellect, and the tenets of Symboliste poetry. The credo of the French poet was taken up by English and Irish writers: Wilde, Arthur Symons, Craig and W. B. Yeats himself all produced their own trib-
utes to dance and dancers.”] [Annotation edited from *DAI* 51 (1991): 2369A. Published in 1995 as a book with the same title—see below.]


AS exerted a powerful influence in Yeats’s development as an artist. AS introduced Yeats to the Herodias–Salome theme, to Mallarmé and Verlaine, to things Japanese, and to music-hall dancers. Though eschewing the solipsism in aesthetic ideology and the degree of abandonment AS preferred in dance, Yeats’s work strongly echoes AS’s dislike of realism for the artificial and his desire for mystical imagery in art.


The main fact about the *Savoy* was it was edited by AS when he was sharing rooms and ideas with Yeats. “The two extractable motifs of the magazine [its Pan–Celticism and its bias toward Symbolism] sprang directly from this association.” (Stern)


[Cites AS’s *The Symbolist Movement in Literature* and *Cities of Italy* (with an inscription “James Joyce with many wishes for a happy Xmas 1910”) as part of Joyce’s Trieste library left behind in 1920.]


Lhombreaud’s biography requires more rigor. AS was “the Vergil of this [French] literary underworld” even though he “lacked the capacity for synthesis…” (17). In addition, “Yeats chided him for being too formless” (17). Indeed, AS “spoke grandly of making an aesthetic of all the arts, and he dismissed symbolism and all other movements as inconsequential in this larger scheme” (18). [Ellmann identifies weaknesses in Lhombreaud’s biography but dismisses AS too easily with the view that AS was simply a less gifted and less articulate writer who was always being corrected and guided into the right path by the mythic Yeats.]


AS’s “*The Symbolist Movement in Literature* and W. B. Yeats’s *The Wind among the Reeds*” were published in London, and as if to show that the need was both international and interdisciplinary, Freud’s *Interpretation of Dreams* was published in Vienna. In dissimilar ways the three books recorded the search for a psychic reality which challenged external reality and offered to fix half-glimpsed meanings in a systematic way” (101). Preceding AS, “the main middleman between English and French culture had been George Moore” (102). “What Symons lacked as a critic was the ability to generalize. His remarks are better than his conclusions, yet paradoxically the importance of his book on symbolism was its ruling generalization”: AS “began to accept the view of Yeats, that symbolism was springlike rather than autumnal, and stood for the imagination’s recovery of its lost author-
ity over the body and the material world” (105). “The strength of these conceptions bent Symons and his magazine, the Savoy, towards symbolism too…. He now began to surrender his word ‘impressions’ as a key to the new literature” (108). AS “includes among the symbolists those who reject the world, those who see an unseen universe impinging upon the world, those who accept the world so totally they see it with new eyes, those who regard it as reflecting a quasi-divine order. Yeats never felt that Symons correctly understood the inter-penetration of the symbolic and real worlds, and the essay, ‘The Symbolism of Poetry,’ which he wrote in part as a corrective, offers a much more thoroughgoing claim for a ‘buried reality’ as controlling the world” (109–10). “In our day some of Symons’s subtleties in his book may easily be overlooked” (110).


Yeats believed that AS’s view of the ideal of Decadence was a “fainthearted and precious misconception.” Symbolism, not Decadence as AS has asserted, was the trunk of modern literature. Under the pressure of Yeats’s writings and his lengthy conversations with Yeats in the Temple, AS in “one of the swiftest changes of face in literary history” published The Symbolist Movement in Literature and replaced Decadence with a genial discussion of Symbolism. [Ignores the evolution in AS’s thinking and some of the biographical details occurring between 1893 and 1899 that make AS’s work on Symbolism less unexpected, less the volte face Ellmann believed it to be.] (Stern)


“In this attack upon archaism Yeats was considerably ahead of his time, as a comparison with Ernest Dowson or Arthur Symons confirms” (120). “Yeats’s friend, Arthur Symons, had remarked of the dance that it stood for ‘possession and abandonment, the very pattern and symbol of earthly love. Here is nature (to be renounced, to be at least restrained), hurried violently, deliberately, to boiling point…. ’ This possibility of the symbol, that it might contain both self-expression and self-renunciation, attracted Yeats to it” (168). In Yeats’s “The Song of Wandering Aengus,” the second line may owe something to the opening of Arthur Symons’s ‘The Broken Tryst,’ ‘That day a fire was in my blood,’ which Yeats would have read in The Book of the Rhymers’ Club (London, Mathews, 1892), 19” (298). [1st ed. 1954, 2nd ed. 1964, reprinted 1970.]


