Arthur Symons, Critic Among Critic

Symons, Arthur

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nineties figure who, Jessie Conrad said, was the only poet Conrad read with pleasure, is full of ... that whole paraphernalia of late nineteenth-century poets who combined the vivid mannerisms of English romanticism with a misunderstood and misused French symbolism” (95). “As much as Yeats and Dowson, Conrad learned his literary English at the end of the century, and was only able to make it leaner and more pungent as he developed a more mature style” (95–96).


After Cosmopolis refused to publish Conrad’s “The Idiots” he wrote to T. Fisher Unwin on July 22, 1896, “But I must live. I don’t care much where I appear since the acceptance of such stories is not based upon their artistic worth. It is probably right that it should be so. But in that case there is no particular gratification in being accepted here rather than there. If the ‘Savoy’ thing asks for my work why not give it to them? I understand they pay tolerably well (2g[uiinea]s per page?). The only thing I wish is that your right to reproduce in a volume should be perfectly clear” (293). AS published the story in the Savoy “in October 1896” (292).


[Passing mention that Pound came to Yeats, the person to whom AS dedicated The Symbolist Movement in Literature, to learn about Symbolism.]


AS dubbed the most important late-Victorian music-hall cockney, Albert Chevalier, “The Coster’s Laureate.” [Reference to AS’s article in Black and White (1892).] (Stern)


“Tchaikovsky and his Sixth Symphony have two distinct functions in E. M. Forster’s Maurice. The composer and composition serve as a strategy of disclosure for Clive Durham as he woos Maurice Hall, and may provide evidence of the ways that music, like literature, can take part in individual and social formations” (85). “A waltz, claims Forster’s contemporary Arthur Symons, ‘is possession and abandonment, the very pattern and symbol of earthly love’” (91).


“As a young man Yeats was, as he tells us elsewhere, a Pre-Raphaelite, and in the course of the present volume he encounters Wilde’s aestheticism, Morris’s craft socialism and Symons’s reading of the French symbolists” (xxxviii). [AS referred to in 5 letters. In some letters, Yeats misspells ‘Symons’ as ‘Symonds,’ but he is referring to AS. Editors include considerable commentary on AS in their explanatory notes.]

“Symons, Arthur, 5, 10, 55n, WBY [William Butler Yeats] dines with 59; 66, 93n, 131n, WBY introduces to Craig, 159–60; 179n, 185, 189, 190n, sees WBY about controversy over Stephen Phillips, 191–2; WBY defends chanting against, 196–7, 198n, 207, 211, 253, 254, WBY introduces to Joyce, 268; 271, enthusiastic about Synge, 320; 328, 329, 334, 345, 403, 408, 409, 416n, 455n, 498n, 545n, 603, 607n, 666; ‘A New Art of the Stage’ 160; ‘The Speaking of Verse’ 194; *Studies in Seven Arts,* 160n; *The Symbolist Movement in Literature,* 11” (757). [25 letters refer to AS. In some of the letters, Yeats misspells “Symons” as “Symonds,” but he is referring to AS. Editors include considerable commentary on AS in their explanatory notes.]


“Describing the theatrical circulatory system of this period, Stetz’s introduction surveys theatrical genres, from Adelphi melodramas to Avenue Theatre intellectual dramas; theatrical consumers like Arthur Symons, who pursued the pleasures of books and ballet girls during his urban wanderings; and dramatic writers like George Moore” (465).


[Although Arthur Symons’ *Symbolist Movement* has been recognized as an important influence on contemporary poetry, his equally representative body of criticism on English subjects has been neglected by critics. This study, therefore, provides an analytic description of Symons’ critical method as it is revealed in the broad range of English criticism produced between 1886 and 1908, the year in which his mental illness became apparent. Primary materials, including those in the vast collection at Princeton University, serve as the major source for this description of Symons’ historical milieu, his critical theory and practice. Because Symons was vitally involved in the movements of the “nineties,” a survey of his activities, attitudes and affinities provides a background for the examination of his critical method…. His methods of composition and revision are discussed through a comparative analysis of parallel materials drawn from notebooks, published essays, and full-length studies. This study suggests that in his criticism of English subjects Symons employed a critical method that has affinities with historical, comparative, relativistic and contextual criticism: a mixture of Coleridgean metaphysics and Paterian impressionism. Eclectic as well as derivative, his method eludes facile identification with any one “school”; his work needs appraisal in the current critical concern with re-evaluation of the writers of the late Victorian period. To aid future scholarship and to obviate much of the confusion Symons created by reorganizing, combining and reissuing his essays, a bibliography indicating reprints and revisions is appended to this study.] [Annotation edited from *Dissertation Abstracts* 28 (1968): 3674A.]

“The script is adapted from a short story by the Decadent poet Arthur Symons, and from time to time a voiceover supplies narrative links drawn from Symons’ prose…. Arthur Symons was fascinated by the tawdry glamour of the theatrical demimonde, making it the favourite subject of his poems. In one of them he describes a troupe of musical-hall chorines: ‘The gusty gaslight shoots a thin/Sharp finger over cheeks and nose/Rouged to the colour of the rose. All wigs and paint, they hurry in:/Then, bid their radiant moment be/The footlight’s immortality!’ No hint of this febrile pathos lightens the dull plod of "Esther Kahn” (48). [Reviews director Arnaud Desplechin’s 2000 film adaptation of AS’s short story “Esther Kahn.” See comments under Desplechin, Arnaud.]


Pater and Wilde lie behind AS’s declaration that his art has found its subject in “the moods of man” (Preface to 2nd ed. of London Nights). AS’s prose style also reflects Pater’s influence. [Unimportant.] (Stern)


Sappho’s elegiac tone appealed to both Decadents and Pound alike, and Pound often moves beyond their typical fin-de-siècle “weariness, the note of Symons and Pater, but in a passionate generosity of attention” (57). Twenty-five years later, however, Pound, much like Beardsley and AS, worked with an awareness of the transience of life and interprets his Sapphic fragments more with a feeling of “sad ecstasy” (60).


In his poetry Pound preserves things glimpsed, but he does it not “in weariness, the note of Symons and Pater, but in a passionate generosity of attention…. ” AS’s poetry anticipated the Imagists and the poetry of Pound in 1912. [Excellent and incisive analysis of poetic techniques and practices in AS’s poetry.] (Stern)

Basing his poetry on Paul Verlaine and “an aesthetic of glimpses” (69), AS described himself as one constantly searching for “sudden unreal glimpses” (70). His intent was “to be a disembodied voice” (70). Pound’s poetry combines the aesthetic of fleeting glimpses and the “presiding doctrines” of traditional poetics (70). Unlike AS, Pound initially viewed tradition as a beneficial system by which all poems were judged. In “The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock,” Eliot mimics “Symons’s and Dowson’s poetic of atmospheric slightness” (132). Encountering Laforgue first in AS’s The Symbolist Movement in Literature, Eliot identified with what AS saw as the Symbolist’s “strictly correct manner” (134). Eliot very likely based “restless nights in one-night cheap hotels” on AS’s translations and characterization of Laforgue (134). By citing Mallarmé’s concept of “elocutionary disappearance of the poet,” AS gave rise to Eliot’s “classic expression in his testament to the poet’s impersonality, ‘Tradition and the Individual Talent’” (136–
37). Walter Pater contended that lesser artists always seek for “a recipe for being an artist” (182). This trend leads to a fixation with “transient effects,” which will render the piece pictorial. “Pastel,” a short poem by AS, sums up the very trend Walter Pater described earlier. It was written as “a moment seized simply for the moment’s sake” (182). Where Mallarmé composed sparsely detailed poetry, AS’s poetry relied on darkness rather than “enigmatic rigor … as an excuse for leaving things out” (183). Consequently, AS converted “what was a technical discipline” into “a pictorial discipline” (183). Apart from the rhyme, “Pastel” incorporates the fundamentals of Imagist poetry. For instance, Pound’s “In a Station of the Metro” has the same impetus as AS’s poetry—a passing glimpse. In fact, Pound’s description of catching “suddenly a beautiful face” in the Paris Metro (the impetus of the poem) echoes AS’s fascination with “bright unexpected glimpses in a dark setting” (184). Despite sharing many of the poetic fundamentals with AS, Pound tried to avoid writing in AS’s style.

AS’s memoir of Dowson is the source of the fables about Dowson’s drunkenness, drug-taking, love of squalor, and lack of intellect. (Stern)

At the turn of the century a group of “avant-garde bookmen, the innovators, the transmitters, of whom Arthur Symons is the type,” played an important part in the development of modernism (199). AS influenced modernism and poets such as T. S. Eliot: “Indeed there are poems of Symons that sound like pre-echoes of ‘Prufrock.’ And with his interest in dancing and music halls, his perhaps short-lived respect for Wagner,… Eliot is a little like an updated and of course superior Symons” (201).


