Arthur Symons, Critic Among Critic

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“The Savoy (1895–96) ... was an essentially Anglo-French enterprise, planned in Dieppe; for, in the later summer of 1895, England was no place to organize an ‘advanced’ periodical. ... The context also explains Symons’s defensive preface: the periodical would not be ‘realist,’ ‘naturalist’ or ‘decadent,’ it lamely judged that ‘all art is good, which is good art,’ regardless of school. So, no originality for originality’s sake; or audacity for the sake of advertisement; indeed there were no advertisements at all. Nonetheless, the Savoy still represented an attempt to conquer the ‘open,’ the commercial world for ‘advanced’ art. Symons claimed, too, that he would not stud the Savoy with names” (196–97). “[B]y 1895, when his close friendship with W. B. Yeats began, Symons revised his attitude to symbolism. It now struck him as a synthesis of decadent pessimism and submission to the Zeitgeist and impressionist cult of the moment; between a demonic nature and one subject to supersensuous illumination” (198). [Also published New York: Holmes & Meier, 1980.]


The Symbolist Movement in Literature had a formative effect on Yeats and Eliot: “it underlies Yeats’s Ideas of Good and Evil (1903)” and it brought Eliot to imitate AS’s quasi-symbolist and impressionistic verse. Through AS Eliot discovered Laforgue. In literary history, AS bridges the gap in English poetry between late Pre-Raphaelitism and early Imagism. He wrote at least one poem (“Scenes de la Vie Boheme”) which “owes a great deal to the manner of procedure of Laforgue.” His body of poetry traces a movement from naturalism “through a poetic equivalent of French impressionism in painting to something that faintly begins to suggest the Imagism of Hulme and the Ezra Pound of Lustra.” In his relationship to Yeats, their dialogue is not restricted, as Yeats suggests in his Autobiographies, to an exchange of critical doctrines and attitudes, but it also affects their poetry. The main source of Yeats’s preoccupation with the dance image can be traced to AS’s “The Dance of Herodias.” In imitation of Donne, AS attempts, without much success, to write with sexual frankness and conversational ease in his love sonnets. [Fletcher isolates the tensions expressed in AS’s verse, tracing them to the influences affecting his poetry.] There is a tension between revivalism and impressionism and between Zola’s naturalism and Yeatsian occultism. In Days and Nights, Browning’s imprint is clear; in Silhouettes, Pater’s impressionistic evocation of the scene is imitated; in London Nights, it is the music-halls, the dancers, and AS’s search for identity that offer AS his subject. In Images of Good and Evil the dancers are transfigured, and dance as spectacle (see “Javanese Dancers”) becomes dance as quasi-religious ritual. In AS’s poetry, the dancer is always distinguished from the dance; in Yeats’s verse the two are fused. The poetry of the 1890s does not belong to a self-enclosed period, but rather it is part of a literary continuum. [One of the best close studies of AS’s poetry, and particularly of the dance imagery, to date (1960). He is now considered as one of the best authorities on the 1890s.] (Stern) [Reprinted with revisions in Ian Fletcher, W. B. Yeats and His Contemporaries (New York : St. Martin’s P, 1987) 252–66.]

*Amoris Victima*, while beneath *Silhouettes* and *London Nights* in quality, is primarily biographical in nature as it describes AS’s three-year relationship with the dancer known as Lydia. This biographical slant may be the reason that the two different editions differ only slightly. Underneath the poems we can see AS’s dramatization and mythologizing of Lydia which she seems to have accepted, desired, and returned. In addition, Yeats, who shared rooms with AS and had love affairs of his own, shows similarities to AS’s verse in the use of Christian theology to describe the sexual tension and struggling love affair. In the end, Lydia married an older gentleman with money and perhaps *Amoris Victima* documents a “psychological” breakdown in 1896, from which he recovered, but that preceded the more visible and complete mental breakdown later in his life.


Yeats obliquely suggested that Althea Gyles would no longer design covers for his works because she, “after despising” AS and George Moore “for years because of their morals, has ostentatiously taken up with Smithers, a person of so immoral a life that people like Symons and Moore despise him” (60). In September of 1900, AS wrote to Rhoda, his wife to be, that he had received a manuscript of poems from Gyles, “an artist and poet of uncertain but really remarkable talent” (69). AS eventually “succeeded Yeats as her principal patron and a letter of his to Thomas B. Mosher of 5 July 1904 invites the famous pirate of Portland, Maine, to publish her ‘slight, fantastic’ verses with ‘their genuine touch of lyric quality’” (73–74).


“Yeats assumed Symons’s phraseology of ‘pattern’ and ‘rhythm’ and applied them (in an article published also in the *Dome*) to the Symbolist designs of Althea Gyles and subsequently to poetry and to Symbolist ‘total’ theatre and history.” [Fletcher consistently writes intelligently about AS: even in this article where the discussion of AS is slight, one finds that his insights into AS are sound and illuminating.] (Stern)


Ford Madox Ford somewhat inaccurately argued that “it was Arthur Symons who provided the model in free-verse for the Imagists” (51). Although AS’s work was almost always rhymed, he did focus on urban life but “The ideal objectivity of the Imagist is rarely achieved” (51). However, AS’s work is still important from “the point of view of ‘organic’ verse-structure and the creation of ‘images’” (51), which demonstrates that “tradition is not built on ruptures” (53).


On their first meeting. It occurred in 1893, not in the summer of 1895 as AS says in his “Aubrey Beardsley” (1898). [See also Martin Secker, “Symons and Beard-


“In art rhythm is everything,’ Arthur Symons had declared in a Symbolist manifesto published in The Dome of 1898. Yeats assumed Symons’s phraseology of ‘pattern’ and ‘rhythm’ and applied them (in an article published also in The Dome) to the Symbolist designs of Althea Gyles and subsequently to poetry and to Symbolist ‘total’ theatre and history” (139). “With Dowson, however, the case was different. Yeats followed Symons, who had presented (140) Dowson in 1900 as a conventional poète maudit, ‘a demoralized Keats,’ though understandably Symons makes little attempt to associate Dowson with his contemporaries. Dowson, however, had also done his mythologizing, and this ran counter to Symons, and to Yeats’s association of the Tragic Generation with the protest against Positivism” (141). [“Note: A number of the pieces reprinted below have appeared before; all have been revised, and several expanded” (viii). On 252–66, reprints Fletcher, Ian. “Explorations and Recoveries—II: Symons, Yeats and the Demonic Dance.” London Magazine 7 (June 1960): 46–60.]


“Wilde’s and Symons’s impressionist cityscapes may not escape from verbs, but they are often deliberately weak ones” (12). [Passing mention. Also published New York: Holmes & Meier, 1980.]

374. Flint, Richard Charles. “Fin de Siècle: The Concept of Decadence in French and English Art During the Late-Nineteenth Century.” Diss. Indiana Univ., 1980. AS’s criticism helps both to define Decadence and describe contemporary artists. AS accurately identified Beardsley’s stylistic relationship with Decadence: “Symons grasped and appreciated how, through purely formal operations, Beardsley could effectively modify or transmute expressive content … [and] that the artist’s sense of beauty necessitated the inclusion of gratuitous props or ornaments which simultaneously embroidered and dissembled the initially chosen motifs” (144). [Annotated from the dissertation. Passing mention and use of AS’s work to describe and position Decadence.]


Regarding the Yellow Book, “Volume I also contains nine short poems by six poets, almost all young. The poems are of varying merit and have no thematic similarities. Only Arthur Symons’s ‘Stella Maris’ could be conceivably shocking” (76). “Oscar Wilde once declared that Henley killed any magazine he got his hands on; whether or not Henley would do better with The New Review was debatable.” “Henley published other poets who appeared in The Yellow Book: Arthur Symons, Stephen Phillips, and Nora Hopper” (81).

AS “had been no more than a friendly acquaintance of Dowson” yet his “very unpleasant accusations stuck, and the Dowson legend was created.” AS’s “beastly slurs were no more than unfounded libel. I tried to balance the record to some extent in 1934. In 1967 Henry Maas and I, with so much more detailed knowledge of Dowson’s hard working life, under the shadow of inevitable death, did, I hope, lay the ghost. Dowson as the greatest English poet of his age with Lionel Johnson as his nearest rival gains in reputation while Symons, like the ghost of Hamlet’s father, had disappeared behind the battlements” (iv). [From the “Preface.” No index.]