In The Symbolist Movement in Literature AS gave currency to the term “symbolism,” to describe the practices of a group of French writers who had hitherto been conceived in isolation from one another. When he gave the public this “magically operative word ‘symbolism,’” he thrust the movement from its infancy into maturity. It is appropriate that AS, a foreigner himself, should be the man to interpret French culture to the English; it was not only his own alien status that made him well-suited to demonstrate the provinciality of the Londoners and their literary movements, but his own nature, attracted to “serpent-charmers,” music-halls, ladies of the evening, and the romance of things exotic, made the art and lives of
French Symbolists a natural subject for him. As a critic, AS lacked the ability to generalize, yet “paradoxically the importance of his book on Symbolism was its ruling generalization.” Yeats was instrumental in weaning AS from his term “decadent” and showing him the possibilities of an idealism which set the soul above the body. AS’s book has excited writers of the twentieth century, most notably Eliot, Synge, and Joyce. [Good general introduction to AS; this introduction with the reprint of the book was largely responsible for the revival of interest in AS which led to the reassessment of his place in literary history.] (Stern)


Yeats introduced Joyce to AS, the man who played “as central a part in the publication of Joyce’s early work as Ezra Pound was to play later.” AS placed one of Joyce’s lyrics in the Saturday Review; he gave Joyce introductions to other editors who might be interested in his work; after failing to get Grant Richards to publish the verses later known as Chamber Music, AS persuaded Joyce to send them to Elkin Mathews and when Mathews published the book, AS wrote its first review, calling it a book of pure poetry, each poem “an instant of ‘made eternity.”’ (Stern)


“The Symons, Arthur, Yeats brings J to meet, 17n; J mentions meeting, 19; his Francesca da Rimini, 19; to help J find publisher, 19n; admires Riders to the Sea, 35; offers again to help J find publisher for poems, 42; out when J calls, 66; writes of Richards’s bankruptcy, 70; mentioned in J’s letter to Richards, 77; sends Chamber Music to Richards, 88; J writing to, 112; J offers to send Dubliners to, 113; advises J to try Constable, 114; might help J with Speaker, 117; J tries Constable accordingly, 122; J sends ‘The Holy Office’ to, 123; J asks for advice about Richards, 168, 169, 170; advises J, 171–72; on Rimbaud, 173n; regarding Chamber Music, 176; sends J Matthews’s letter, 181, 182; J waiting to hear from, 188; no reply from, 189; J proposes as judge of Dubliners, 207; promises to praise Dubliners, 210; reviews Chamber Music, 224, 332–33n; his breakdown, 231; tells J of twelve sales of Chamber Music, 283; J wants his review of Chamber Music, 322; copy of A Portrait to, 386; no reply from, 406.” [From index. AS is mentioned in twenty-four letters. Two letters from AS to Joyce are also included.]


“The Symons, Arthur. J’s idea for article by, 118; wants to meet Larbaud, 121; signs protest against Ulysses piracy, 153; suggests J collect later verse, 155; receives Pomes Penyeach, 162; to write preface for The Joyce Book, 203.” [From Index. AS mentioned in 5 letters.]


AS contributed “a maudlin poem” and “a more interesting essay on Villiers de l’Isle-Adam” to Woman’s World, which Wilde edited (294). When the Ballad of Reading Gaol was reviewed, AS gave it “a handsome notice.” AS “had not until then been one of Wilde’s friends. There had been jokes about the productive
Symons as a joint stock company in which Wilde proposed to take shares but Symons was not jealous or mean-spirited like Henley,” who was jealous of the notice the poem had received and had dismissed it as a “jumble” (560). [Index lists only A. J. A. Symons, but all of the pages listed, except for p. 23, are references to AS.]