Nineties poets wrote endlessly about dancers and dance and fraternized with the ballet girls at the Alhambra and Empire. Stewart Headlam knew AS well. AS built an aesthetic in which dancing had a central place: this view was climax in his essay, “The World as Ballet.” [Excellent discussion of dance and its place in the Symbolist and Imagist aesthetic.] (Stern)

AS, more influentially than any of his contemporaries, knew how to synthesize the earlier English tradition with Pater and the French Symbolists. He saw Blake as a forerunner of Symbolism. The Symbolist Movement in Literature is not “absolutely a good book, it is scrappy, often an excellent example of an avant-garde Paterian’s view of French Symbolism.” AS discerns the connection between magic (Mysticism) and Symbolism; he is aware of the Symbolist paradox that
art is both “concrete” and “obscure.” [The author relates AS’s explanation of the symbol back to the Romantics, and earlier, the metaphysicals, and forward to the Imagism of Pound. Reconsideration of AS’s poetry and his understanding of the Symbolist image of the dance begins with this work. Kermode’s analysis of the “Romantic Image” and the dance as an emblem of “identical form and meaning” is essential to an understanding of more recent critics’ assessment of AS’s handling of dance imagery. See K. G. W. Cross, “The Fascination of What’s Difficult: A Survey of Yeats Criticism and Research,” in Excited Reverie…. Ed. A. Norman Jeffares and K. G. W. Cross (1965). (Stern)

   “‘The Perfect Critic,’ an essay here included as the fullest statement of Eliot’s early position on the place of the intellect in criticism” (15). In it “Eliot strives to distinguish between Symons’s ‘impressionism’ and his own ‘surrender’; the difference lies in the ability to elevate impressions into rules, though without ceasing to be intelligent. ‘The point is that you never rest at the pure feeling’” (23).

   “For the most part, too, one can say of Mr. [T. S.] 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, Arthur Symons” (513).

   [Lists some of AS’s articles and reviews on Blake as well as his William Blake (1907) and The Romantic Movement in English Poetry (1909).]

   Although J. M. Synge “modeled his work on that of Arthur Symons,” he lacked AS’s critical capacity (32). The similarities between AS’s “The Isles of Aran and Synge’s Aran Islands” suggest that “‘The Isles of Aran,’ rather than Pecheur d’Islande, was the primary model for The Aran Islands” (34). Both men recorded their encounters with island storyteller Pat Dirane. Dirane actually supplied Synge with the plot for his play, “The Playboy of the Western World.” The account, previously recorded by AS, records the actual experience of a mainland fugitive who sought refuge in the Aran Islands.

   Although her book does not concern itself with applying contemporary theories to the 1890s, Dorothy Richardson Jones’s detailed and careful account of George Saintsbury’s life and works in “King of Critics”: George Saintsbury, 1845–1933 explains convincingly Saintsbury’s contributions and presence during the time period. While she obviously admires Saintsbury, she acknowledges his limits
as a critic and literary historian. She notes, for example, AS’s “criticism of Saints-
bury as an interpreter of French literature” (488).

634. Killeen, Jarlath. The Faiths of Oscar Wilde: Catholicism, Folklore and Ireland. Bas-

“The extent to which Catholicism and deviant sexuality were linked in the 1890s is clear from Hanson’s study, and writers important to Wilde, such as Walter Pater, Joris-Karl Huysmans, Arthur Symons and John Gray, are, he believes, best seen as part of a general Catholic aesthetic” (18). [Brief mention of AS. Reference is to Hanson, Ellis. Decadence and Catholicism. Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1997.]

635. Kingsbury, Martha. “Sargent’s Murals in the Boston Public Library.” Winter-

[Publishes the entire cycle of over a dozen murals by John Singer Sargent, executed between 1890 and 1916 for the Boston Public Library, and identifies their ostensible subjects. The main object is to clarify the cycle’s content as a “history of religious thought” (Sargent’s own phrase), in which the thought of each era is identified and characterized by paraphrases of and allusions to historical styles. The article places the murals in the context of Sargent’s work just prior to the undertaking and of Symbolist tendencies which he shared with his contemporaries. It examines Sargent’s interest in the Pre-Raphaelites, his acquaintance with Judith Gautier and French art and literature (in particular Flaubert’s Salammbô), and cites the critical approaches of Ernest Fenollosa and Arthur Symons to clarify the reception of the murals as essentially Symbolist.] [Kingsbury’s abstract from Bibliography of the History of Art (BHA).]


Professor Ehrams’s claim to have found Conrad’s much-sought-after evaluation of Kipling “is mistaken.” Professor Ehrams attributes the article, “Kipling, Rudyard a criticism on his poems” to Conrad, positing that this was Conrad’s article which Conrad described as “a chatter about Kipling provoked by a silly criticism” (331). However, Conrad was actually replying to AS’s article in the Saturday Review, in which AS claimed both Captain Courageous and The Nigger of the Narcissus had “no idea behind them” (331). Disproving Ehrams’s theory is the fact that Conrad wrote a 1500-word essay in response to AS, while the “Kipling, Rudyard a criticism on his poems” was around 275 words. Furthermore, the style and subject of the article is markedly different from Conrad’s style and subject.

"It may have been as early as Divan Japonais days when the English essayist and critic Arthur Symons first lost his heart to Yvette, and throughout her career he remained her faithful rhapsodist” (129). “My visual culture is great, my culture through books has been less, enchained as I was every hour of my life with work that absorbed too much of my energy and exhausted me. The poet Arthur Symons wrote that I was one of the best-read women he had ever known” (282).

[Passing references to AS.]


AS’s and Arnold’s assessments to the contrary, Keats’s odes are “energized by a deepened moral insight into life.” (Stern)


At the center of some of the most influential criticism in Japanese literature is AS’s *The Symbolist Movement in Literature*. “One must signal the fact that at the origin of their knowledge [the most influential critics from 1930–1960] of French Symbolist poets was a book by the English critic Arthur Symons, *The Symbolist Movement in Literature*, translated by a novelist, Iwano Homei” (192). [In French. Brief mention of AS on 192.]


[Treats Wilde, Beardsley, and Dowson with references to AS.] (Stern) [A truly decadent work of art, if the original meaning of the word “decadent” is to be honored, is one that “falls” or declines from a previously established state of artistic achievement. The purpose of this study is to show how and in what respects so-called “decadent” British literature of the 1890s represents a decline from an artistic standard set by the writers of the school of art for art’s sake in mid-nineteenth century England and France. The major portion of this study is devoted to the examination of three seemingly “decadent” works of art: *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, Aubrey Beardsley’s *Under the Hill*, and the poems of Ernest Dowson. The examination reveals that the characteristics of literary decadence are strikingly present in the work of Wilde and Beardsley, but are absent in Dowson’s poems.] [Annotation edited from *Dissertation Abstracts* 24 (1963): 1604.]


AS emphasized “vice” and sexual liberation, the diseased character of the *fin de siècle*, and praised the use of opium. AS’s Wagnerism was probably influenced through the French Symbolists, and resulted in occasional borrowing of Wagnerian motifs in AS’s poetry. [In German.]


The aesthetic ideology of Edward Gordon Craig and AS exerted a powerful influence on the history of dance, particularly the aesthetic valorization of the separation of the artist and her art. This valorization paradoxically devalued the specificity of the dance while simultaneously increasing the acceptance of women
on stage, suggesting a deep connection with gender ideology and aesthetic ideology (70). Early modern dancers, such as Isadora Duncan, however, could not accept the “erotic come-on” and abstract unity of AS’s theory, nor the distance between art and the performer that Craig required (72).


This book is a welcome addition to the very little information written about AS who has not received the attention he deserves. The book is attentive (mindful), intelligent, and contains the appropriate degree of enthusiasm. It acutely expresses the rare beauty and forbidden pleasure of the first poems by AS. Welby illuminates well the simple language of AS and his themes of emotion and thought, the inquietudes of human wisdom, and the simple rural life. It is regrettable that his style is not always at the height of the views which he expresses—his interpretation is sometimes inferior (not genuine). However, the chapters and the usage of the bibliography can aid the reader in understanding an oeuvre which is very diverse and always very emotionally involving. [In French.]