The interest in the Aran Islands was shared by writers looking for a “medieval, prehistoric, pagan, illiterate” community. Synge’s observations in The Aran Islands are “harsher but even more genuinely romantic than Symons’s” who described his trip using “the discourse of dream ... as well as the legendry of enchanted islands...: ‘More than anything I have ever seen, this seashore gave me the sensation of the mystery and the calm of all the islands one has ever dreamed of’” (254). AS’s “ingenuous” stance when describing his experiences with the people is one of civilized man looking down on the primitive islanders whom he finds “‘simple’” and the women “‘placid animals on whom emotion has never worked in any vivid or passionate way’” (256). Meanwhile Synge found the women to “share some of the liberal features that are thought peculiar to the women of Paris and New York” (256). [Has a similar focus and contains the same information about AS as Foster’s “Certain Set Apart: The Western Island in the Irish Renaissance.”]


The western island “real and mythical, and one’s attitude to the western island, mattered greatly in the whole cultural as well as literary renaissance” (261). Of the many literary figures, including Synge and Joyce who visited the Aran Islands, AS and Yeats also visited in 1896. AS’s description uses “the language of dream, fetched up out of symbolism, aestheticism and the Celtic Twilight” (268). [References to AS, 268–69.]


[Has a similar focus and contains the same information about AS as “Certain Set Apart: The Western Island in the Irish Renaissance.”]


AS’s friendship with Yeats was a powerful force in the development of Yeats’s art. AS introduced Yeats to several of AS’s own “preoccupations,” most notably to hashish, dance, and several occultist and religious writers (109). AS also guided Yeats through Verlaine, Mallarmé, Pater, and French dramas, including Jean Marie Villiers de l’Isle-Adam’s play Axël, which AS viewed as the “origin of the symbolist drama ... [and] pure symbol” (138). Yeats acknowledged the close-ness of their relationship, and corresponded with AS after AS’s mental breakdown, though later his letters lapsed (391–92). In The Tragic Generation, Yeats presents AS and his generation “as a generation doomed by their search for liberation” (110), while Yeats himself found salvation “by consecrating himself to the search for a cause” (110).

“Arthur Symons and George Moore both attended the Tuesday evening gatherings and took back to England the new theories of French symbolism. Symons became one of the first exponents of Mallarmé’s aesthetics” (279). [Published 1953, third impression 1970.]


“In the Victorian Collection at Brigham Young University are … the volumes of Browning’s works that Arthur Symons … used for his An Introduction to the Study of Browning published by Cassell in 1886. All but three are signed by Symons and contain penciled notes in the margins in Symons’s handwriting. The first edition of Symons’s study for which these … volumes served as some of the primary sources is also in the Victorian collection. Symons’s introduction to Browning (with its accompanying source volumes) is a valuable document in the history of Browning criticism. This article briefly traces the genesis of Symons’s work on Browning and suggests its importance in Browning studies” (47).


[Chapter One, Biographical Introduction: Although James Joyce was a remarkably original writer, his radical innovations often obscure his debt to literary tradition. Undoubtedly one of the most important phases of that tradition to be neglected in studies of Joyce is his affinity with the literature and criticism of the writers of the aesthetic movement. Of all the writing of the transition period that could be examined as an exemplification of the milieu in which Joyce worked, that of Arthur Symons seems the most suitable because it contains some of the shrewdest and most eclectic views of the time and was Joyce’s acknowledged introduction to French symbolism. When Symons’s virtual storehouse of commentary is applied to Joyce’s art it becomes another key to the Joycean puzzle and documents a whole generation’s transition from late Victorianism to early modernism. Chapter Two, The Poetic Overture: A comparative study of Joyce and Symons reveals their common interest in impressionistic poetry, in their view of women as both fascinating and destructive, and in fusing stimuli from various artistic media. Joyce’s poems in Chamber Music are modeled on the imagery, rhythm, and tone of Symons’s 1890s poetry. Chapter Three, Imaginary Portraits of the Artist: After his poetic overture, Joyce demonstrated his interest in the artistic mind in his fiction as did Symons in his psychological short stories. They both glorify isolated artists who are secular priests in the religion of art…. Chapter Four, The Aesthetic Image: Their use of religious terminology to express a secularized view of the epiphany shows that their interest is in art, not theology. They make free use of the horizontal correspondences suggested by music and painting. Chapter Five, Intermingling of the Arts: The analogies among the arts evident in the works of Symons and Joyce are part of an important concept promoted by Mallarmé that art should be evocative. Chapter Six, Evocation: A Theory of the Novel: Symons in his theories and Joyce in his fiction both eschew photographic realism as the mere “portrayal of externals.” They prefer rather the poetic transformation of fact to produce an art more allusive and suggestive than statement. Joyce’s style from A Portrait through Ulysses to Finnegans Wake shows
a transition to the modern evocative style Symons championed.] [Annotation edited from DAI 32A (1972): 4609A.]

AS “documented the literary movements of his day probably more completely than any other critic at the time, and when this virtual storehouse of commentary is applied to Joyce’s art it becomes another skeleton key to the Joycean puzzle. The earliest evidence that we have that Joyce was applying Symons is in the impressionistic verse of Chamber Music” (70). Joyce may have taken as his immediate model Symons’ Amoris Victima (1897)” (71). Dubliners is in the evocative, impressionistic style that Symons found in French authors and used in his own writing. The idea of epiphany in Stephen Hero is “closely aligned to the ‘spiritual vision’ that Symons assigns to the symbolist view” (74). AS saw “Mallarmé as the high ‘priest’ in the new literature that was fast becoming ‘a kind of religion, with all the duties and responsibilities of the sacred ritual,’” an attitude that is closely aligned to Stephen’s in A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man (75). AS “feels that Joyce attempted to avoid the ‘bondage of rhetoric’ by following Mallarmé” (76). “Like all Joyce scholarship the task is a forbidding one because as Tindall observes, ‘James Joyce was ... indebted to the aestheticism of the nineties, but he hid it like a Jesuit.’” (77).

After reviewing Wilde’s Intentions, AS writes that “Wilde can be admirable even when his eloquence reminds us of the eloquent writing of others” (92). AS’s comment demonstrates “how Wilde’s language tends to disappear behind itself” (92). That Wilde typographically mimicked some of Whistler’s titles should not be mistaken for “plagiarism”; rather it exemplifies AS’s belief in the “consciousness of ‘the charm of graceful echoes’”(99). One could argue that Le Gallienne and AS “were invented by Wilde”(104).


Yeats met AS in the early nineties, and depended much on his knowledge of French to guide him through the French Symbolists. “Yeats’s defence of the erotic realism of Symons is so much based on Yeats’s spiritual aesthetic that he gives a rather chaste impression” of London Nights. [Traces Yeats’s literary career

“In the two volumes of this edition we have attempted to collect every piece of prose published in Yeats’s lifetime which he acknowledged or which can reasonably be attributed to him and which is not currently in print either in his own collections, in Allan Wade’s edition of the letters or in Mrs. Yeats’s posthumous edition” (1). “Yeats’s appreciations of Arthur Symons and Althea Gyles … set forth the ideals of the symbolist movement which Yeats tries, in the articles on Maurice Maeterlinck, to connect with the Celtic awakening” (25). “Yeats and his allies produced the material for such ‘sacred books’ as *Ideals in Ireland* and *Ideas of Good and Evil*, the most comprehensive alliance of Symons’s symbolists with Angus Oge” (26). “The second review by Yeats of Arthur Symons’s work, a review of *Amoris Victima* (1897) in *The Bookman* for April, 1897, contains his most impassioned defense of the decadents, a group with which Yeats, by his insistence on a literature expressing a philosophy of life and race, had as many differences as opinions in common” (39).


AS wrote “decadent verse not much different from” George Moore’s (79). AS became Moore’s traveling companion on his Paris vacation in 1890. While in Paris, the two English critics attended a showing of Ibsen’s *Ghosts*. So much did they enjoy Ibsen’s experiment in “free theatre” that the two “hatched plans to campaign for an equivalent” movement in London (213). Katherine Bradley and Edith Cooper, the women playwrights publishing under the name of “Michael Field,” were great friends of AS. AS led Moore to Pearl Craigie, the American author bearing the pen name of John Oliver Hobbes (230). Following a visit to Dieppe and Paris, AS and Aubrey Beardsley met Moore at Edmund Gosse’s Sunday dinner and informed him of their plans for the Savoy. Both AS and Moore contributed to the manuscript of Edward Martyn’s *Maeve*. AS resolves a minor disagreement between Yeats and Moore over the portrayal of Grania in their cooperative play. After reading Joyce for the first time, Moore maintained that Joyce’s verse “echoes of an echo of Paris Symbolism [AS]” (319). Believing that AS had “recovered from his senses in an extraordinary way,” Moore recommended that AS write his biography (418). Because Moore had refused to meet with AS until the latter had “come to [his] senses,” AS denies the commission (418n8).