Yeats came upon Symbolism, not through AS as some critics have suggested, but through the theories of his father. Yeats came under AS’s influence in 1895 when they lived together and in 1896 when they travelled to Ireland. Both men vowed to dress elegantly. Yeats helped AS to write The Symbolist Movement in Literature. AS gave Yeats “a clearer picture of contemporary developments in literature than the poet, with his imperfect knowledge of French, could have secured by himself,” but AS himself acknowledges that he “had little to teach Yeats about symbolism.” [ Writes of AS with a tone of amusement and tends to underestimate his influence on Yeats. ] (Stern)


[Passing mention of AS’s criticism on Donne, p. 4.]


“J.-K. Huysmans’s novel A Rebours is often called the ‘Breviary of the Decadence’ ... [the] phrase coined by Arthur Symons in ‘J.-K. Huysmans,’ an article that appeared in the Fortnightly Review, March 1892” (119).


Charlesworth’s book approaches Decadence as an extension of the Victorian era. In particular, Charlesworth portrays AS as “so victimized by his personal life that he seemed to close the Decadence by living out almost to the letter what his predecessors had put into theory and art.... Symons, a shrewd critic, saw better into the abyss of the ‘tragic generation’ than anyone save Yeats” (424). [ Engleberg’s tone is partially dismissive on the grounds that the Decadent period is just shedding its embarrassing literary history and because of the failure of Pater’s central belief that “Everyone creates for himself a reality which is personal, incommunicable, and imprisoning” (423).]


By 1900 Yeats made a choice between two views of life and death, one embodied in Pater’s Renaissance, the other in the conclusion to AS’s The Symbolist Movement in Literature. “Although Yeats made no unqualified choice, he emerged far closer to Pater than to Symons.” The chief image of Pater is light and the promise of rich possibilities; AS’s writings depict darkness and the solace of escape. [ Provocative essay. ] (Stern)

It is possible that the conceptions of “picture” and “gesture,” if not the terms, came to Yeats (“Irish Dramatic Movement,” *Plays and Controversies*, 114–15) from AS’s essay, “The World a Ballet” (*Dome*, 1898; reprinted in *Studies in Seven Arts*). AS writes, “and the dancer, with her gesture, all pure symbol, evokes, from her mere beautiful motion, idea, sensation, all that one need ever know of event.” (Stern)


AS’s *The Symbolist Movement in Literature* helped “point toward a changed view of reality and at the same time helped comprise the prelude to ‘modern’ literature (43). [Discusses AS’s work in relation to Symbolism, Decadence, naturalism, and to the writings of several French and British contemporaries. In German.]


“Chronologically Bizzotto’s study ranges from Rossetti’s novella ‘Hand and Soul’ (1850), which gives the book its title and is treated as the archetypical ancestor of the genre, to Arthur Symons’s collection of short stories, *Spiritual Adventures* (1905). Within this time frame she traces the evolution of the genre from what she calls a ‘historical-mythological’ model, through its formal and thematic completion in the work of Pater, to its latest phase in the *fin de siècle*, in which it takes on the character of ‘history of a conscience’” (313).


Among Pater’s friends, AS “saved everything or almost everything; so that in spite of accidental loss since their deaths, a fair proportion of their letters from Pater survives” (xviii). Pater had a “special awkwardness with correspondence itself” and told AS “Letters are such poor means of communication” [Letter 121] (xxiv). Early in his life, AS “had three literary idols: Browning in poetry, Meredith in the novel, and Pater in critical prose” (xxxix). After a close friendship for years, AS and Pater became distanced, “perhaps because Pater disapproved of the frank, or decadent, eroticism of Symons’s poetry, and life. From the start Pater valued Symons’s literary talents and undertook to advance his career with letters of introduction and by using his influence with Macmillan on behalf of Symons’s *Days and Nights* (see Letter 135)” (xl). From the start, Pater felt AS had “poetic talent” (79), but advised him to “make prose your principal metier [sic], as a man of letters, and publish your verse as a more intimate gift for those who already value you for your pedestrian work in literature. I should think you ought to find no difficulty in finding a publisher for poems such as those you have sent to me. I am more than ever anxious to meet you” (80). “Symons dedicated *Days and Nights* to Pater” (89). “Pater’s review of *Days and Nights* appeared in the *Pall Mall Gazette*, 23 March 1889, p. 3. Entitled “A Poet with Something to Say,” it is reprinted in *Uncollected Essays* and in *Sketches and Reviews*” (93). [From the index: “xv n., xvii–xviii & n., xxiv, xxix & n., xxx–xxxi, xxxix–xl, 78 & n., 79–80, 83 & n., 84 n., 87 n., 88 n., 89 n., 90 & n., 91 n., 93 n., 94 n., 96 n., 97 n.,