Pound felt that AS was responsible for renewing British interest in Edgar Allan Poe. AS not only revived Poe, but he also made Poe available to Joyce by considering “Poe as a major source of inspiration for Charles Baudelaire, Villiers de l’Isle-Adam, Stéphane Mallarmé, Paul Verlaine and Joris-Karl Huysmans” (17). When Joyce read The Symbolist Movement in Literature he would have seen AS’s attempt to demonstrate Poe’s influence on the French Symbolists. Consequently, in his efforts to master Symbolism, Joyce “might well have been stimulated to investigate further the source of their inspiration” (17). Because of his profound interest in Huysmans, AS critiqued A Rebours. AS detected that Poe and Des Esseintes, Huysmans’s protagonist, share “the instinctive sympathy which drew Baudelaire to the enigmatically perverse Decadent of America” (18). Poe and Huysmans also share the sentiment that “there [is] no beauty without strangeness” (19).


In August 1896, Beerbohm wrote to Rothenstein: “Also I will do some kind of skit. Possibly parodies of various writers writing on the subject of Xmas ‘Seasonable Tributes levied by Max Beerbohm’ or something of the sort. What do you think? Mrs. Meynell on ‘Holly’ Arthur Symons on ‘Xmas Eve in Piccadilly’ Henry James never mentioning Xmas by name and so forth. Rather amusing if acceptable. Yours Max.” “The Symons parody was apparently never written” (33). In commenting on the “genesis” of his story “Enoch Soames,” Beerbohm
wrote, “The waterproof cape worn by Enoch was itself suggested, I think, by memory of one worn by Arthur Symons. Otherwise Enoch, as drawn by me, owes nothing to Symons” (102).


“Thanks in no small part to W. B. Yeats’s famous 1922 memoir, ‘The Tragic Generation’ an essay that succeeded in formalizing prior mythologizing gestures, especially by the broadly influential critic-poet Arthur Symons these poets have been allotted a problematic yet fascinating niche of their own in the English canon. In this chapter, then, I devote less space to what the poets wrote about self-murder than to the ways in which critics have memorialized these writers not only as personal suicides but also as identity constructions of the author as a suicide” (70). “Even before Dowson died, Arthur Symons propounded what John Gawsworth famously termed (and sought to demythologize as), forty-two years later, ‘The Dowson legend.’ In a purportedly favorable review of Dowson’s book Verses (1896), Symons layers adjectival layer on layer to develop an impressionistic caricature that no one would be likely to forget” (71). “It would be an error, however, to credit Symons with originating the legend of the death of the fin-de-siècle poet, since it would have developed with or without the existence of Symons and Dowson” (72).


[Brief reference to AS’s comments on Swinburne and Richard Burton in AS’s Dramatis Personae (1923).]


After reading an article of AS’s on Philip Massinger, Swinburne wrote to Have-lock Ellis on April 7, 1887, that the article “gives, in my opinion, a generally inadequate and a radically unjust estimate of a great writer if not a great poet. Nor is the selection by any means the best that might be made. I am sorry to see that so able a critic has followed the present fashion of underrating Massinger” (183).


Swinburne informs AS in a letter dated November 12, 1900, evidently in response to a request for submissions, “I do not at present feel inclined to write any more on imperial or patriotic subjects, but if I should it is already promised or pre-engaged elsewhere” (148). On May 13, 1908, he wrote to AS, “You are welcome to any of my parodies you please to select.” “For a Book of Parodies, published in Nov. 1908” (214, 214n1).


[List 36 items relating to AS: 72, 188, 195, 232, 365, 631, 692, 765, 791, 868, 869, 1218, 1245, 1343, 1444, 1556, 1597, 1620, 1648, 1650, 1672, 1777, 1783,
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most of which are annotated herein.]

651.1. Langenfeld, Robert, ed. Reconsidering Aubrey Beardsley: With an Annotated
37, 52n23, 56, 57, 59, 67n24, 76, 83, 98n13, 131, 142, 144, 155, 162n1, 164n24,
164n26, 207–208, 222, 225n4, 225n5, 243, 254, 258, 270, 277.
[Contains passing references to AS in these chapters: Robert Langenfeld, “Beards-
ley in Time” (3–17); Chris Snodgrass, “Beardsley’s Oscillating Spaces: Play,
Paradox, and the Grotesque” (19–52); John Stokes, “Beardsley/Jarry: The Art of
Deformation” (55–69); Bridget J. Elliot, “Sights of Pleasure: Beardsley’s Images
of Actresses and the New Journalism of the Nineties” (71–101); Rodney Shew-
an, “Love, Death, and Criticism: Three of Beardsley’s Culs-de-lampe” (131–
65); Karl Beckson, “The Artist as Transcendent Phallus: Aubrey Beardsley and
the Ritual of Defense” (207–26); Ian Fletcher, “Inventions for the Left Hand:
Beardsley in Verse and Prose” (227–66); and Nicholas Salerno, “Preface to the
Bibliography: Beardsley under the Microscope” (269–80).]

652. Lauterbach, Edward, and W. Eugene Davis. The Transitional Age British Litera-
AS’s “chief contribution to criticism was The Symbolist Movement in Literature” in
which he maintained “that symbolism was closely linked with mysticism, a the-
ory of life which makes us familiar with mystery, and which seems to harmon-
ise those instincts which make for religion, passion and art.” Although the work is
not of first importance either as history or criticism, it had considerable impact
on Edwardian and Georgian poets and critics” (71). AS’s “poetic subject matter
and forms did not differ markedly from those of the other Rhymers, but fastid-
iousness of phrasing gave them rare finish. He had the unusual ability to create
images of bittersweet sensuality” (284). [“This book is a concise guide to British
literature between 1880 and 1920…. Part I consists of four essays which survey
significant developments in the fiction, poetry, drama and non-fictional prose of
the era. Part II consists of selective bibliographies of more than 170 authors, each
with a list of primary and secondary works and a brief assessment of the author’s
place in the period.”]

Sufficient evidence of Beardsley’s literary facility exists to repudiate AS’s judg-
ment that he lacked the temperament and judgment to be a true writer and could
only make desperate attempts to force nature. AS seems to have missed the hid-
en ironies and double-entendres that give Venus and Tannhäuser its richness.
(Stern)

9.556 (26 October 1892): 3.
[Reprinted as “Arthur Symons: Silhouettes, October 1892,” Retrospective Review
(London: John Lane: The Bodley Head, 1896), I, 181–83.] AS is typical of the
contemporary poets who long to be “in the movement” at all costs, and who
look to Paris as Eustacia Vye longed for “Budmouth.” Poems appear frail, but on
closer inspection they are seen to be wrought by an artist full of “careful observa-
Whistler and Verlaine are the dominant influences in this volume just as Browning and Meredith were the sources for so many of the poems in *Days and Nights*. [Le Gallienne erroneously refers to the latter-mentioned volume as *Nights and Days*. Review of *Silhouettes*. Le Gallienne's feeling that AS's verse is derivative and that it lacks spontaneous, genuine emotion is a common one shared by many of AS's critics.] (Stern)

AS's *Silhouettes* contains “many delicate and beautiful things. His poems, indeed, look much smaller than they are. Fragile they seem, and often are, but sometimes it is with the seeming fragility of wrought iron. They are full of careful observation, and a strenuous art which has measured its form by its matter to a word. To this more self-conscious art, they sometimes add the unbidden charms of passion and song. In this poem of ‘Emmy’ we have also an unwonted touch of pity” (181–82). “These poems have both strength and charm. Many other poems prove that Mr. Symons has a genuine gift of impressionism. Mr. Whistler and M. Verlaine are evidently the dominant influences with him at present, as Browning, and perhaps Mr. Meredith, were in his first book. *Silhouettes* is a marked artistic advance on *Nights and Days* [sic: *Days and Nights*], but Mr. Symons's next volume will be more crucial. It will be all the better if he will let himself go a little more, and not keep so self-conscious an eye upon his art, which by this time may safely be trusted to act instinctively” (183). [No mention of AS in Vol. 2 of this work.]

Robert Buchanan's “London Poems” (1866) and D. G. Rossetti's “Jenny” doubtless had its influence on Mr. Arthur Symons with his celebration of the music-hall, and his Noras of the Pavement” (209). AS was one of the “representatives of ‘modernity’” (228). [Also published London: Putnam, 1925.]

AS fulfilled Pater's criteria for a good critic in a way that Pater never could have done: he achieved the “detached, inhuman, objective criticism … a cold-blooded chemical analysis of literature” which Pater's rich nature would not have allowed. AS's judgments of Keats, Coleridge, and other Romantics are strangely understanding and occasionally brilliant, but always they are without feeling, pity, or love. He is better on the lesser lights, Hood and O'Keeffe. AS treats writers as “‘specimens’ to be classified and somewhat patronisingly studied.” [Review of AS's *The Romantic Movement in English Poetry*.] (Stern)

“A more ‘yellow’ species of misogyny is played out in Arthur Symons’s tribute to the prostitute ‘Stella Maris.’ Here the poet lingers on erotic memories of a sexual encounter…. The transactional nature of the encounter with the prostitute is obscured by the poet’s aestheticisation of her—she is a ‘Juliet of a night,’ not a common streetwalker. Sexually available and thoroughly sexualized, Symons’s ‘Juliet of a night,’ his irreverent ‘Stella Maris,’ whose lips attach themselves vam-
pire-like to his neck, is thoroughly characteristic of male Decadent formulations of femininity in the 1890s” (10).


