Arthur Symons, Critic Among Critic

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AS and Ellis took an extended trip to Paris in 1890 and visited such notables as Verlaine and Mallarmé. [Brief references to AS’s role in the Casanova scholarship. Reliable discussion of the AS–Ellis friendship.] (Stern)


AS was a dedicated Browningite in the 1880s. Frederick J. Furnivall and James Dykes Campbell launched him on his literary career. He was a contributor to the *Transactions of the Society* and his study of Browning, *Introduction to the Study of Browning* (1886), was the best book in the nineteenth century on Browning’s poetry. AS’s tribute to Browning, and debt to him, can be found in his poem “A Fancy of Ferishtah.” (Stern)


Browning declared in a letter to Furnivall, dated 5 November 1882, that a poem, “Unanswered Yet,” attributed to Browning that AS had sent from “an American paper” to be a “holy fraud.” Cassell sent Browning proofs of *Introduction to the Study of Browning* to which Browning responded to Furnivall on 7 October 1886: “By this Post, I return the ‘Proofs’ to Messrs. Cassell, having read them carefully and set right the very little that was wrong in the printing. I enclosed in the parcel, a letter of acknowledgement to Mr Symons. I tell him truly that I hardly know how to praise his book without praising myself but I try to convey some sense of the great gratification he has given me however my poetry may come short of what his generosity endeavours to find there” (139).


We usually remember AS for his work in the 1890s, but that view is limited unless we see his work in the 1880s as a “zealous Browningite” who was “still struggling to break away from a home filled with evangelical piety and still trying to find his place in the London literary world.” In the 1880s AS “met chiefly through his membership in the Browning Society the men who were to help him launch his career” (71). Dr. Furnivall helped introduce AS “to the larger world of London” (71). AS’s *Introduction to the Study of Browning* (1886) was given “to every member of the Browning Society” (74). Although AS’s book “is marred by an ‘excess of enthusiasm,’ it is in many respects brilliant and perceptive, displaying that fine critical tact which was to characterize his subsequent prose writings” (74). Even though AS became “disenchanted” with some members of the Society, he was grateful that through the Society he was able to meet Browning (76). Browning and his followers helped constitute AS’s “literary apprenticeship: by the nineties he was able to emerge with fully developed powers as the chief literary spokesman of that decade” (79). AS’s work on Browning is “among the finest and most intelligent essays written on Browning in the nineteenth century” (191).

[Considers the poetic techniques and themes of AS and his contemporaries and identifies Walter Pater as one of the theorists of the 1890s with AS as both theorist and lyricist. Notes that AS’s essay “The Decadent Movement in Literature” and his poem “Autumn Twilight: Grey and Gold” are illustrations of both his theory and practice that reflect the feelings of the times. (In German.)]


[Notes that T. S. Eliot, in his early lyric poetry, followed the example of French Symbolists, especially Jules Laforgue, and Laforgue was described by one of the most important theorists of Decadence and of Symbolists in England, AS, in The Symbolist Movement in Literature. Also explains that AS and his contemporaries treat the effects of time in recurring pictures of evening, fall, age, and exhaustion. (In German.)]


Most of Pater’s followers fell under the spell of his early works and failed to reckon with the more mature Pater of Marius the Epicurean and Plato and Platonism. Wilde, Dowson, Moore, and AS serve the Pater of The Renaissance; only Lionel Johnson, the antithesis of these men, grew with Pater and left the art for art’s sake doctrines for the higher values Pater finally espoused. (Stern)


“In Germany, Theodor Lessing could claim that city noises both caused and revealed the degeneration and ‘cultural immaturity’ of modern European urban life (Baron, 165, 173). Yet at nearly the same time, in ‘The Barrel-Organ’ (1897), Arthur Symons was mourning a frustrated romance by aligning his emotional state with that former target of Victorian scorn” (448). [Passing mention of AS, but quotes a stanza from AS’s poem “The Barrel-Organ” from Amoris Victima (1897).]