Swinburne, Pater, and Wilde realize as do Rossetti, Morris, AS, and Dowson that a fragmented, “contradictory vision of life is inevitable” (8). While an awareness of paradox is not unique to Aestheticism of the 1890s, the Aesthete’s acceptance
and decision to explore the generative power of paradox is. Though Eliot would like to dismiss “‘aesthetic’” and impressionistic criticism, which Eliot traces from Pater to AS (126), Eliot cannot escape Aestheticism and actually helps import Aesthetic ideals into modernism, most notably that “of the autonomy of art” (128). However, though the early Aesthetes such as Rossetti and Pater maintained the “tentativeness” and “paradoxicality” (128) of art for art’s sake, with AS and Eliot it became a method, and thus “antithetical” (128) to the initial power of paradox. Consequently, paradox became a solution, instead of a source of interpretive struggle.

AS’s poetry has “a competent adroitness, a power of expressing quite fully and clearly all that he could see or hear or feel” (196). However, his poetry is limited by the very fact that he concentrates on “moods” and not on greater emotions: “He is a poet, but he does not see men and things poetically; he accepts them for what they seem, and interprets them sensitively, without violence or vulgarity” (196). In fact, AS’s poetry is “the most literary, the most refined and the least provocative poetry in the world” (196). AS’s greater accomplishments are reflected in his translations and criticism. “Mr. Symons’s criticism is impersonal,” and he observes his subjects with “ceremonious patience,” as well as “untiring watchfulness behind slightly dimmed glasses…” (196–97). AS’s The Romantic Movement in [English] Poetry represents “Mr. Symons’s best book and among the best of all commentaries upon English poetry” (196). [A mixed review of AS’s work.]

“Unfortunately, [John] Lane’s championing of radical new writers had come at a price. The Yellow Book was a notable achievement, but it alienated a significant section of the literary establishment, mainly through Lane’s choice of Aubrey Beardsley as art editor. The magazine’s startling appearance and the vaguely unwholesome ambience of some of Beardsley’s contributions had won it a decadent reputation, even though many of its contributors, Gissing for example, could hardly be claimed for the ‘decadent movement.’” “To associate one’s work with Verlaine, even in passing, was to proclaim markedly decadent sympathies in the England of the 1890s: in the early years of the decade, Arthur Symons had worn his friendship with the French poet as a badge of rank” (121–22).

[Passing mention of AS’s admiration for Pater’s work. Additionally, the author misconstrues AS’s praise of Pater as a “homosexual undertone” (BR3).]

[Occasional references to AS’s interview with Olive Schreiner.] (Stern)
   “The English poet and critic Arthur Symons wrote that ‘Seville, more than any other city I have seen, is the city of pleasure. It has the constant brightness, blitheness, and animation of a city in which pleasure is the chief end of existence, and an end easily attained.’ He penned those words in 1903; nearly 100 years later, they still ring deliciously true” (46).

   The playwright, Stephen Philips, who in his time was often compared to Webster, Chapman, Dumas, Milton, Marlowe, and Shakespeare, puzzled scholars when he fell rather quickly from public favor, where he remains still (226–27). AS acknowledges the virtues of Phillips’s works, but also notes Phillips’s lack of originality. More important in tracing Phillips’s demise is the “change from High Victorian poetry to Imagism” (228). Phillips was responding to the critics’ demand, voiced by AS, for a “literary drama” (229).

   [All but five of these items refer to AS’s own work: 129–32, 425, 687, 717, 912, 1026, 1145, 1158–59, 1208–1209, 1295–96, 1491, 1832, 1836, 1918–21, 2168.]

   “‘Fatal Initiation: The Life of Arthur Symons’ is a full-length screenplay based on the life of British critic Arthur Symons. The screenplay is preceded by an introductory essay giving brief biographical information and the methodology used to adapt Symons’s life into film. The screenplay focuses on the period before Symons’s mental breakdown during which he rose from being virtually unknown to become the most influential critic of his time. The screenplay is composed in a traditional three act structure. The first act focuses on Symons’s relationship with his charismatic and deeply religious father as well as a close friend, Katherine Willard. The first act ends when Symons decides to pursue a literary career in London. The second act deals with Symons’s rise to literary success, his friendship with W. B. Yeats, and most importantly his infatuation with a dancer named Lydia at the Empire theater. The art Symons creates in the second act is part of a movement revolutionizing Victorian literature and laying the foundation for modernism. In the third act, Symons’s decision to stand by his commitment to art, rather than compromise his beliefs in order to marry Lydia, leads to a mental breakdown from which he never recovers. Throughout the film, Symons’s noble commitment to artistic principles is counterpoised against the clearly valuable influences of his religious upbringing and opportunities for loving relationships” (iv–v).
Assuming the role of spokesman for the English literati, AS, as Gautier and Verlaine did for the French, offers one of the many definitions of “decadence” in the 1890s. He combines both “the moral and the theoretical” in his definition, describing decadence as possessing “an intense self-consciousness, a restless curiosity in research, an over-subtilizing refinement upon refinement, a spiritual and moral perversity” (75). While some scholars question the applicability of the term “decadence” to such a diverse period as the 1890s, exploring the variety of authors that typically fall under this label helps us “untease” the “decadent issues” in Hemingway’s work (76).

AS’s life and art reflect many of the cultural tendencies of his time. His appropriation of women, particularly the dancer Lydia, distorts female gender into his own “personal mythos,” a problem shared by his surrounding culture at large. In particular, the responses of the “artistic brotherhood” to AS’s breakdown reveal the further gender distortions in their “outrage at the impecunious Rhoda and virile contempt for Symons’s attempts to present himself as Casanova” (115). Regardless AS “crafted a myth of art and the artist that would greatly influence the high Modernism of Yeats, Joyce, Eliot, and Pound” (107). In fact, AS’s “presentation of the art world and artist became one of the most underanalyzed idées réçues in Modernism” (109). As the “herald of Modernism,” AS announced in his criticism and art “its worst excesses of elitism, solipsism, and the great divide between high and low culture” (115). Passages of AS’s work show remarkable similarities to concepts in The Waste Land as well as in Joyce’s work (110). For its many strengths, the weakness of Beckson’s biography, just as of Richard Ellmann’s Oscar Wilde, resides in the attempt to de-emphasize the society in which AS operated.

AS, like many of Eliot’s contemporary critics, was “unable to reconcile” Wilde’s more Christian, “pastoral themes” in his earlier stories with the themes in Dorian Gray (62). After Wilde’s prison experience, most critics, while agreeing the experience was a “turning point” in Wilde’s career, are divided as to Wilde’s apparent sincerity. AS, for example, sees Wilde’s work after his release from prison expressing a “new sincerity,” while W. E. Henley argues Wilde’s words are “merely new poses” (171).

“Understanding the road that economics and aesthetics took at the end of the nineteenth century is crucial to our understanding of the possibilities of democratic market society today” (291). “The convergence of economics and aestheticism” (298) during the 1890s is exemplified by “the specularity of Arthur Symons’s and J. A. Symonds’s respectively hetero- and homoerotic poetic objectifications” (299). They and characters such as Conrad’s Kurtz and Wilde’s “spectacular stages” epitomize the “modern economic man.” “They are all insatiable” (299).


“John Stokes’s thesis is subtle, not so much argued as embedded in the research as a matter of faith: that Wilde is able to be all things to all people…” (80). “[T]his is the research we came here for, this is the kind of book I want to go home to: an escape from the business of academic life into the life of the mind.” The essay on Dieppe is one of those that shows “how inextricably aesthetics and economics were connected at the fin de siècle. In Dieppe, again, there are the outdoor markets loved by Renoir and the ‘internalized’ shops tempting Arthur Symons. The aesthetic and economic city Wilde returned to after prison hosted bohemian artists and bourgeois families, who all met, or passed one another, on the beach. Other essays, more mistily suggestive, are on ‘Romantic Incarnations,’ in which Wilde’s reconstruction of the Romantic hero is contrasted with Symons’s, and on Beardsley and Jarry’s absorption into their theatrical styles” (82).