“Mass-produced fiction of the fin de siècle was a far cry from the project of literary Decadence. To AS “such literature was avowedly ‘aesthetic,’ appealing to a select audience and attempting to seek out ‘the truth of spiritual things to the spiritual vision.’ Symons’s ‘Decadent’ canon … is, like Modernism, emphatically a European movement, led, like literary naturalism, by the French. Emphasizing the importance of ‘nuance,’ the ‘unsayability’ of certain sensations, and the ‘exquisite’ nature of the feelings that Decadent writers try to express, Symons draws on musical and artistic analogies to attempt to define the Decadent movement in literature, notably making comparisons with the Impressionist and Symbolist schools. Literary Modernism, then, usually associated with the 1920s and 1930s, in fact was ‘born’ amongst the writers of the Decadent school of the late nineteenth century, identified so acutely here by” AS (98–99).


John Becker, a musician who helped move music into the modern era, includes in his work At Dieppe, four “moody, landscape poems” of AS. Both At Dieppe and Concerto Arabesque are sensitive and musing, qualities both lacking in Sound Pieces.


“But between Wagner and the symbolists there is this difference, that Wagner not only recognized the possibility of gaining a wide audience, and in some sense at least allying his art to religion, but took steps to achieve this end; while the symbolists spoke much of making art a religion, but in fact made it no more than a private cult. To say, with [Edouard] Dujardin, that there is here a signal instance of Wagner’s influence, is to ignore this simple distinction. ‘Literature,’ said Arthur Symons, ‘in speaking to us so intimately, so solemnly, as only religion has hitherto spoken to us, becomes itself a sort of religion, with all the duties and responsibilities of the Sacred Ritual’” (240). [Lehmann’s book was first published in 1950.]


During the period between 1899–1908, AS spent a great deal of time engaged in creating a theory that would encompass all of the arts, including literature and music. On the topic of music, AS critiqued the work of Richard Strauss and even wrote a semi-autobiographical piece exploring “the nature of musical ideas and their effect on the individual, entitled ‘Christian Trevalga’” (55). The two pieces helped form Pound’s theories of precision and absolute rhythm. Pound valued AS’s Spiritual Adventures because, even though AS understood music, he “was never able to attach any expressible meaning to the pieces” (57), a conclusion that immensely influenced Pound’s concepts of music. AS’s piece on Rich-
ard Strauss effectively steered Pound away from using musical analogies in his vocabulary. Referring to AS's essay on Strauss, Pound wrote to Viola Baxter Jordan arguing that because music as a language “has not yet subdivided itself into finite areas,” it therefore fails to convey “precise notions” (58). This argument, AS’s argument, prompted Pound to develop his concept of absolute rhythm—a rhythm in poetry that corresponds exactly to the emotion or shade of emotion to be expressed. By expounding on the vagueness of music, AS led Pound to develop his theories on precision in rhythm.


AS’s description of the symbolist functions of literature “epitomizes” the critical observations in photography of Sada Kichi Hartmand and Charles Caffin (134).


AS depicted Ernest Dowson as a suicidal genius. [Brief mention of AS. In German.]


Yeats shared AS’s belief that classifying objects as beautiful amounted to a “moral judgment on evil” because it represented the triumph of a spiritual appetite over a physical appetite (77).


“By means of their criticism, Symons and Yeats hoped to establish symbolism as a wide-spread, accepted and conventional mode of artistic behaviour” (98). AS and Yeats’s Symbolism differed from the Symbolism of the past (especially that of Blake) by having the quality of self-awareness.


Yeats’s interest in “the symbolism of sound” was shared by many critics and writers. Among these is AS who, like Yeats, found that Pater’s “prose and his ideas imitated the musical structure” (202). AS also interpreted the writings of Swinburne, Gautier and Verlaine to have a musical quality with “harmonies” and “la nuance.” Yeats’s poetry was also concerned with this musicality in rhythm and even shared Symons’s praise of Wagner whose “actors moved rhythmically like music…, wanting his actors to move in much the same deliberate, stylised way” (209–10).


[Passing mention of AS’s criticism in *The Symbolist Movement in Literature*: “Even Arthur Symons seemed to be aware of the same theory of reality in his analysis of *Axël*, a play which impressed Yeats a great deal” (92n).]

“In the early part of his career, Yeats shared the belief of aesthetes like Arthur Symons” (92). Yeats also shared many other literary opinions with AS: that art should not suffer because of “the moral fastidiousness of the general public” (100), that “the artist ought [not] to be subject to claims of externals,” but that poetry was “purely personal and lyrical in its spirit” (102). AS considered beauty “to be a moral judgment on evil,” since it represented the “victory of the spiritual over the physical” (106).


“William Ernest Henley … we habitually read as a militant anti-aesthete; yet as early as 1893 Arthur Symons was finding close parallels between his work and Walter Pater’s” (xvii). AS’s statement that Decadence “has all the qualities that mark the end of great periods” is the “best description of all” (12). “Perhaps there is no writer of this period whose work is more insistently marked by the hunger for ecstasy” than that of AS (170).


AS, though long neglected, will be seen to be a poet who, beyond others, realized the “ideals of the moderns.” [Unreserved in his praise of AS.] (Stern)


A search for AS’s *Spiritual Adventures* began a personal discovery of his life and work. According to Roger Lhombreaud’s biography, AS wrote introductions to Blake, Marlowe, and John Day. Verlaine dedicated a poem to AS and Yeats wrote about AS in his biography. AS translated numerous French authors, including Baudelaire, Mallarmé, and Verlaine. AS also wrote important essays portraiting William Blake, Hawthorne, Pater, and Dowson. AS is “a great portraitist when he paints men, a great critic when he judges works” (7). [Includes brief synopsis of AS’s life, including his upbringing, time in Paris, contributions to various journals, and nervous breakdown in Italy. In French.]


Ruth Temple and other critics have criticized AS’s writings on Rimbaud, but time has shown that scholarship and criticism on Rimbaud today has not advanced as much beyond AS’s remarks as one has been led to believe. [Weak argument; overstates AS’s virtues as an early critic of Rimbaud. In French.] (Stern)


AS is a man who lived apart from his age, detached, with “no great point of contact with his epoch.” Although AS’s role in the 1890s is probably the part that brought him to the public’s attention, it should not be considered at the exclusion of his early career when he was influenced by Browning and Pater, nor of
his later years when he attempted a criticism of all the arts. [The author, drawing on AS’s published and unpublished writings, performs a critical analysis of AS’s formative years (1865–1889), his years “in Behalf of Patchouli” (1889–1898) when he was a spokesman of the doctrines of “decadence” and “symbolism,” his years from 1899–1908 when he attempted to synthesize all his criticism of poetry, prose, music, and art into a theory of all the arts, and the lengthy period from 1908–1945 in which AS had his initiation into madness and only a partially successful recovery. This book is valuable to the critic of AS because it is the only published, book-length biography to date (1974) that takes account of the wealth of unpublished materials that are available in libraries in America and abroad, but it is disappointing in that it is often careless and inaccurate about the biographical details of AS’s life and its criticism is more descriptive than analytic. A Frenchman’s critique of AS’s grasp of Symbolist doctrines would have been welcomed, but Lhombreaud settles for a superficial discussion of this topic. He assumes that it is the fin-de-siècle AS that is best known and concentrates on portraying his entire career. In so doing, he often diminishes AS’s importance in the nineties and is too generous in his assessment of his later writings. Reviewed by Ian Fletcher in Listener 69 (20 June 1963): 1045; in Times Literary Supplement (7 June 1963): 402; by Brigid Brophy in London Magazine 3 (November 1963): 82–88; by Francis Watson in Spectator 211 (12 July 1963): 61; by John M. Munro in Etudes Anglaises 17 (July–September 1964): 294–96; by Pierre Leyris in Mercure de France 350 (January 1964): 3–10; by Richard Ellmann in New York Review of Books (15 July 1963): 17–18; by Robert Peters in Victorian Studies 9 (June 1966): 422–23; in Economist 207 (29 June 1963): 1392; and by John Gross in New Statesman 65 (14 June 1963): 901, 904. See Index for additional reviews.] (Stern)


AS’s translations of the French poets helped to introduce Verlaine, Baudelaire, and Mallarmé to the British and American public. He rendered the entire body of Mallarmé’s verse into English but most of his translations remain unpublished. Many are held in the Princeton collection. A comparison of AS’s translations against the original reveals that here and there AS met “with divine equivalence.” (Stern)


In AS’s study of Monticelli in Studies in Seven Arts, he grasped the essence of the painter’s originality. (Stern)


[Discusses the literary relationships between England and France in the nineteenth century and considers some of the attributes of decadence in AS’s and Walter Pater’s views. Notes that AS commented on Decadence as a “disease,” but
also saw it as a phenomenon related to stylistic form. Includes references to AS and Mallarmé and Thomas Carlyle. (In German.)