“Although young Craig seems not to have read the French Symbolist essays on theatre, in the early nineties his friends often crossed the channel and he heard the echo of the Symbolist productions in Paris” (28). “Craig also knew Yeats, who would be the first to use Craig’s screens, and (28) Symons, who was the most ardent disseminator of French Symbolism in England” (29). “Craig adopted the synesthetic, Symbolist approach in the mise en scène, and all his productions were excellent demonstrations of its effectiveness. Each of the sparsely used details had to evoke, reflect, or enhance the idea, the feeling, or the state of mind that the director was interested in. Each detail had to work in concentrating attention on the central idea. *Acis and Galatea* used a single theme. Arthur Symons (36) called it a ‘pattern’ in costume, scenery, and movement” (37). “To grasp the deep impact of Craig’s mise en scène, one must again refer to Symons’ review of *Acis and Galatea*” (46). AS “who followed Craig’s work from his first production, was quick to perceive the distinctive quality of Craig’s scene” (102).


*Arthur Symons als Kritiker der Literatur* examines AS’s childhood and later critical development. In particular Wildi identifies the many influences on AS: “Symons reflects surprisingly often the thinking and even the stylistic peculiarities of the authors who have successively appealed to him. Hence his sympathetic preoccupation, at one time or another, with impressionism, naturalism, symbolism, and decadent art” (342). Despite AS’s limitations, Wildi brings to the surface AS’s theory that the “only true poetry is a kind of ‘embodied ecstasy,’ a purely personal reaction, intoxicating the senses by means of its rhythmical magic…” (342).


[Good early study of AS’s role in the Rhymers’ Club and in the aesthetic and Decadent movement. Devotes a chapter to the *Savoy* and the decline of Decadence.] [In French.] (Stern)

“Crucial to my purposes, Symons theorized his relation to music-hall, as if the apparently universal appeal of Variety demanded of its self-consciously intellectual devotees that they rethink their conventional aesthetic pieties. In the letters and essays Symons wrote on the halls during his most influential years as critic and poet, he consciously mediated between music-hall patrons and special readers interested and capable of broadening their critical vocabulary and cultural values. Symons’s accounts achieve a reflexive awareness that exceeds a mere descriptive account or performance review. They conceptualize what the halls signified, and elaborate on the challenge music-hall presented to traditional cultural hierarchies” (171). “Symons’s assertion that his field of study functions with a purpose and logic he has mastered is of a piece with the attempt to professionalize popular culture as a subject of study” (173). “Symons anticipates modern camp as much as do Oscar Wilde’s maxims” (174). “Symons was drawn to a series of camp topics that mirrored his uneasy position as unaligned intellectual; he adopted a studied pose of distance from the music-hall while at the same time marking his identification with various music-hall patrons and performers” (175). “My essay details what Symons did with camp attitudes and to camp protocols, which I assert worked to frame his reflections on his own critical practice and served as tools with which to think” (175). “Indeed, the two music-hall accounts, early and late in Symons’s music-hall attendance that serve as my primary focus, ‘A Spanish Music-hall’ and the 1896 essay ‘At the Alhambra,’ elaborate upon the tension between participation and distanced observation that defines Symons’s particular spectator style” (175). “Symons anticipated the future of cultural criticism as a professional activity, and these essays equate critical perception with a statement of potentially exclusive expertise” (176). “Both elaborate Symons’s central insight into professional formations: namely, that expert claims are not in fundamental contradiction with egalitarian forces” (176). [176–186 provide a detailed analysis of Symons’s “A Spanish Music-hall” and “At the Alhambra.”] “I believe Symons’s music-hall essays participate, however incompletely, in the re-allocation of cultural capital. Both his triumph and failure suggest the necessary imperfections that accompany the secular labor of the professional” (189).