“Conder [was] building up that wealth of sexual experience which would make him such a congenial companion to English ‘Decadent’ poets and to writers Arthur Symons and Ernest Dowson and which he would later use to enhance his mystique, enthralling younger artists with tales of nocturnal Paris” (83). “Conder’s ambivalence towards English society in the mid-1890s helped position him with the group of English artists and writers who identified more with French literature and living than with their native habits. His friends at this time included Arthur Symons” (127). “In spite of his latter-day admiration for Conder, Symons was never as close to him as was Rothenstein” (144). “Just as Mr Symons and Mr Dowson could translate Verlaine into English verse, while preserving all the personality of the lines, Mr Conder can translate the poem into paint” (202).


The reissue and elaboration of AS’s essay on Beardsley reveals Beardsley’s continuing importance as an artist. AS’s edition has been enlarged with the inclusion of “twenty-five plates to the original six” (62) as well as some new comments on Beardsley’s letters. AS, though, should have taken the effort to criticize the editor for including several trivial letters and notes that detracted from the work. The
most interesting addition to Symons’s work are several never-before-published drawings, particularly Beardsley’s charming “Evelina and her Guardian” (63).


“Walter Pater (1839–1894): Le forme della modernita (The Forms of Modernity), edited by Elisa Bizzotto and Franco Marucci, is composed of eight essays in English and six in Italian.... Those by Michela Vanon Alliata, Giovanna Franci, and Laurel Brake place Pater’s work in relation to other fin de siècle figures, including James, Wilde, and Arthur Symons” (945–46).


[Quotes two unpublished letters found in the Princeton University Library Collection to illustrate the two chief components of AS’s aesthetic heritage, one lent by Pater, the other by Mallarmé.] Pater, in a letter dated 8 January 1888, told the youthful poet to make criticism his métier and save his poetry for his most intimate acquaintances. Mallarmé, in praising AS’s translation of “Hérodiade,” celebrated AS’s poetic gift and taught him the practices of the French Symbolists. [Published copy of Pater’s letter appears in Roger Lhombreaud’s Arthur Symons: A Critical Biography (1963): 43. Mallarmé’s letter does not appear elsewhere.] (Stern)


The poetry of the Art-for-Art’s-Sake movement in the “Yellow Nineties” gains in significance when its debt to the French Symbolists is acknowledged. The close union between poets and artists of England, AS, Dowson, Yeats, Beardsley, Conder, and Sickert, and the French Symbolists and Impressionists, Gautier, Verlaine, Mallarmé, Rimbaud, and Lautrec, is best illustrated in “the life story of the Savoy, which, in its brief spurt of brilliant life in 1896, was more truly representative of the time than the Yellow Book. It would not be rash to call the Savoy an Anglo-French periodical, and in this, certainly, the first of its kind.” Letters from Mallarmé, reviews of the Savoy (Courrier Français, 2 February, 1896: 8–9; 17 May 1896: 9; 31 May 1896), translations by AS, Moore, and Dowson of poems by Mallarmé, Verlaine, and Verhaeren, as well as the inclusions of illustrations and literary “causeries” of things French in the Savoy, all suggest the extent to which the avant-garde of England had fused with that of the Continent. From the summer of 1895, when the Savoy had its origins in Dieppe, until December 1896, when its last issue appeared, AS and his circle brought French poetry and culture to England while they brought themselves to the attention of the French. Although AS’s translations of Verlaine’s verse were more wooden than Dowson’s, his role as editor of the Savoy, poet, and trumpeter of Verlaine to the English more than made up for this deficiency in the eyes of the men whose verse he translated. [The quotations from unpublished letters found in the AS collection at Princeton University Library and from French periodicals make this article helpful as well as chatty.] (Stern)

[The dissertation presents a selective re-edition of the *Savoy* magazine, 1896, with a long critical introduction and biographical and critical notes.... The work is divided into three parts, of which the first is the long critical introduction. The first half of this essay contains the story of the *Savoy*, from the tragedy of the Wilde trial, the demise of the *Yellow Book*, and the great exodus of the esthetes and intellectuals to France. The *Savoy* is followed from its beginnings in Dieppe, in 1895, through the various issues and an account is given of the problems arising from the art editor, Aubrey Beardsley’s, youthful eccentricities; the publisher, Leonard Smithers’ personal and professional peculiarities and the editor, Arthur Symons, paradoxical bohemianism. The first part of the discussion ends with the suicide of Hubert Crackanthorpe in Paris, the last attempts to revive the *Savoy* in October, 1896, and a critical appraisal of the magazine by some of the major contributors. This discussion was aided by the use of numerous unpublished letters of Ernest Dowson, Arthur Symons, Stéphane Mallarmé, Hubert Crackanthorpe, William Sharp, and others. The second half of the Introduction is a critical appraisal of the contents of the *Savoy*, grouping the various items into the several characteristic trends of the period.... The body, or second part of the dissertation, comprises the contributions from the *Savoy* itself, chosen for artistic merit, for readability and interest to contemporary readers, and for traits characteristic of the *fin de siècle*.... The third part of the dissertation is the biographical and critical sketches of the authors who contributed to the selection above.... The result of the whole work has been to produce a critical edition of the major English literary periodical in the Eighteen-Nineties, achieving thereby a literary history of the period, with a discussion of the events of the times, and the personalities of the people who contributed in the diverse artistic movements of the *fin de siècle*. Seventy-five illustrations, consisting chiefly of photographs of the Beardsley drawings appearing in the original, accompany the text.] [Annotation edited from *Dissertation Abstracts* 17 (1957): 3014–15.]


Nordau’s *Degeneration* “was merely the most hostile deployment of a medical and pathological model accepted by most of the decadents themselves. Certainly Symons employed it in his sympathetic accounts of Ernest Dowson and Aubrey Beardsley, almost deriving their talents from their tuberculosis” (27). “Within the Rhymers’ Club, the decadence operated as an alliance between Anglo-Irish literati (including Yeats), Oxonian dilettantes (including Dowson and Johnson) and provincial Grubs (including Symons and Le Gallienne)” (36).


[The Rhymers’ Club did more than any other group of poets to resolve the problems that confronted English literary culture in the early 1890s: the problems arising from such issues as the maturing of English imperialism, the crisis in Irish nationalism after Parnell, the rise of Grub Street journalism (and the consequent literary battles between aesthetic and philistine), and late Victorian conflicts over theories of literary inheritance.... In terms of literary theory, the Rhymers reacted along generational lines to the Victorians’ classicist and evolutionary literary theories, and conducted the period’s most intelligent and productive debate about
Decadence. In terms of literary politics, while the laureateship remained vacant, the Club contended for the Regency.... Specifically, the Club played a crucial if de facto role in the Irish renaissance, achieving casually what the soon-disabled Irish Literary Societies had been formed to do. Moreover, the group disintegrated not because of these Celtic projects, but because its publishing alliances faltered and its allies, Wilde and Beardsley, were attacked. [Annotation edited from Digital Dissertations, DAI 43A (1983): 3919A. Published, unrevised, New York: Garland, 1988. No Index.]


“In Arthur Symons’s The Symbolist Movement in Literature, Symons speaks of the symbolic nature of language and efforts the French have made to produce a literature ‘in which the visible world is no longer reality, and the unseen world no longer a dream.’ Together, these viewpoints argue for the richness of the subconscious mind and the power of its archetypes to counter the burdens of external experience” (7). Among the members of the Rhymers’ Club, AS was (along with Dowson and Lionel Johnson) one of the three most important to Yeats. AS’s “treatment of Ernest Dowson reflects the self-destructive fascination of the aesthetic temperament” (54). “Symons’s madness in 1908 and Davidson’s suicide in 1909 reinforced a sense of the tragedy and futility of these poets’ careers and caused the survivors to look back upon that era with new seriousness and understanding” (104). “The narrowness of [AS’s] contribution [to the Rhymers’ Club anthologies] helps us understand the limitations of Symons’s expression and to anticipate the difficulties he would encounter as the decade progressed. A skilled craftsman in his particular vein, he could not expand or develop new facets of an essentially reductive art. Pater’s prognostications concerning his career seem sound in view of this fact. His critical prose had intellectual content and was, thus, valuable to others. His verse was intellectually and philosophically stark and, thus, enjoyable only to those who shared his delight in music halls and ladies of the night” (122). [Includes AS’s background in London, influence on Yeats (including AS’s symbol of the dancer as employed by Yeats), portrait of Ernest Dowson, poems in Rhymers’ Club anthologies, and the effect of the Wilde debacle on London Nights.]