The renewed interest in AS during the 1950s removed much of the “decadent” stigma associated with his work. Unfortunately, the scholarship did little to alter his part Symbolist scholar, part self-indulgent hedonist image. Nevertheless, under careful scrutiny it becomes apparent that the same drive that characterizes AS’s “decadent poetry” also characterizes his more scholarly criticism. AS’s “seeming contradictions … can be viewed … as symptom” of the late Victorian urge to find meaning outside of “conventional responses offered by religion and society” (6). AS’s drive to find meaning through philosophy in the wake of the Victorian “disintegration of the old values” led him to seek refuge in Symbolism (6). The “contradictions within the Symbolist aesthetic” made his creative work what it was. For all intents and purposes, AS left off producing original work at the time he suffered his mental collapse. Because his later work consisted of republications from an outdated aesthetic, AS’s later contemporaries had little respect for this work. Ironically enough, despite the similarities between his work and a more modernist aesthetic, AS never developed an appreciation for modernist poetry. In fact, he was never truly “decadent” because not only did he repeatedly attempt to link art and truth, but he never found satisfaction “in his personal impressions and experiences” (205). Of all the possible labels, that of existentialist—not “decadent”—applies to AS. [Annotation from dissertation. See also DAI 37 (1976): 335A.]


For all the inadequacies and inaccuracies of AS’s memoir of Dowson, it stimulated interest in Dowson and rendered “a service to the poet’s name.” It neglected Dowson’s days at Queen’s College, it exaggerated his experimentation with hashish, it celebrated “Cynara” to the neglect of other equally noteworthy and more typical poetic performances, and it wrote in ignorance of Dowson’s final days, but for all these faults, it was also one of the most perceptive and sympathetic studies of Dowson in its time. [Fair account of AS’s writings on Dowson.] (Stern) [3rd ed., Philadelphia: U of Pennsylvania P, 1967, contains appendix which includes new references to AS in three letters to Conal O’Riordan: 290, 291, 293.]


In his introduction to Dowson’s poems [The Poems of Ernest Dowson, with a Memoir by Arthur Symons, London, 1905. Reprinted 1929.], AS did not give “proper weight to the facts” (14). AS was also “mistaken” about the Dowson and Adelaïde relationship (21). Dowson’s poems revolving around “Cynara” figures “grew out of heightened emotional experience integrated into flawless artistic achievements. The trade of writing this kind of poetry is a dangerous one: without valid experience or without proper objectification of experience this kind of poetry can descend to the level of Arthur Symons’ ‘Bianca’ poems, and his
‘To One in Alienation,’ in which the theme of ‘Cynara’ recurs with unfortunate results. The distinctive quality and merit of Dowson’s love poetry can be traced to the fact that the life and personality of the poet and the decadent spirit were mutually congenial” (30). [Notes to the poems, 183–259, contain numerous references to AS. No index.]

From 1891, when Yeats met AS in the Rhymers’ Club, to 1895, when the two boarded together at Fountain Court, it would appear that AS encouraged Yeats to develop an idealistic aesthetic. In reality, however, when the two poets first began associating, “Symons subscribed to a sternly realist aesthetic, intent upon the conditions of the modern world” (87). Only later when fearing that the base subjects of such an aesthetic would cheapen poetry, did AS begin to accept Yeats’s esoteric and mystical aesthetic. Yeats’s foray into mysticism did lead AS to see the “esoteric beauties of symbolism” in time to dedicate The Symbolist Movement in Literature to Yeats. In the end, however, AS wound up catering to a modernist or realist aesthetic. Because he also found it difficult to reconcile poetry and politics, Yeats turned to AS’s article on Mallarméan style. Based on AS’s review of Mallarmé, Yeats’s “The Autumn of the Body” functioned as an attempt to justify his elitist’s tendencies towards the general readership. Ironically enough, Yeats returned to a practical aesthetic just as AS lost himself in abstraction similar to that in which Yeats previously floundered.

AS describes Eleonora Duse’s acting as “criticism; poor work dissolves under it, as under a solvent acid, and out of it emerges something finer and nobler” (169). [Quotation from AS’s Eleonora Duse. Passing reference to AS.]


In terms of being a literary heroine, AS called Christina Rossetti “more English than any Englishwoman” (171). “Arthur Symons’s 1895 Saturday Review article, which asserts Rossetti’s exclusive claim to feminine poetic greatness, is perhaps the most influential work in this mode” (174). AS ranks Rossetti “among poets rather than among poetesses” (179). “In some sense, Arthur Symons does read Rossetti as a deliberate artist. By accepting the narrow bonds of womanhood, he asserts, she ‘masters’ her own nature and thus paradoxically transcends the limits of her sex” (179).

AS remembers asking Walter Pater “if his family was really connected with that of the painter, Jean-Baptiste Pater.” Pater responded that he thought so. Even assuming it was not true, Pater admitted that he would “always say so” (302). AS’s account attests to the fact that Pater engaged in “personal myth making” (302). AS further records that Pater once informed him that “The Child in the House” was to form the beginnings of an autobiographical romance pointing out “the poetry of modern life” (303). This insight suggests that “The Child in the House” portrait didn’t make the reprint edition of *Imaginary Portraits* because it lacked the mythical foundation found in the remainder of the tales.


Defining French Symbolism for Joyce’s generation, AS described the goal of Symbolism in *The Symbolist Movement in Literature* as “‘a form of expression, at the best but approximate, essentially but arbitrary, until it has attained the force of a convention, for an unseen reality apprehended by the consciousness’” (7). Art Nouveau, or its German equivalent *Jugendstil,* did not attempt the “revolt against exteriority” spoken of by AS. Instead of clarifying the invisible world, these movements struggled to mend the exterior world “by introducing into it beautiful objects and designs” (8).


AS’s criticism, according to Eliot, is “etiolated creation.” (Stern)


AS echoes George Moore’s and George Gissing’s hopelessness, a characteristic of Naturalism, when wondering why the poor along Edgware Road “take the trouble to go on existing” (128). Both Yeats and AS faulted Naturalism with “always tending to lose itself in externalities of all kinds” (131). In fact, in his essay “The Symbolism of Poetry,” Yeats quotes AS on this very issue, proving “that both men were on the attack against the Naturalism of their own day” (131). Like AS, Moore, in his essay on Turgeniev, openly disagreed with Zola, and like both Yeats and AS, summed up the shortcomings of Naturalism with “the word ‘externality’” (133). Yeats’s preoccupation with style and music links itself to AS’s “Introduction” to *The Symbolist Movement in Literature.* AS argues that true-to-life art is less truthful than Symbolism because of its inability “to penetrate beneath accident and casual phenomena (‘externality’) to the ‘essence’ or ‘soul’ (favorite words of his and of Yeats)” (134).


After Hopkins’s death, the Nineties were characterized by poets who wrote about the city—“the city” meaning London. Like Hopkins, AS studied English prosody, and like Hopkins before him, returned to the example of Coventry Patmore. But, whereas Hopkins, in his poetry, tried to imagine solutions to the problem of modern urban life, “Symons, on the other hand, has no such grand ameliorative or corrective vision. The city is simply the condition of modern life” (64).


“By the end of World War I the major force of the Arts and Crafts Movement appears to have been spent … by the inexorable progress of the machine, the appropriation of art by the market economy, and the isolation of the fine arts, now more specialized than ever, from public and popular concerns” (190). AS lamented this in his review “The Decay of Craftsmanship in England.” “Symons was true to the Arts and Crafts ideal and regretted its failure to take root in an inhospitable soil” (190).


“In April 1908, not long before his career-ending mental breakdown, Arthur Symons published a notice in the Journal of the Gypsy Lore Society titled ‘In Praise of Gypsies.’ Though brief, the essay is freighted with the exoticism characterizing most gypsophilia at the time—indeed, characterizing most ethnographic endeavors of the early modernist period” (517). AS’s objection to the “Moveable Dwellings Bill” which he said would ‘shuffle (the ‘Gypsies’) right off the very earth to which they have the universal human right”—is largely disconnected from the actual social conditions of the Romani populations in England and Wales. Instead it springs mainly from Symons’s investment in the fictional romantic figure of the ‘Gypsy,’ a ‘natural man’ whose instinctual drive for freedom leads him away from civilization’s gatekeepers along a secret and infinitely receding road limning the outer reaches of modernity. Symons repeats all of the nineteenth-century tropes of orientalism and race, mysticism and ahistoricity” (517). “Thus Symons replicates one vector of the multivalent figure of the gadže (non-Romani) creation called the ‘Gypsy’” (518).