AS’s letters are “roughhewn and often drab, the letters lack art and rarely delight” (167). The letters show that “ambition and frustration undermine his attempts at being high-minded…. Symons struggles, abrasive and vulgar but alive. The Symons letters are wonderfully edited” (168).


“In 1895 he published Arthur Symon’s ‘London Lights’ [London Nights] from Effingham House (printed by the Chiswick Press) and in the following year Symon’s
‘Silhouettes’ (again printed by the Chiswick Press and published in February)” (5). [This would have been the second edition of Silhouettes. Karl Beckson in Arthur Symons: A Bibliography (5) lists April as the month of publication.]


The richness of suggestion exhibited in AS's delicate verse reminds one of Whistler’s works. [Admiring review of Silhouettes.] (Stern)


“The crisis in English poetry which began about thirty years before the outbreak of the First World War is a part of the moral, intellectual, social and economic crisis of England and Western Europe in which we are still living today” (9). AS was among the poets of this time “who chose the ‘voyage within,’ deliberately cutting themselves off from the life of the common man in order to dedicate their lives to a purely aesthetic ideal…. These poets were the literary descendants of the Pre-Raphaelites and especially of Swinburne” (15). They also “deliberately cut themselves off from the common life of late Victorian England…. For them art was a kind of religion, but none of them except Yeats had the courage to devote himself to that religion with the wholehearted integrity of a Mallarmé or the wild ecstasy of a Rimbaud” (17). Unlike AS and others, Yeats “was in touch with a genuine living folk culture and a mythology which had not grown stale and hackneyed by centuries of repetition” (79). For Yeats, AS’s “translations of Mallarmé’s poems were as useful to him as Golding’s Ovid was to Shakespeare” (82).


AS's “contribution to contemporary and subsequent understandings of the points at issue in Symbolism, Decadence, and Impressionism was considerable. Both as a popularizer (among an elite) of Symbolist theory, and as an exponent of symbolic studies in dance, sexuality, and the stage, he was to prove himself a figure who could not be excluded from any account of the issues he himself had done so much to raise. What he had to say made itself felt across a huge range of the subject-matter of what became Modernism: from his part in the Metaphysical revival and his idea of Donne as in a ‘morbid state of body and brain and nerves’ to his identification of the nature of Symbolism in literature, despite all the prejudices, apostasies, and opportunist changes of heart of which Symons's arguments were guilty. This is Symons’s triumph, and one not always acknowledged: yet all acknowledgement should guard itself against the mere inheritance of his arguments. Symons's Symbolism is a powerful mystic force: but Symbolism itself was more than Arthur Symons said it was” (77).


“There were certainly two Dowsons—one the vexed and torn spirit of the biographers, of Mr Sherard and Mr Arthur Symons, the other a Dowson intime, known, I venture to think, to very few, but by those few greatly loved” (9). “Ernest Dow-
son appreciated the ancestral trade half humorously. Mr Arthur Symons need not have pitied him for being a docker in those early artless days” (34). In 1893, Dowson’s “myth, as well as Aubrey Beardsley’s, was in process of formation. By the American Mr Talcott Williams, and mutatis mutandis, by Mr Arthur Symons the melancholy or lurid myth of Ernest Dowson will inevitably be perpetuated” (79). [Reprint of the 1914 edition published by L. J. Gomme, New York.]


The photographic style of Frederick Evans has Symbolist aspects highly comparable to the literary Symbolism of J.-K. Huysmans. “So vividly does Symons’s discussion of Huysman’s Symbolism recall Evans’s photographs that in many instances Symons sounds as if he were actually describing them” (248–9). It is thought that because Aubrey Beardsley was a mutual friend to both, AS and Evans may have known each other.