The “massive, glamorous, and titillating myth” of Ernest Dowson was “vigorously fed after his death by a well-meaning Arthur Symons” (376). AS also “praised Dowson’s genius for ... silence” (386), and “perceived with uncanny accuracy [the] quality that made Dowson both irresistible and flawed in his poetry” (394).

In an important contribution to cultural studies, Koritz explores through both dance and literature the intersection of “aesthetic, gender, and class ideologies” on the female body (152). In addition to discussing “the ways in which the female performer is positioned by available discourse” (152), the “modernist ideology” (152) of Shaw, the Ballets Russes, and Eliot, Koritz also demonstrates how the ideals of Symbolism as expressed in writings of AS, W. B. Yeats, Oscar Wilde, Isadora Duncan, and Gordon Craig are negotiated and appropriated in other fields, such as dance and vice versa.


In a “valuable contribution to cultural studies” (420), Koritz’s book draws from several disciplinary fields to explore in dance and literature the intersecting cultural influences of aesthetics, gender and class as they converge on the female performer during the 1890s and 1920s. Koritz devotes time to AS’s and Craig’s “dehumanization” of the female performer, first through AS’s notion of the dancer as a “living symbol,” and then through Craig’s construct of the Ubermarionette (419). Her discussion of these various cultural fields provides a “disquieting” analysis of symbolism (420).


While AS praised Henley on his second volume, he questioned his lack of rhyme, which he considered “one of the beauties of poetry” (145). Later in his life AS more seriously criticized Henley; however, Henley’s verse is important in the development of modern poetry and free verse. Wallace Martin linked the two, writing that “the commonplace as a source of subjects can be traced to Henley and Symons” (146). Henley was particularly important to the development of imagist poets.


AS, emissary to Smithers, was sent to propose the creation of the Savoy to Beardsley. AS was a Cornishman who prided himself on not being Anglo-Saxon, found the “French outlook habitual to him,” and revered Mallarmé and Verlaine. [Denies AS the importance due him; in a book devoted to the Art-for-Art’s-Sake movement a fingernail sketch of AS is hardly adequate.] (Stern)


“Before we permit Dowson to speak for himself out of a series of twelve newly-discovered and unpublished personal letters, let us examine his legend from the day in 1900 when Mr. Arthur Symons unhappily inaugurated it in an obituary notice, afterwards included as a Preface to the first collected edition of the ‘Poems’ 1905, and frequently reprinted since. This essay, certainly the most widely-read account of the poet, has been the source of nearly every stream of calumny concerning him which has flowed in ever-widening ripples during this century” (94). The fact that AS did “not know the poet sufficiently well has led
him into performing the greatest disservice to Dowson’s personal reputation” (94). “Having examined a considerable amount of evidence, and considered its fluctuations and metamorphoses, in a search for the truth, I am now prepared to side with Plarr and Mr. Jepson in their reasonable good opinion; with the reservation, however, that Dowson’s careless mode of living and indifference to the expectations of society laid him open, perhaps, to a tithe of the criticism and reproach that he has received” (109). [Traces “The Dowson Legend” through several commentators. Carries the note “Read March 9th, 1938.”]


Though many major artists experience a decline after initial success, John Everett Millais’s descent into mediocrity is “one of the more spectacular cases” (45). Many scholars attribute Millais’s decline to his marriage to John Ruskin’s wife, Effie. After Millais’s successful wooing of Effie from Ruskin, Millais had to turn out as many paintings as possible to keep up with the care she and her children required. AS essentially supports this view in his widely accepted statement that Millais did not make the “great refusal” and instead painted for money (45).


Eliot discovered the French Symbolists through AS’s The Symbolist Movement in Literature. AS “remarked of Laforgue that ‘He will not permit himself, at any moment, the luxury of dropping the mask: not at any moment’” (30). [Passing reference to AS.]


AS was a talented critic and creator of many arts, including poetry, fiction, description, drama, journalism, and visual. His remarkable talents that anticipated so many modern artists and influenced so many of his contemporaries deserve a biography. Beckson’s biography, even if a little heavy on “anecdotal detail,” creates a portrait of AS based on his personal and literary life. AS’s influence on Yeats, Eliot, Joyce, and his anticipation of Beckett and Pound combined with his influential exposition of French Symbolism in The Symbolist Movement in Literature reveal AS’s many, diverse accomplishments. [In French.]


[Checklist of writings by O. Wilde, L. Johnson, AS, G. Moore, V. Paget, E. Gosse, G. Saintsbury. Passing mention of AS.]


“The annotated bibliography of writings about Arthur Symons formerly in preparation under the direction of Robert Mowery has been temporarily suspended because of Mr. Mowery’s recent appointment as Director of Libraries at Wittenburg University. We have made tentative plans to place this project in the hands of two or three collaborators, with Mr. Mowery serving as advisor” (125). [No indication that the project was undertaken.]
An Annotated Bibliography


“The many facets of decadence are also illustrated by Arthur Symons’s several discussions of Verlaine’s work” (59). However, AS “had sufficient distrust of symbolism and decadence to separate Verlaine from these labels” (59). [Passing mention of AS in context of a larger review of sources defining the 1890s.]


“Thus the ‘imaginary portraits’ of, say, Pater or Arthur Symons have a precedent in the Theophrastian character and the essays and sketches of Lamb and Landor; the ghost story and, more generally, the supernatural story, which had a vigorous revival in the last two decades of the nineteenth century, have their precedent in the medieval ballad, in myth, in folklore motifs as old as man, and, more specifically, in the Gothic novel of the late eighteenth century” (xiii). “Like Pater, Symons in his poetry and sketches is also often an autobiographical writer…. He is also interested … in states of mind and very much in sensations, the sounds and feel and sight of the world which give rise to mental states. Symons’s own Confessions provides rewarding insights into his creative work, poetry and prose” (35). [An anthology of twenty-six English short stories from the period 1880 to 1920 with critical introductions, notes, and bibliography (from the back cover). Reprints AS’s “Christian Trevalga” from Spiritual Adventures.]


[Traces AS’s and Moore’s friendship throughout the 1890s. Reliable account.]


[All of these entries but one are to AS’s own work: F. 76, H. 48–49, J. 253, L. 42g, N. 29.]


The fascination with dance seen in AS’s poetry and critical writings reflects not merely his own personal enthusiasm for the music-halls and the possibilities of dance, but an enthusiasm shared by other men in his circle, notably Image, Horne, and Yeats, and by the general public as well. The Reverend Stewart Headlam was at the center of public controversy about the music-halls from 1878–1898, and he, more than anyone else, sparked the public’s interest in dance as a form of poetry during this era. AS met Headlam early in the 1890s, saw him frequently at the Crown, the Alhambra, and the Empire, and probably got his first introduction to dance as poetry from Headlam. AS’s debt to French Impressionistic art and French music-halls is well known; his debt to Headlam is underrated. Headlam trumpeted Hake’s poem “The Dancing Girl” to the English; later, in an essay on Hake, AS discusses the poem. [Informative article on an influence on AS’s poetry that had been overlooked at the time.] (Stern)
AS's work played a vital role in the development of modern poetry for three reasons: “It directly influenced the three most important ‘English’ poets of the early twentieth century. It was the chief source of late-Victorian England of what became generally accepted views on modern poetry. It forces us to re-examine not only the chronology of the ‘modern movement’ in poetry, but what the movement stood for” (47). When analyzing AS’s work in chronological order, his critical development shows three important phases: an Impressionist phase (1885–1893), a Symbolist phase (1893–1900), and an Expressionist phase (1900–1908). AS’s influence in all three phases can be felt most evidently in modern poetry: “Throughout his career he strove to purify poetic subject matter of all didactic, moralistic and ‘descriptive’ elements, and to rid poetic language of such forms of ‘rhetoric’ as poetic diction, inverted syntax and decorative imagery” (47). 