“Beardsley’s dismissal from The Yellow Book had shocked many of his fellow-contributors into severing their links with the Bodley Head, and one of them, Arthur Symons, was the first to see that Smithers could be used as the ideal substitute for Lane as publisher to the new writers and artists. He persuaded Smithers to seize the moment and engage Beardsley and himself to edit a new magazine to rival and replace The Yellow Book as the showcase of the latest ideas. This was The Savoy” (95). The Savoy “was more original, less dependent on established
names.” AS “was a more incisive and discriminating editor than Harland, and Beardsley was now at the height of his powers” (95–6).


AS liked to search for beauty “anxiously, sadly, and even perversely, in moods and perceptions which are generally regarded as trivial or base.” The purest of such beauties can be felt in the subtle and responsive critical writings of AS. [Review of Cities of Italy. Essay on AS and aesthetic criticism in general. Good early critique of Aestheticism.] (Stern)


AS was an ideal partner for Beardsley in the new venture, the Savoy. It is to AS’s credit that he did not encourage Beardsley in his literary endeavors. [Fails to mention the personality difficulties that existed between AS and Beardsley.] (Stern)


There are similarities between Lawrence’s city poems and the “urban poetry” of several writers, including AS. Lawrence’s use of night settings recalls how this same motif was “dear to Symbolists and late romantics” because at night the “city can be more easily depicted in its unreality or décadence, and its human components revealed in their existential implications based upon a bodiless ethereal ambiguity” (30). When Lawrence writes of night as “a refuge and an escape” in “Hyde Park at Night Before the War,” it reminds one of AS’s “affected fin de siècle urban verse” (30).


“Both advance the view that the time has come to modify some conventional ways of discussing the Romantic frame of mind, and both make use of ‘up-dated’ methodologies” (125). “There have been several ‘new’ criticisms over the past five or six decades, and this prompts one to ask just how long any critical approach can be expected to remain serviceable before suffering relegation. Obviously, few critics of consequence would now adopt the manner of phraseology of, say, Matthew Arnold or Arthur Symons or even, for that matter, the author of The Sacred Wood [T. S. Eliot]” (125). [Review of Questioning Romanticism by John Beer (AS not mentioned in the book’s index) and Romanticism by Aidan Day (no index, AS not mentioned in book’s bibliography).]


In a letter to AS on August 10, 1927, Image wrote, “So far as I personally am concerned I rejoice that it is on my Millet article that you have pitched…. With regard to the other articles you mention as wishing to make use of them, I imagine in respect of any question of copyright that it would rest entirely with Mackmurdo” (207). [One letter referring to AS.]

695.1. MacLeod, Kirsten. Fictions of British Decadence: High Art, Popular Writing, and the Fin de Siècle. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006. 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 12,
Arthur Symons, Critic Among Critics


“British Decadents mystified their class origins. Ironically, this project, as Symons notes, only exposed them as the middle-class subjects that they were. He ought to have known. He was a middle-class Decadent himself” (22). “Where critics of Decadence focused on its more sensationalistic aspects, proponents [including AS] articulated intellectual theories that represented Decadence as a high artistic genre.” (99). Arthur Machen’s work may be compared to that of AS, but Machen “would likely have taken exception to the comparison … for though their aesthetic theories coincide in their mystical, romantic, anti-realist, and anti-materialist emphases, they find their ideals in different sources” (198).


“The presence of Francophobia in English literature and culture has been overshadowed by the Francophilia of canonical late nineteenth-century and modernist writers and critics such as Pater, Swinburne, Symons, Wilde, Moore, Yeats, and others” (67). “[A]bsinthe was particularly popular among the Francophilic artists in Britain who drank absinthe ‘as a means to extend sensation beyond the range of ordinary consciousness.’ Ernest Dowson and Arthur Symons, among others, wrote poems in praise of the green liqueur, suggesting that Corelli’s fears were not entirely unfounded” (74). [Passing mention of AS.]


AS, spokesman of French Symbolism to the English, interpreted Verlaine and Mallarmé to Yeats. Yeats’s essay “The Autumn of the Body” is another “exposition of the gospel of Symbolism as preached by Symons.” [Thinly understands AS’s poetry; too quick to label it “Ninetyish.”] (Stern)


[This dissertation proposes an affective theory of emotionality derived from the affect psychology of Silvan Tomkins. It then reads nineteenth-century British poetry as a participant in a culturally constructed affective economy. This theory proposes that biological imperatives for the preservation of the species include the imperative for the preservation of the self through the perception of approval from others…. In analyses of the poetry of Samuel Taylor Coleridge, William Wordsworth, Robert Browning and Arthur Symons, this dissertation explores how poetry engages readers in the affective economy and also how the poetry participates in changing that economy through the century as publicly shared affect is suppressed in favor of an affectively muted, self-reflexive compensation.] [Annotation from *Digital Dissertations*. Source: *DAI* 65 (2004): 1380A.]


James Joyce wrote the 36 poems of *Chamber Music* during a period heavily influenced “by Arthur Symons and the Symbolist movement” (44).

AS relied heavily on Charles Lamb’s theory of theater to develop his own aesthetic for drama. Edward Craig, in turn, incorporated AS’s theories on theater “to develop an art of theatre which carries the ideals of aestheticism into the 20th century” (147). Craig, AS, and Lamb believed that in “all departments of the stage … life is no gain, and offers no genuine interest” (147). AS rejected the excesses of theatrical realism, such as using “real Thames water” on stage, in favor of more “imaginative approaches to staging” (149). Lamb and AS also agree that realistic drama will not reveal the fundamental elements of life. Craig and AS share many of the same views regarding puppets. In fact, Craig’s objection to acting was based on his aversion to realistic reproductions of nature—an objection similar to AS’s qualm with photography. Because neither Craig or AS viewed life as something resembling lived experience, their preferred styles of acting incorporated qualities other than the reproduction of life. Craig must have read AS’s “An Apology for Puppets” because he quoted from it “in various issues of *The Mask*” (155). Both men connected marionettes with the role of masks in Greek theater. AS believed that an Ibsen play would benefit immensely if portrayed with Craig’s marionettes.


AS “deserves to be much better known that he is”: as the author of *The Symbolist Movement in Literature*, he influenced T. S. Eliot and Ezra Pound; he helped James Joyce find a publisher; and he defended the work of Joseph Conrad and Thomas Hardy (ix). “Part of the problem with Symons’s reputation stems from the fact that in the late summer of 1908 he suffered a mental breakdown from which he never fully recovered” (x). However, AS’s early work showed amazing breadth and insight, and this study attempts to “deal directly with some of the more important aspects of Symons as a critic of the seven arts” (x). “The first chapter [‘The Literary Background’], then, deals with some aspects of his literary background that relate most directly with his criticism of the other arts. ‘The Art of the Theatre,’ the second chapter, within which is included some consideration of the art of dance, begins the fuller description of Symons’s work as a critic of the various arts. The next chapter [‘The Art of Travel’] concerns Symons’s travel writings, his interest in the aesthetics of the spirit of place. Living life as art became especially important to the aesthetic traveller during this period. ‘Arts and Artists’ [chapter 4] deals with Symons’s theory of the visual arts, including handicraft, and his evaluation of various individual artists. The final chapter [‘Music and Musicians’] describes Symons as a music critic, evaluating his ideals in music and the art of musical performance” (xi).

Elizabeth Siddal’s life, although scantily documented, has gone through multiple interpretations since her death. One group, fin-de-siècle artists, reveal a fascination with Elizabeth Siddal in their writings. “As one fascinated, the chief priest of Decadence—Arthur Symons—discussed the exhumation with Eleonora Duse, while Beata Beatrix seems to have inspired his own ‘pale and heavy-lidded woman’ in Images of Good and Evil…” (67). [Passing mention of AS.]

Evidence suggests that William Faulkner encountered translated poems by both Verlaine and Mallarmé in AS’s The Symbolist Movement in Literature. Some of AS’s translations were “very close to Faulkner’s own translations” (390). William Faulkner developed his ability to “suggest rather than directly state” by studying the synaesthetic, lyrical, and musical qualities of Symbolism in Symbolist poetry and the writings of AS (390). Even had he failed to read Mallarmé’s “famous dictum”—“to suggest [an object], there’s the dream”—Faulkner would have learned that “to name is to destroy, to suggest is to create” from AS (400).