Even though AS wanted to be known to late Victorian readers as a poet, “he was almost exclusively known as one of the leading literary theorists and critics of his time, whose outstanding merit lay in the introduction of French Symbolism to British literary circles” (9). His prose works caused him to be “ranked among the most multitaled and prolific authors of the Yellow Decade, but when it came to his lyrical oeuvre even his friends and fellow poets tended to adopt a highly critical stance” (9). “In the present study I shall endeavour to adopt a more objective, unbiased approach to Symons’s early poetical works so as to be able to unearth the technical subtleties and literary qualities of some of his most ill-famed lyrics that his prudish critics failed to bring to the fore. Contrary to Thornton, who completely misjudged the Decadent author by calling him ‘unliterary,’ I hold the view that Symons, being perfectly familiar with the national literatures of Britain, France, Germany, Italy, Spain, Russia and America, not only fell back on his incredibly vast and profound knowledge of Western civilization, poetic traditions, and literary topoi in writing his innumerable critical essays and articles, but also echoed many of his favourite writers in his own lyrics, inscribing some of their most prominent motifs and poetic strategies into his own texts. To my mind, this does not make him an uninspired imitator of greater poets, but rather a truly innovative author whose originality is determined precisely by the intertextual tenor of his works” (21). [Originally presented as the author’s thesis (doctoral)—Universität Duisburg-Essen, 2004.]


[Brief biographical piece on AS. In German.]


Eliot wanted to present himself as a world poet, not just an American poet. While at Harvard, he had read AS’s The Symbolist Movement in Literature, and discov-
ered he could “turn his American experiences into poetry only with the help of European models” (40). Eliot argues that he could not have written poetry at all without the poets contained in AS’s work, namely Laforgue and Baudelaire (41).


“The trapeze [an image used by Hardy] and the floating spar [an image used by Gissing]—given the different elements of air and water, they are curiously similar images. For these are the only objects the city seems to provide for the sustaining of identity, the perilous floating or floundering. It is interesting to find this image of the acrobat and the trapeze being used by Arthur Symons in a volume of short stories entitled *Spiritual Adventures* (1905) dedicated to Hardy. In the superb story ‘Christian Trevalga,’ the concert pianist of the title imagines the mechanical activity of his performance to be similar to that of the trapeze-artist, and then projects the image beyond this to characterise his whole public identity…. Though Gissing’s image typically refers to a state in which the individual has already in some sense fallen, for all three writers the maintenance of identity is associated with a perilous edge of survival. Beyond the edge of the spar or the trapeze, there is only vacancy, as Symons’s artist discovers in his progressive absorption into a disembodied inner world” (39). In AS’s “*London: A Book of Aspects* (1909), the created style is concerned with revealing certain limited aesthetic impressions with extreme absorption, and with resisting any more challenging connection with the actual human beings who live in the city. London is drenched in Whistlerian images of night, mist, lights, colours” (55).


“Arthur Symons is better known for his writings on poetry than for either his own verse or for his essays on other arts. His *oeuvre* also contains a substantial amount of criticism of the visual arts…. By the late 1890s, when Symons’s ideas on the arts began to mature, he formulated an aesthetic that was broad enough to encompass the visual arts (260). Symons’s entire aesthetic can be seen as symbolist as he stipulates the term … [because] for Symons, artistic vision and the visionary are one and the same (261). Fundamentally, his aesthetic seeks organicism in art. What a work of art wishes to be or say should determine its form, that is, its technical considerations … (262). Symons seems to be saying that the artist who suggests rather than copies nature in his work comes closer to the natural world or has a more complete understanding of that world than those for whom truth in art means the simple representation of detail…. The artist is he who is able to perceive that links exist between the phenomenal and noumenal worlds (264). Symons found that an artist’s powers of vision were crucial, the one gift the painter must possess in order to achieve the kind of transcendental art that Symons calls symbolist (266). Symons judges all art depending upon whether it possesses or lacks visionary power…. To know exactly what Symons means when he says that only the presence of life characterizes truly great art is difficult (269). Ultimately, in Symons’s aesthetic art is elitist (270). Symons’s aesthetic did not prepare him to follow art along the path it would take in the twentieth century” (271).
   AS drew from Thomas Carlyle's concept of symbol to develop his own concept of symbol in *The Symbolist Movement in Literature*.

   Those that Madame Sadayakko met on her performing tours “read like a Who’s Who of fin de siècle Western culture” and included AS (102). AS “claimed that the Japanese troupe displayed ‘the emotion of children, naked sensation, not yet clothed by civilization’” (103). [Brief mention of AS.]