AS shows several stages in his criticism which anticipate Modernism. After an Impressionistic phase focused on “the complex mental life of man in the mod-
ern city” (515) and a Symbolist phase which centered around “communicating ‘the sensations of the soul,’” (516), AS entered an Expressionist stage in which he anticipated “notions about the arts which are more generally associated with the Italian Futurists” (516). Gradually, after the publication of The Symbolist Movement in Literature, AS began to “reject” figures such as Huysmans, Maeterlinck, Whistler, and Verlaine. This transition was accompanied by a preoccupation with “energy” and visionary affirmation: “He was calling not for the overthrow of Symbolism itself, apparently, but for a new, dynamic, aggressive and genuinely visionary form of Symbolism, purged of its ‘decadent’ elements of defeatism, triviality, nostalgia, and morbid eroticism. And the same appears to be largely true of the Futurist writers…” (519).


“To Grant Richards, 26 September 1904 … Mr Arthur Symons has written to me saying that you have my book of verses Chamber Music under consideration” (56). “To Robert McAlmons, 4 April 1925…. A rather silly idea came to me about your book [Contact Collection of Contemporary Writers. Paris: Contact Editions; Three Mountains P, 1925] which I send on for what it is worth. Is there to be any preface or introduction? It seems to me there is a certain resemblance between the group of writers who collected around Pound … and the writers of the Yellow Book Row of half a century ago who collected around Arthur Symons; if he is still writing do you think it will be amusing to have a few pages of preface by him?” (226). [AS mentioned in 7 letters.]


Joyce appears to have been influenced by Symbolism: “‘The influence of Arthur Symons was hardly less [than that of Ibsen on Joyce]. He was then playing a part in criticism comparable with Ezra Pound’s in later years and he influenced writers greater than himself—among them Joyce’” (48). It is believed that Joyce had The Symbolist Movement in Literature with him in Trieste (one of two books related to Symbolism) based on the fact that he quoted the famous last line in a 1906 letter. [Passing mention: 15, 48.]


AS was a “poet whose work Conrad read and admired” (253). [Passing mention.]


AS’s description of Decadence as a “‘corruption of language by which style ceases to be organic’ … is no doubt accurate, by which I mean it is true to what was thought about decadence in scholarly circles at the time and for the most part still is” (15–16). However, this “studiousness” is difficult to maintain in the face of a word so “flagrantly pictorial,” and therefore, the word loses any chance for a moral or spiritual meaning, and becomes merely an epithet (16). [Passing mention.]
Even though Eliot criticized AS's faults in "The Perfect Critic" (1920) and in The Criterion (1937), Eliot's statement that he owed "a great debt" to AS has more significance than perhaps even Eliot admits. Eliot seems to have thought that AS was "a sensitive reader who had, in essence, mistaken the critical pursuit for something quite different" (73). Eliot felt that AS had confused critical and creative activities and so hovered in a fatal limbo between the two. However, after closer examination, "There seems to be no doubt that Arthur Symons influenced or at least encouraged Eliot's direction in certain areas of interest, not only because there is a good deal of common ground between the two men, but also because Eliot seems to have unconsciously (or consciously) echoed passages of Symons in his prose writing..." (80). Even though AS and Eliot had significant critical differences (most notably their views on religion and art), Eliot's criticism, such as his critique of Flaubert, feels like "strangely familiar ground" in comparison with AS (74). At times their similarity of diction, phrasing, and subject matter is quite notable. Given their differences, there are numerous examples that reveal a similarity and subtle influence. [Chapter two focuses on AS's and Pater's influences on Eliot. Glass gives several examples of Eliot's similarity to AS's criticism which shed important light on Eliot's critical foundation and "debt" to AS. Annotation edited from dissertation. See also DAI 45(1985): 2884A.]

AS's definition of the Decadent-Symbolist literary movement is used in explaining the abnormality of the movement that influenced Faulkner (2). AS is referred to as the critic "best equipped to understand French linguistic experimentation and its adaptation to English" (24n6). If Faulkner ever read AS then it was AS who introduced him to the Decadents.

The reliance of critics on the false testimony of AS and Yeats has perpetuated a Dowson legend which even Longaker's accurate biography cannot seem to dispel. (Stern)
In the late-Victorian period Decadent literature is said to be animated by exploration of immoral experience. It is characterized by an artistic preoccupation with the morbid and perverse. It has been easy to label a writer such as AS a Decadent but it has been less easy to fix the distinction between the term “decadent” and the term “aesthetic.” Who are the Aesthetes and how do we know them? [Response to the Washington Conference (December 1962) on Estheticism and Decadence; Goldfarb feels the definition of the former term is still slippery.] (Stern)

We need to define better the terms “decadence” and “aestheticism” as operative literary terms; in particular, it is “aestheticism” that suffers for want of a definition. We understand why AS is a Decadent, but what makes us call Pater an Aesthetician? [Letter written in response to the Washington Conference (December 1962) on Estheticism and Decadence, in which scholars attempted to define the two terms.] (Stern)

“Generally this essay makes larger claims for what I shall term, following Symons, the decadent movement: what I shall set up as a ‘materialist’ perspective reveals a ‘break’ with the hegemony (crucially restricted) that modernism only repairs by assimilation” (109). AS views Decadence “as an inclusive term in 1893, a marginal one in *The Symbolist Movement*. It embraces Henley and Pater in the magazine version of 1893, but not in the reprint of 1923; while in the interim, Symons has applied it to Meredith (again specializing its meaning from the term offered in 1893)” (112). AS and Havelock Ellis see Decadence “as a specific stylistic development” (112). “‘The Decadent Movement in Literature’ really has the sense of a movement, a sense of a new phase of consciousness embodied in various, but related forms. By the time ‘Symbolism’ has come to replace ‘Decadence’ as the comprehensive word, this sense of a movement, the change in the relations of literary production signalled by the word ‘revolt,’ is dissolved in a vaguer assertion of continuity—all poetry is symbolic, symbolism is merely the self-consciousness of the symbol” (125–26). [Also published New York: Holmes & Meier, 1980.]

[The aim of this study is to examine: 1) the ways in which Arthur Symons evolved a Symbolist theory of criticism; and 2) the relationship of his essays to that theory and to an idealistic view of art. The intention is also to demonstrate the common ground Symons shared with certain French writers—notably Gourmont, Gide, Mallarmé and Maeterlinck—if not the “influence” they exerted upon him. Toward these ends the investigation deals first with three “problem areas” in Symons’ work which embody the strengths and weaknesses of his position: the problem of beauty as an ideal of art; personality and sincerity (problems of crit-
ical method); and language and symbol as the means to the poem’s vision. His criticism of poetry, music and drama, and prose fiction is considered in turn. The juxtaposition of three critics—Symons, Gourmont, and Eliot—is an attempt to show how each made particular use of a dissociative critical method, variously seeking out the poet’s personality.] [Annotation edited from Dissertation Abstracts 30 (1970): 5408A.]


AS’s criticism of William Blake is particularly insightful and rich. AS presents a picture of Blake that “leaves nothing to be desired” other than the fact that AS overvalues Blake’s achievement in visual art (35). Blake was limited by the artistic medium itself in the presentation of his imagination. However, AS does correctly highlight Blake’s power as a poet and thinker. AS’s criticism is backed by solid research. In fact, “No other writer has, on the whole, given a better picture of this strange genius…” (36).


AS’s article on Beardsley (1898) rightly stresses the evolution of the poster and its place in the new art, shrewdly observes that the model for the role Beardsley sought was in the theatre, and correctly remarks on the affinity of the modern for “the new media that project the artist’s figure to wider and wider circles.” [Review of the Aubrey Beardsley Exhibition at the Victoria and Albert Museum, 1966. Lengthy discussion of AS’s obituary piece on Beardsley.] (Stern)


In London Nights AS frequently uses the metaphor of the dance to structure the dialogue of “inner and outer,” subjective and objective, in a manner parallel to “the more radical choices of his personal life.” At first he stands as passive observer, as impotent voyeur, of dance, but later the persona in verse strives to “participate without the loss of ‘self.’” “The narrator must convert life to art in some transformational activity that retains the ability to be simultaneously author, participant, and watcher and to unite prophesy and memory in a Fuller-esque moment of durational time.” At the end of London Nights, AS discovers “that the sole dance in which he can participate is one dance of selves or masks and that there is a certain freedom to be obtained thereby.” (Stern)


Spiritual Adventures, a collection of short fiction, deals with themes that had long interested AS: the threat of imprisonment by the randomness of nature; the need for a mediating mask between man, art and nature; the loss of selfhood that accompanies the conversion of life into art. [Good analysis of the short fiction of AS.] (Stern)