“This article makes the case for a critical consideration of the Victorians’ attitude towards France which goes beyond studies of literary influence and focuses on their response to French culture in a broader sense” (562). “Analyses of French literary influences on British texts still account for the largest share of publications in this area, which take the shape of articles and sections in books rather than monographs devoted exclusively to the subject. The most prominent example is the discussion of the inspiration which British fin-de-siècle writers like AS “found in French Parnassian and Symbolist poetry, which is touched upon by almost every study on the 1890s. The critical fascination with the fin de siècle tends to eclipse the analysis of Anglo-French literary relations earlier in the century” (564).

“Joyce and Wagner” demonstrates Joyce’s thorough exposure to Wagner, both direct, through his habituation of the library and the opera house, and indirect, through conduits like AS (xiv). To AS, “Wagner was the consummate Symbolist” (11). “Joyce’s Wagnerism, however uncritical in his Dublin youth, would soon be restrained and conditioned by his pride, iconoclasm, and ironic temperament. As his own artistic powers developed, he could not remain a disciple like AS, “nor could he accept the influence of a coterie” (30). “Joyce may have been following the example of” AS in The Symbolist Movement in Literature “where the idea of fusing music and literature is a persistent theme” (143).

By “coining a French equivalent for leitmotif,” following Wagner’s operas by libretto, and by alluding to Wagner in his “early critical writings” and poetry, James Joyce demonstrated he was a “true Wagnerite” like AS.
Joyce’s knowledge of Mathilde Wesendock—Wagner’s inspiration for *Tristan und Isolde*—confirms his status as a “literary Wagnerite … in the tradition of Édouard Dujardin, George Moore, and” AS (70).

“Literary impressionism, defined by Pater, found poetic embodiment in Wilde’s ‘Impressions’ (1877) and Symons’ *Silhouettes* (1892)” (23). Pound later called impressionistic subjectivity “softness” but the roots of “the commonplace as a source of subjects can be traced to Henley and Symons” (23). It was also most likely that AS introduced Symbolism to the “School of Images.” In the end however, “For Pater and Symons, it was impossible to reconcile the realm of impersonal fact with the sensitive individual consciousness which constituted the only source of poetry” (32). [Passing mention.]

“The closer one comes to characterizing some piece of music in a way that does not refer to the deeds of individuals in a temporal setting, the more general and abstract will be the account one gives of it, and the less liable to objection on grounds of arbitrariness and infidelity.” AS “presented these alternatives memorably in ‘Christian Trevalga’” (51). In that story, “it was the listener who made up stories about the music, while the player dealt in music alone; as if the unity of the idea were refracted into discrete elements by passing through him, to be received at a farther remove. Mallarmé suggested such a relationship when he called the dancer a ‘living hieroglyph’: the art of the dancer consists in embodying an idea” (57). “In the discrepancy between their approaches to solving the same inveterate problem—How can musical effects be achieved by the use of language?—there is ample illustration of the truth of Arthur Symons’s remark that ‘In their mystical aim Villiers and Maeterlinck are at one; in their method there is all the difference in the world’” (65).

The Aesthetic artist was preoccupied with artificiality, physical exhaustion, moral degeneracy, but surprisingly he also spoke of simplicity and virtue, as seen in AS’s proclaimed admiration of the Decadent’s “childlike simplicity” (4) and “perfect proportion” (5). Stylistically, the Aesthete’s “neglect of larger forms” reveals, as AS explains, the artist’s “desperate endeavor … to flash the impression of the moment” (6). Interestingly, the artist himself is this “gratuitous detail” (6) who still possesses the qualities of the whole. AS also notes the Decadent artist’s refusal to be dismissed as inconsequential to society and asserts that an artist’s dreams “reflect all the moods, all the manners, of … society” (9).

“Sarojini Naidu arrived in London as Sarojini Chattopadhyay in 1895 ... [and] she quickly found her way into the literary circle of Edmund Gosse, where she developed an intimate friendship with the decadent poet-critic” AS. “Sarojini strove to become the poet of the mysterious East that Gosse and Symons wanted her to be and was, at the same time, deeply influenced by the contemporary poetry scene in England” (141). Sarojini convinced AS “that she and her vision of India were the living embodiments of an exotic intensity to which even a Western adventurer like Sir Richard Burton could only aspire” (146). Although Laurence Hope’s [pseudonym for Adela “Violet” Nicolson, 1865–1904] poetry is similar to AS’s in “‘psychological subtlety and frankness’” AS “himself seems to have taken only a passing interest in this late arrival to the decadent camp” (149). “Rather than reading her in the context of the poets of the 1890s, Symons chose to compare Nicolson with Emily Brontë” (150). AS “disapproved of Nicolson’s going native, [and] he also took issue with her philosophically” (150). “Yet Nicolson’s philosophy of passion was as complex as Symons’s and certainly more intense; his passionate lyrics, the tales of excess in his London Nights, for example, seem tepid in comparison with her ‘passionate effusions.’ In rejecting the mysticism that held together Symons’s tenuous approach to life, she was perhaps the more modern of the two, though it left her, as she wrote in one poem, ‘a broken boat / On a sea of passions, adrift, afloat’ (16)” (151). “Symons’s observation that Laurence Hope had captured ‘the very soul and colour of the East’ was a common, though by no means universal, view” (151).


“Donoghue gives us, in a chapter on ‘La Figlia che Piange,’ a fine defense of beauty—hardly a term one hears in most academic discussions on poetry these days. In this chapter Donoghue discusses symbolism, using references to Virgil, Dickens, Arthur Symons, Guy Davenport, James Joyce, Catullus, Dante Gabriel Rossetti, Aquinas, Hegel, and Adorno, not to mention Eliot’s own criticism” (631).


[Favorable review of AS’s Charles Baudelaire: A Study. Differs with AS’s assessment of Baudelaire, but admires his method and particular temperament which combine to make him peculiarly suited to write on Baudelaire.] (Stern)


AS’s Tristan and Iseult is a piece of “fine poetic tragedy.” (Stern)


“Arthur Symons very anxious to join the ranks of the L. R. contributariat. Is this a compliment? He apparently prefers our company to chance of payment from ‘Drama’” (95). [Brief mention of AS.]

“AND the Symons’ play [not identified] seems to me so much ‘worse.’ Its hot anti-con. Suppose the point doesn’t dawn on the postal mind. I don’t mean that it is lascivious or whatever the legal term is. BUT if they are going to suppress literature WHY they pitch on Cantleman and not Symons stumps me. etc. etc” (133).

[Passing references to Yellow Book, Savoy, and AS at the Bodley Head, Harland’s home, and the Cheshire Cheese.] (Stern)

After AS published “The Decadent Movement in Literature” in 1893, “no amount of backtracking in subsequent years could undo Symons’s fatal association of Decadence with poetry that was profoundly morbid, male, and morally perverse, even though a number of scholars have done their best to resist the stereotype” (48). “One of the factors we underestimate in analyzing Decadence is the power of gossip, the way the oral tradition worked to fashion the literary reputations of Dowson, Gray, Johnson, Symons, and Wilde, as well as the Scottish writer John Davidson” (51). “Rumor and Yeats did the rest to establish Dowson’s legend. Although Yeats insisted in his Memoirs that he had ‘no intimate knowledge of Dowson’ except through Symons, Yeats’s portrayal of Dowson as drug addict, drinker, and womanizer became definitive” (52). “Yeats dictated that the mythos of this group which in part he forged (in collaboration with Symons) would effectively determine any future discussion of the poetry of the 1890s” (57).

AS “and Gray were passionate converts to the symbolistes, having discovered Verlaine and Mallarmé by 1891. Independently, as we have seen, Gray had come upon the poetry of Rimbaud and Laforgue” (59). As Gray looked toward the twentieth century, AS was one of the poets that “would last”; others, he claimed, “were preposterous” (60). In comparing AS’s Silhouettes (1892) with Gray’s Silverpoints (1893), we see that AS “limited himself to the translation of Verlaine. In comparison, Gray’s poems cover an impressive range: from Baudelaire (three poems) and Verlaine (seven) to Mallarmé (one) and Rimbaud (two). If one may argue that modern poetry evolved in part through the discovery after the turn of the century by T. S. Eliot, W. B. Yeats, and Wallace Stevens, among others, of the symboliste poets and their disciples, then it is fair to say that John Gray here played a strategic if limited role” (135–36). “Of his contemporaries, Gray is the first to capture that austere precision which T. S. Eliot found so deficient in the translations of Arthur Symons. The difference is apparent in the opening lines of their renditions of [Charles Baudelaire’s] ‘Un Voyage à Cythère.’… Gray’s muscular lines move with the tension of the original, entirely lost in Symons’s flaccid (if faithful) paraphrase. Not only is Gray’s poem admirable, but Symons may have pillaged it for his own closing lines” (137). However, Gray “did not become
a major translator of the symboliste poets, as did” AS (141). Even though AS “praised Gray’s translations of Goethe and Nietzsche, there seems to have been some tension between him and Gray, as Gray himself admitted” (175).