“The search for the authentic within a performing art inevitably produces essentialist claims that overlook modes of production. Ironically, the very move that seems to validate ‘the popular’ can place it beyond the reach of all but the most expert critics. Just such a move animates the powerful, elegiac narrative that emerged in the late-Victorian age through the writing of such key figures as Max Beerbohm, Elizabeth Robins Pennell, and Arthur Symons on the music hall” (3). “*Music Hall and Modernity* demonstrates how such pioneering cultural critics as Arthur Symons and Elizabeth Robins Pennell used the music hall to secure and promote their professional identity as guardians of taste and national welfare
who were, at the same time, devotees of the spontaneous culture of ‘the people’” (21). [The book reprints as one of its chapters Faulk’s “Camp Expertise: Arthur Symons, Music Hall, and the Defense of Theory” from Victorian Literature and Culture 28.1 (2000): 171–93 with some revisions. See Item 347.]

Unlike some other guides to Browning, AS’s “An Introduction to the Study of Browning (1886) is “virtually a handbook” and “is critically discerning” [from the section on Robert Browning, written by Park Honan] (98). [Comments on AS’s work on Robert Browning, D. G. Rossetti, Coventry Patmore, W. E. Henley, Francis Thompson and Ernest Dowson; continues a bibliographic summary from the first edition of attempts to correct “The Dowson Legend” attributed to AS.]

“The Indian Naidu, who acted as authenticising exotic icon for Arthur Symons, internalised a late nineteenth-century poetic that drew upon the imperialist W. E. Henley as much as Symons and Swinburne in its construction of a reflexive orientalism…” (373).

“How fitting that the first planned garden suburb, Bedford Park, was built in the 1870s as a kind of artists colony and satirized as the ‘aesthetic Elysium.’ Even Arthur Symons admitted, in his classic treatise on decadence, The Symbolist Movement in Literature, that ‘the desire to “bewilder the middle classes” is itself middle-class’” (94). [Passing reference to AS].

[All of these entries but one are to AS’s own work: 230, 391, 404, 510, 595, 731, 1025, 1044.]

[No particular mention of AS but brief description of gap between Victorian and Modern periods. Unfavorable opinion of the book.]

[Ferrà translates AS’s poem “Montserrat” (Images of Good and Evil, 1899) into Catalan with the prefatory note that he has tried to caputre “the soul of the verse” with its “informing spirit and informing sentiment.”]
Ian Fletcher and John Stokes review research on Oscar Wilde: “Edgar Saltus first met Wilde in 1882 and in his Oscar Wilde: An Idler’s Impression (1917, rpt. 1968) recalls their relationship mainly through reconstructed conversation and in a style which at times resembles that of” AS (78). “The most curious quality of” AS’s A Study of Oscar Wilde (1930) “is its ambivalence.” AS “is troubled by Wilde’s pretensions to have been an artist when what survives is his ‘personality’” (82). AS “is uneasy even with his own paradoxical formulation that Wilde was at his most sincere when striking poses. He is more sympathetic to the criticism, most sensitive in response to the Ballad and De Profundis. This book can still be recommended, with the proviso that some previous acquaintance with Symons’ critical approach is probably necessary.” “James Huneker (Unicorns, 1918)” (87). Helmut E. Gerber reviews research on George Moore: “Disgruntled with the state of novel criticism and with the situation in the English theater,” George Moore “allowed Edward Martyn, Arthur Symons, and W. B. Yeats to persuade him to devote his energies to the Irish theater movement” (139). Richard J. Finnerman reviews research on W. B. Yeats: AS’s “dedication of The Symbolist Movement in Literature (1899) to Yeats as ‘the chief representative of that movement in our country’ seems a mistake, for it has resulted in an overstatement of Yeats’s indebtedness to the French tradition” (309). [Some of the pages in the index under AS are references to A. J. A. Symons.]

AS was privy to Olive Schreiner’s reflections of her troubled childhood (52), her work, and her beliefs (184–85). While some scholars viewed her work Dreams as “blasphemous,” AS defended Schreiner’s book in an anonymous review in the Athenaeum, arguing that her “words seemed to chant themselves to a music which we do not hear” (185–86).

Sally Ledger’s and Scott McCracken’s book Cultural Politics at the Fin de Siècle has several shortcomings, namely its forced feel of cohesiveness and its lack of originality of some essays. The book offers provocative essays on vampire legends, Yeats, Blake, and Shelley, in addition to its wealth of recent critical theory, but readers “might wish … for some words on writers like” AS (577).