The transposition of self to art and the ensuing confusion between the two defines the genre of the imaginary portrait. This prose vignette of self-abnegation reached its height in the 1880s and '90s in the works of AS, Wilde, Synge, Moore and others. In 1905 AS published his work in this form, *Spiritual Adventures*, and offered an allegory of Decadence. [Includes a discussion of Ruskin, Wilde, Moore, Rossetti, Pater, Synge, Dowson, and Joyce as well as AS. Good insightful analysis of some of the stories in *Spiritual Adventures.*] (Stern)

[Passing references to AS. Analyzes the complex relationship between real life and the confessional attitudes in fin-de-siècle writing.] (Stern)

“Without attempting to be a full biography, the study necessarily draws upon Conrad’s reminiscences and letters, some of them unpublished, and upon biographical studies” (xiii). Although Conrad and his agent T. Fisher Unwin were reluctant to publish in the Savoy, Conrad sent “The Idiots” there and was “offered a guinea more a page than the Cornhill.” AS “accepted it and must have paid him forty guineas” (222). In a review of d’Annunzio’s *The Triumph of Death*, AS “praised d’Annunzio at the expense of Kipling and Conrad” (289). Shortly after, Conrad wrote Cunninghame Graham to ask if he thought AS was right” (289–90). Conrad said he wrote “for a chosen little group” of which AS was one (307).

T. S. Eliot’s art was significantly transformed upon reading AS’s landmark *The Symbolist Movement in Literature*. Eliot found in AS’s work his model and muse, Jules Laforgue, from whom Eliot learned to include in his writing irony and sophistication. Eliot was also attracted to AS’s interest in consciousness and in other French Symbolists, interests which reveal AS’s part in shifting interest from the realistic tradition to a type of spirituality which viewed art almost as a religion (29). “Eliot’s own religious journey” (35) perhaps may have originated with his encounter with AS.

Reprinted in *American Criticism*, ed. William A. Drake (New York: Harcourt, 1926), 87–94. T. Earle Welby’s *Arthur Symons* is the first book to treat AS’s works as a coherent, rounded whole. Welby neglects the poet of London Nights in order to show that AS transcended that mood and moved to a higher philosophy of things—to a criticism of all the arts. AS’s *Studies of Modern Painters* illustrates well his peculiar, sensitive approach to the aesthetic implications of any work. [Review of Welby’s book and AS’s *Studies of Modern Painters*. Neither substantial nor orderly criticism.] (Stern)

In the last analysis, AS’s subject is always himself. A thoroughgoing Impressionist, he cannot be understood without reference to his own personality. He was a cultivated product of his period; even his later poetry is fin de siècle. Love as a malady is his theme. His career is a history of the epoch and his essays capture the intellectual milieu of his day better than any other writer’s. But “he is a ghost, a revenant of the nineties.” Written shortly after the publication of AS’s Collected Works. [Typical descriptive piece on AS which characterizes him as the epitome of the nineties and focuses almost exclusively on his poetry.] (Stern)


“In reference to our intention to ‘crown’ two books of signal merit published during 1897, we sent the following communication to certain men of letters who have been in touch with the literature of 1897: ‘The proprietor of the ACADEMY having decided to set apart sums of One Hundred Guineas and Fifty Guineas as awards to the authors of books of signal merit published during 1897, the Editor asks your kind assistance in selecting the recipients. He will esteem it a favour if you will write on enclosed postcard the titles and authors of two or three books belonging to the period named, which are, in your opinion, most worthy of being ‘crowned.’” Below are a few of the replies already received. We shall announce our decision next week” (34). “One Hundred Guineas to Mr. Arthur Symons for his Studies in Two Literatures” (34).


In 1893 the only man to give the theories and experiments of the French Symbolists and Decadents any serious attention was AS. [Overstates his point: ought to mention Moore’s Confessions of a Young Man.] (Stern)


From index: “Symons, Arthur William, 3, 4n, 7n, 8, 11n, 26n, 33, 39, 40n; WBY [William Butler Yeats] visits Ireland with, 43, 44n, 47n, 48, 49; 51n, 52n, 53n, 55n, 59n, 62, 63n, 65n; WBY in Paris with, 66, 70n; 95n, 119n, 137n, 149n; becoming ‘more of a mystical writer,’ 154, 165, 170; admires AE’s [George Russell] The Earth Breath, 181–82; 191, 199, 202n, 208, 210n; ‘falling in love with a serpent charmer & is writing better than ever,’ 215; 232n, 247n, 258n, 285n, 286, 302n, 303, 306n, 333, 338n, 346, 353, 360, 403n, 414; opinion of The Countess Cathleen, 416n; invited to Coole, 420; describes AG [Augusta Gregory] as ‘la Strega,’ 420n; 426, 427, 447n, 451, 470, 473, 480, 486, 498n, 499n; WBY finds The Symbolist Movement in Literature ‘curiously vague in its philosophy,’ 506; thinks WBY’s ‘The Symbolism of Poetry’ ‘among the best things’ he has done, 512; 584n, 586, 587n; asked by WBY to arbitrate in his dispute with Moore, 588, 589, 593n; 596n, 603n, 608n, 648n, 654, 659, 663, 681, 682, 688, 694, 719, 720, 721, 722, 723, 724, 725, 729” (756). [35 letters refer to AS. Editors include considerable commentary on AS in their explanatory notes.]

[Only passing references to AS, but useful for the biographer. In French.]
(Stern)


AS was “a fully fledged literary critic and a Donne enthusiast” (530). “Gosse and Symons, although different in temper and outlook, shared a preoccupation with language and style as a medium through which to project literary qualities” (530), and although the two believed Donne to be the “restorer of English poetry,” “Symons’s reading of Donne is very much his own” (530), AS instead casting Donne as a neurotic modern. AS accepted and revered Donne as the best and worst of English poets and definitely unique. Leslie Stephen also deviated from Gosse in his appraisal of Donne, and it was from Stephen that Eliot “borrow[ed] his concept of ‘intellectualized emotion’ that became the essence of Eliot’s Donne criticism” (532).


“During the December of 1908, Eliot first read Arthur Symons’s ‘The Symbolist Movement in Literature’ (1899), a revised edition of which had appeared that year. Symons’s discussion of the late nineteenth-century French poets drew Eliot’s attention to the work of Laforgue, whose ‘Oeuvres Complètes’ he immediately ordered. Eliot read Laforgue over the summer of 1909, and the effect can be seen in the poems he wrote at this period” (3). “For the most part, too, one can say of Mr. Eliot’s early dramatic theory that it was anti-naturalist, or, more positively, Symbolist. One remembers how many interests he had in common with the first-generation Symbolist,” AS (709). [From the reprint of “What Became of Sweeney” by Frank Kermode, *Spectator* 202 (10 April 1959): 513].


“Out of the dissatisfaction with materialism, mass-ism and impersonality of industrial-bourgeois civilization, with the rationalism, objectivity and analytical spirit of positivistic science, and with the reflection of all these in the literature of realism and naturalism; and perhaps more directly in response to a loss of faith in God, man and traditional values, a new artistic sensibility was born which required new forms of expression. Arthur Symons, [was] a sympathizer with this alienated, refined egocentric and hypersensitive spirit” (9). “Although the major contemporary poets disavowed the term [Symbolism] and Moréas himself proclaimed *Symbolisme* dead in September 1891, ‘Symbolism’ endured as the term denoting the Parisian poetic cénacle of the decade 1885–1895. Eventually, it broadened to encompass French poetry form Nerval to Valéry, centered in Baudelaire, Verlaine, Mallarmé, and Rimbaud. Finally, thanks to key works such as Arthur Symons’ *The Symbolist Movement in Literature* (1899) ... the international aspect of symbolism has been recognized” (12).

AS’s *London: A Book of Aspects* (1909) is a collection of “prose sketches” of London in which “he likes its look at night, in fog and smoke, and in the parks and on Hampstead Heath.” “I know of no collection of views and illustrated sketches in which the city is perceived so desperately and so close to disintegration as it is in literary texts like Symons and in some of Doré’s illustrations. But the pressure of the city that Doré, Dickens, Symons, and others saw is apparent in many of its late-century representations in views and sketches, and it is apparent too in some of the strategies with which the enormously expanded late-century city was dealt with, or avoided” (52).