“Looking back, Father Gray had an even harsher view of the Rhymers, remarking that except for Johnson and Symons, Yeats and [probably] Dowson, ‘the rest were preposterous’” (53). “Gray did not particularly like Symons, even though he had become a neighbor of his when he moved, less than a year ago, into rooms in the Temple” (73). [Written in a narrative style, McCormack recounts several incidents in the AS–John Gray relationship.]


AS is characterized as “no passive spectator” who attempted to place Synge’s Riders to the Sea in a number of periodicals for profit (248). AS’s nervous breakdown drew Yeats and Quinn to speculate over the cause. Quinn attributes the breakdown to AS’s sexual promiscuity (355). In June, following Synge’s death, AS writes of the deceased that “his name will remain among those writers whose names survive death” (386).


“Sophisticated and urbane, Symons introduced WBY to the work of the French Symbolists Mallarmé and Paul Verlaine…. He acquainted him with the music hall, and the genesis of WBY’s preoccupation with the dancer in his poems and dance plays is contained in early poems by Symons.” “WBY had nineteen titles by Symons in his personal library, including The Symbolist Movement in Literature” (382). [AS is mentioned in entries on Aran Islands, Fountain Court, Glencar, Althea Gyles, W[illiam] T[homas] Horton, Lionel Johnson, Stéphane Mallarmé, Julia Marlowe, Elkin Mathews, John Quinn, Rhymers’ Club, Leonard Smithers, Tulira Castle, and Paul Verlaine.]


AS “wrote of a dinner in London in April, 1900, at which Whistler was present: ‘I never saw anyone so feverishly alive.’…. ‘Feverishly alive’ was more clinically accurate than Symons may have suspected…. His heart was showing signs of serious weakness. He caught colds which he could not seem to shake off” (269).


AS introduced Symbolism to the English tradition by “domesticating it with associationist principles” (359). In reviewing AS’s “Pastel,” “White Heliotrope,” and “Prologue”—poetry characteristic of the associationist line—it becomes clear that Eliot’s Prufrock advanced beyond AS’s associationist standard. While
the persona in “Pastel” succeeds only in acting out “the source or voice of affectionately grounded truth,” Prufrock actually possesses the ability to evoke moods and “sort out the particular objects and feelings that are blurred into … these totalizing moods” (368).


   “The sing-song movement of ““Goblin Market” with “its ‘leaping and hopping and rhythm [and] … its almost infantile jingle and cadence,’ … [were] features that for Arthur Symons made the poem ’surely the most naive and childlike poem in our language’” (46).

   AS, introduced to Olive by Havelock Ellis, became a warm friend to her. [Slight.] (Stern)

   In describing AS’s character, we can identify the interaction of three factors: a strong moral attitude, an attraction to sensuality, and an appreciation of the intellect. AS’s strong moral element creates in AS a strong need for atonement. However, he also strongly values life, and that in the form of sensuality and biological drive, which he finds in the Renaissance and in Romanticism. This drive is not without check, for it is bound strongly to the intellect. Thus, there is a period in AS’s life when art is not a matter of sensitivity, but also a matter of critical criteria (33). Because of the strong influence of these three factors, it is difficult for AS to empathize with entities that do not relate closely to his essence, which often leads to a characteristic misunderstanding of literary personalities and movements. Thus AS’s perception of Romanticism and the Decadent movement is quite subjective. [In German.]

   “The magical arithmetic of Symbolism, whereby the sum of ordinary images is made to yield what” AS “called ‘the finer sense of things unseen, the deeper meaning of things evident,’ is discovered to be a sleight of hand: the poet can solve the equation any way he chooses”(22). “When writers and artists of the 1890s referred to themselves as decadents, they were responding to … [a] Victorian obsession with the dangers of physio-logical abnormality. AS, “for example, described decadent literature as ‘a new and beautiful and interesting disease. Healthy we cannot call it, and healthy it does not wish to be considered’” (204n25). [From AS’s “The Decadent Movement in Literature” (1893). The first edition of Menand’s book was published by Oxford UP in 1987.]

AS, as the key Symbolist of his time, influenced greatly Eliot’s development as a poet. AS’s landmark work, *The Symbolist Movement in Literature*, introduced Eliot to French poets, most notably to Laforgue. From AS, Eliot read Pater’s notion of musicality, which strongly influenced Eliot’s early works. This immersion in AS’s Symbolism later would prompt Eliot’s “temporary conversion to Bergsonism,” whose attention to the “interior life of feeling” and to image was “entirely compatible” with Symbolism (36).


After reading AS’s discussion of the poet Jules Laforgue in *The Symbolist Movement in Literature*, Eliot transformed his writing from being “lyrical, earnest, and imagistic” to the “mocking, jaded and theatrical” verse of Laforgue (28).


AS devoted one of his sensitive studies in *The Symbolist Movement in Literature* to Laforgue. [Passing references to *Studies in Seven Arts* and AS’s writings on Villiers de l’Isle-Adam.] (Stern)


[This paper will examine the role of the late-Victorian Lutetian Society translators (Alexander Teixeira de Mattos, their leader, Ernest Dowson, Havelock Ellis, Percy Pinkerton, Victor Plarr, & Arthur Symons) as translating subjects & cultural agents, united by the “cause” of providing British readers with unexpurgated translations of some of Emile Zola’s maligned, if not banned, masterpieces so that they might be able to form an unbiased opinion of the literary merits of the works. Furthermore, the paper will explore what motivated these translators to join in this clandestine translation project & try to give some insight into the effect of their (re)translation activity on their personal appreciation of Zola & the novel translated. The paper concludes that the act of (re)translation served to expand the cultural horizons of the Lutetian Society translators. Their translations would, in turn, expand the cultural horizons of those who read them. 31 References.] [Abstract from Cambridge Scientific Abstract (CSA)’s *Linguistics and Language Behavior Abstracts* (LLBA).]


AS is a poet of moods. [Discusses the Savoy and AS’s *London Nights*. In French.] (Stern)


Merrill’s most extensive article on AS and his writings. [In French.] (Stern)


“Edmund Blunden took his Arthur Symons selection of Clare to the western front in the First World War” (836). “Contemporary American poets address
Clare in ways that have less to do with madness and more with poetic approach and craft. John Ashbury, in his chapter on Clare in Other Traditions, unsurprisingly commends Clare’s most Ashbury-like, postmodern traits. He quotes Arthur Symons’s remark that Clare ‘begins anywhere and stops anywhere’” (838).


“[“The revival of instrumental music composed before Bach was an important cultural event in the turn of the century noticed by many writers such as W. B. Yeats, James Joyce, and Bernard Shaw, Arthur Symons, and William Morris…. Arnold Dolmetsch inspired Pound to study some of the technical foundations of music. Those studies affected much of Pound’s poetic and theoretical work. Pound, by appropriating concepts principally associated with music for a more general aesthetic applicable to literature, transformed Dolmetsch from a quaint voice from the past (as he had been for Yeats, Symons, and Morris) into an avant-garde avatar, as Shaw had perceived” (4123-A.)] [Annotation edited from DAI 51 (1991): 4122A.]


As the editor of the Savoy, AS was the first to publish Yeats’s definition of symbolism. In fact, AS dedicated The Symbolist Movement in Literature to W. B. Yeats because he considered Yeats to be “the first English symbolist” (16). While Yeats only unconsciously recognized the importance of visual imagery in symbolism, AS anticipated this crucial need. He attempted to artistically express this ideal with ballet. For him ballet “had ‘the intellectual as well as sensuous appeal of a living symbol’” (16). By mentioning mysticism in the introduction to The Symbolist Movement in Literature, AS proves that he “was also aware of the esoteric connotations of Symbolism” (16n1).


Until quite recently, English versions of continental works were unworthy; AS has done much to alter the bad state of affairs. His book on Symbolism was one of the first books to understand and interpret the French movement to the English. (Stern)


“The question of Poe’s high status in France continued to preoccupy modern authors. In two essays written during the Great War, Pound argued that Baudelaire had uncritically adopted Poe’s fuzziest ideas: ‘Poe was his metaphysician, and his devotion sustained him through a translation of Eureka.’ Pound traced the origins of Poe’s foreign reputation to Stéphane Mallarmé’s famous sonnet of 1876 and to Arthur Symons’ four essays on Poe. After distinguishing between the value of Poe’s prose and verse, he condemned Mallarmé’s translation of ‘The Raven’: ‘The cult of Poe is an exotic introduced via Mallarmé and Arthur Symons’” (275).