Richard Ellmann’s Oscar Wilde, Karl Beckson’s Arthur Symons: A Life, and Ian Fletcher’s Aubrey Beardsley portray the importance of their subjects in the development of modernism and their “great strengths in control over their artistic materials and an awareness that they attempt to order the essentially fluid and unstable” (468). Beckson’s biography portrays not just the sensual side of
Arthur Symons, Critic Among Critics

AS but also the part of his personality tied to religious morality. Beckson makes convincing assessments of AS’s importance to Yeats and his role in the development of modernism, particularly in “Symons’s enchantment with the dance as an art form, a fascination that was to earmark modernism” (466). “Like Poe … [AS] was a hard-working journalist for much of his life, whose intermittent, experimental engagements with the creative muse are of no inconsequential proportions in the transition from Victorianism to the present” (467).


[Fisher directs us to Linda K. Hughes’s Graham R.: Rosamund Marriott Watson, Woman of Letters (Ohio UP, 2005) and to her “Women Poets and Contested Spaces in The Yellow Book” (Studies in English Literature, 1500–1900 44.4 (2004): 849–72) in which poems by Dollie (Fisher mistakenly refers to her as “Dolly”) Radford and AS are compared and then concludes with this statement: “The Yellow Book opened up avenues that had previously been fairly closed thoroughfares to woman writers. So this once-infamous publication, regarded as decadent by many contemporary readers and stodgy by a later generation, is now re-established as of critical importance to present-day readers. As with Hughes’s book, this study should be required reading for those concerned with women’s authorship during the transition era” (363).]


“The visual art of Orchardson, Tissot, and, more importantly, Whistler began serious artistic consideration of the urban milieu, which continued through the nineties in the verse of such poets as Symons and Johnson” (169). “[L]ike Beerböhm, Symons, or George Moore, Laurence Housman is an important nineties personage, but, like them, he is not bounded by the decade, and he is due for revaluation” (171).


[Contains bibliographic entries that relate indirectly to AS.]


“Our chief endeavour, then, will be to rediscover what Yeats’s dramatic and theatrical ideals actually were as well as how they evolved out of his personal philosophy of life and his aesthetic as a poet and were tested on the stage of the early Abbey Theatre” (xiii). “By the 1890s Wagner’s influence made itself felt in England. Throughout the decade a steady stream of pilgrims flowed to Bayreuth, among them many of Yeats’s closest associates and acquaintances, including Arthur Symons, Edward Martyn, and George Moore. The idea of a theatre in England on a Wagnerian scale was on the minds of many people” (104). “Moreover, the romantic stories of a bond between mysticism and art that Symons brought back from Paris greatly encouraged Yeats in his plans to transform Ireland through creation of a national theatre” (117). In his early work, Yeats “dis-
covered that in order to maintain a tragic mood it was necessary to achieve ‘a certain even richness’ in dialogue somewhat similar to the ‘experience in monochrome’ (124) that Symons held to be the secret of Maeterlinck’s success” (125).

“As a literary movement, naturalism was rejected with particular vehemence by the puritanical Victorians as well as the adherents of aestheticism, symbolism, and poetic drama” (131). AS “looked down his nose at the scientific method adopted by the naturalists” (131).


AS has emerged as a new hero to critics reexamining the 1890s. [Passing reference to AS.]


During the “unfashionable eighteen-nineties” AS played many roles: “decadent poet,” intermediary who “presided over T. S. Eliot’s encounter with Rimbaud and Laforgue,” translator of Verlaine, and finally the critic, which role “demands attention” (1045). Although praised in countless articles for his “industry and perception” and for knowing what and who was important; AS’s letters addressed to Yeats reveal “anxiety about his own limitations … in the handling of the occult and aesthetic theories of Symbolist critics” (1045). Still, his ability to give meaningful criticism in several different arts shows confidence and is “worth reading” (1045).


“Arthur Symons is one, the main perhaps, conduit between Decadence, Symbolism, and Anglo-American modernism” (484). He displayed the responsiveness characteristic of his era during which the traditional man of letters fell out in favor of the “instant quality of new journalism” (484). However, AS’s prolific, “graceful and alert journalism” drew contempt from some of his contemporaries (484). Perhaps AS’s most interesting works today are his travel pieces in their Pateristic “merging of ‘I’ in ‘eye’” (484). Karl Beckson’s biography imposes order on the tangled web of AS’s activities. However, AS’s personality remains distant, perhaps because his personality does not emerge in the letters which served as the primary source material for the biography.