The volume deals with human life, its joys and sorrows. Many of the poems are derivative. Pater, Rossetti, Shakespeare, and Browning can all be heard. The sonnet sequence “A Lover’s Progress” and the poem “Magdalen at the Threshold,” are among the most accomplished pieces in the collection. The writer shows promise and the volume is “highly readable.” [Review of *Days and Nights*.] (Stern)


AS, “a fellow-countryman as well as a near-neighbour of Moore’s, and at that time a rising critic, reviewed *Impressions* at length in the *Academy*. He talked about Moore’s great talent, as well as his tireless industry and a single-minded devotion to art; yet Moore had, he wrote, an inexplicable capacity, not only for offences against literary good taste, but also for astounding incorrectness, the incorrectness of a man who knows better, who is not really careless, and yet cannot help himself” (171). Moore “also consulted” AS, “who knew a great deal about music as well as literature, for some of his background details on music which are unerringly correct” (187).


Young artists such as Brian Howard and Harold Acton clearly state their debt to AS and the aesthetic artists in their Cremorne Club’s manifesto. In fact, the club’s honorary members included Whistler, Beardsley, Swinburne, Mallarmé, … Wilde, AS, and Verlaine among others. In fact, after reading AS’s *The Symbolist Movement in Literature*, Howard excitedly declared he had discovered their category; they were the “New Symbolists” (141).


Harry Thacker Burleigh, arranger and composer, chooses to include in his *Art Songs* the lyrics of AS’s “Grey Wolf.” “The setting of Symons’s ‘Grey Wolf’ seems more ambitious than most and is somewhat more impressive” (94).


The inclusion of two of AS’s pieces, “A Prayer to St. Anthony of Padua” and “The Sick Heart,” are among the few new items in Peter Warlock’s collection,
Songs. AS’s songs, like others in the collection, are “highly polished miniatures,” and have “definite form but great rhythmic flexibility.” They reflect the development of Warlock’s writing over the years from the “swaggering Warlockian” to the “introspective Heseltinian” (223).


Eliot acknowledged his debt to *The Symbolist Movement in Literature*, criticized AS for confounding criticism and poetry, and found fault with his ninetyish interpretation of Baudelaire. [In French.] (Stern)


Welby’s critical analysis attempts to draw attention to AS’s relevance outside of the nineties. While AS’s poetry is admirable, in particular *Amoris Victima*, his criticism is particularly important, “for no Englishman, save Walter Pater, Mr. Symons’ master, has brought to the contemplation of art and literature a more exposed sensibility or a more trained fastidiousness” (67). AS has all the characteristics of a great critic and “can be called a pioneer in that he did perhaps more than any other single critic to break down the boundaries of his compatriots’ provincialism and introduce French men of genius into the English language. His translations of these masters are among the best translations in existence” (68). [Reviewed together with *Studies in Seven Arts* by AS.]


AS poses chiefly for himself. A man who undertakes to criticize all the arts is suspect. His theory of the arts is expressed in a word, “escape.” His poetry records a series of endeavors to escape from life. He looks to love, Bohemianism, and mysticism but none provide him the outlet he seeks. Before art molded AS he was branded by Methodism. It is not life that his art seeks to escape, but Calvinism and its terrifying images of hell. [Good piece of early criticism on AS.] (Stern)


“Symbolism was introduced into the English-speaking world by Verlaine’s friend” AS. “In *The Symbolist Movement in Literature* (1899) Symons argues that symbolism is the essence of language and literature: our first words were symbolic, and all truly imaginative writers have been symbolists. Symbolism became a conscious movement in the late nineteenth century as a necessary reaction against the dense, descriptive method of the naturalistic school of Émile Zola and others. The Symbolists restored purity to the arts, Symons maintains, by suggesting rather than saying, by evoking through symbols rather than submitting to the ‘old bondage of rhetoric, the old bondage of exteriority’ and describing through the logic of argument or the record of details…. The true sources of Symbolism, Symons concludes, lie in ancient systems of mysticism, and the true purpose of the movement was to evoke the presence of the infinite and confirm the possibility of immortality through the associative network of symbols, ancient and modern” (121). [Provides a summary of some of AS’s major ideas in *The Symbolist Movement in Literature*.]

Donoghue presents “nicely discriminated” accounts of Pater’s encounters with a great many writers besides Wilde and Yeats, such as AS and Lionel Johnson (49). [Passing reference.]


When they met, Ellis and AS “liked each other immediately, and within a few years they were to share quarters in the Adelphi and to go off on many trips together” (113). On Ellis’s and AS’s trips abroad, AS “was the best of companions, sensitive to all forms of art, introducing Ellis to company with whom he would have been extremely shy had he been alone” (165). J. A. Symonds asked AS if he would approach Ellis on “commissioning Symonds to write a book on sexual inversion for the Contemporary Science Series” (175). Henry Seymour organized “a Free Press Defence Committee” (194), but AS was “curiously” not included. AS thought Ellis’s *Affirmations* was “the best of Ellis’s books” (210). “Ellis was extremely upset by an article which appeared in *The Psychological Review* in 1933 in which the author, assuming Symonds to be dead, described his life as one of frightful perversions. Ellis wrote the editor to protest” (433–34).


Symonds gave AS a letter of introduction to Cotton when he wanted to review for the *Academy*. Later, AS was instrumental in bringing Symonds and Ellis together to collaborate on *Sexual Inversion*. (Stern)


“The evidence presented very clearly in the letters exchanged between Symonds and Ellis indicates that in June of 1892 Symonds wrote to Arthur Symons (with whom he had been corresponding for some time), and who was sharing rooms at the time with Ellis, asking him to sound out Ellis on the possibility of their collaborating on a joint study of homosexuality. Symonds brought the subject up at a music hall one night, and the following day Ellis wrote Symonds that he himself had been planning to present a paper to the forthcoming Congress of Criminal Anthropology but, as for a full-scale book, ‘the difficulties are certainly serious’” (287).


“Adams conjures up a remarkably vivid picture of the daily lives of the writers that Yeats dubbed ‘the tragic generation.’... Deftly weaving together a wealth of material from many sources, he provides detailed descriptions of how the members of the Rhymers’ Club—including Dowson, Yeats, Oscar Wilde, Arthur Symons, and Lionel Johnson—worked and played” (373).

French Symbolist writers were very receptive to works of English and American writers, and the latter were, in turn, indebted to the Symbolists. A case in point is found in the writings of AS and Stuart Merrill. The two men met in 1895; in 1907 Merrill wrote a French article on AS’s poetry (“L’oeuvre poétique d’Arthur Symons,” *L’Antée* 2), and when composing this article, wrote to AS seeking additional biographical data. AS answered the inquiry and acknowledged his debt to both Baudelaire and Verlaine. On his relationship to Verlaine, he remarked that while he had imitated Verlaine’s practices, Verlaine, earlier, had gone to the English for some of his practices: “Verlaine learnt from English poetry secrets which he has taught to English poets” (unpublished letter from AS to Stuart Merrill, 26 April 1907). [AS’s unpublished letter is of interest to biographers; in it AS gives a resumé of his career and fixes some dates important to the literary historian. In French.] (Stern)


While in London, Yvette Guilbert was invited to the home of the young poet Arthur Symons. There she met other famous artists, such as painters, drawers, and the celebrated novelist George Moore. Guilbert was struck by Moore’s appearance and asked him why he didn’t write a novel in French. His reply was “I will make you songs, mademoiselle, and maybe Parisians will know me.” It was then that Guilbert understood Moore’s irony: no work of his had been translated into French, or read in Paris. Moore spoke to Guilbert of Verlaine, whom AS had received at his place while Verlaine was a professor in London. AS had devotedly looked after the hardworking but bitter Verlaine. Furthermore, this meeting gave Guilbert a desire to read Moore’s works. She read *Esther Waters*, which moved and excited her. Years later, she suggested to Moore that the novel be adapted to the stage, and Guilbert herself would play the part of the heroine.


[Recalls first meeting with AS when he was twenty-five.] (Stern)


“Mansfield, as is shown by an investigation of her aesthetics as recorded in her secondary writing, may have borrowed and copied some ideas from Symons or Wilde, but those authors clearly did not influence her writing permanently. Certainly not in the manner [Clare] Hanson & [Andrew] Gurr suggest. Besides, Hanson’s methodological short-cut enforces a Symbolist reading on Mansfield’s total work, and this must be rejected” (180).


Katherine Mansfield “developed as a Symbolist early on under the influence of Wilde and Symons, she wrote poetry and made several unsuccessful attempts at a novel, but she never obviously strayed far from the familiar conventions of