   “In the flurry of new values and new poets I wonder how many there are who will leave so many lines, or so many distinct poems, in the faulty memory of the reader in 1940” (663). After his mental breakdown, AS reappeared as though he were still living in the 1890s. Still, Lionel Johnson’s judgment of AS is “somewhat harsh” coming from “the man least fitted among men of Symons’ own decade to understand Symons’ particular beauty” (663). In his translations, AS “shows himself a master of cadence” (664). [Reprinted in *Agenda* 17.3–4 and 18.1 (Autumn/Winter/Spring 1979/1980): 54–57.]

   [This item is a reprint of Pound’s original *Athenaeum* article of 21 May 1920.]

   “Arthur Symons wrote *Spiritual Adventures* (there is I fear no second edition). Carrying on from Balzac’s *Louis Lambert* Symons gave us a series of studies in special sensibility, as for example the actress who as a child in the ghetto watched people’s hands and their way of moving. As culture this book is worth all the freudian tosh in existence” (71). “If I remember rightly Arthur Symons said a finer thing when he praised Whistler for that he ‘sought neither to follow a model nor to avoid one’” (178).

   “The revolution of the word began so far as it affected the men who were of my age in London in 1908, with the LONE whimper of Ford Madox Huenfer. His more pliant disciples were Flint, Goldring, and D. H. Lawrence. Huenfer (Ford) read Flaubert and Maupassant in a way that George Moore did not. Impressionism meant for him something it did not to Symons” (50).

   Pound refers to the anthology as “A collection of poems which have stuck in my memory and which may possibly define their epoch, or at least rectify current ideas of it in respect to at least one contour.” The 1890s “are fairly represented by” AS’s poem “Modern Beauty” (14–15) which appears in the anthology. “The omission of certain writers before 1920 implies generally a direct censure or disapproval, that of writers since 1920 implies merely unfamiliarity or ignorance of their work. From 1902 to 1908 we read Symons, Dowson, and Yeats also Fiona, or rather one might say «Fiona» and then Yeats (if we are to be personal
and American, rather than to speak for the London «world»). The rest of the then writers have more or less faded” (13–14).


*Spiritual Adventures* deserves critical attention for its rich and complex design. Structured around a persistent conflict linking each story and uniting the book as a whole with the personality of the author, the stories’ central characters suffer from a discord between aspiration and actuality. The chief character regularly gains a respite from the unhappy situation he finds himself in and forgets who he is and even at times where he is. The conflicts and their ambiguous resolutions belong as much to the author as to his fictive characters. Symons used *Spiritual Adventures* “as a stage whereon to reconstitute his life as art and act out various roles to achieve the equilibrium which evades him in what he refers to as the ‘real world’” (44).] [Abstract by G. A. Cevasco, *Abstracts of English Studies* 25 (1982): 65.]


“For a writer like Symons the symbol does not finally express an ineffable and benign spiritual reality … but rather provides an avenue of escape from a world darker and more foreboding than most Romantic authors ever conceived. The symbol, for the Decadent as for earlier men like Coleridge and Thomas Carlyle, summons the writer’s attention beyond mundane observable reality, but the final destination for Symons, in contrast to that of the Romantics, is only a refuge from unpleasant reality in the embrace of sheer illusion” (157). In *The Symbolist Movement in Literature*, AS adds to Coleridge and Carlyle a mythical concept of the symbol, as he also does in his discussions of the French Symbolists. AS finds dance particularly symbolic, and life “a stage whereon human individuals perform in a shadowy masque” (161), another means by which to escape from the terrors of real life. “To understand Symons’ *The Symbolist Movement in Literature*, then, we need not simply to trace his arguments but to be aware that for the author art is a ‘symbolic’ performance whose goal is escape and forgetfulness of objective reality through illusion” (166).


AS’s “best poetry equals nearly any of the ’Nineties, his fiction is passable, and his criticism the best the period ever produced except Wilde’s own” (159). For AS, a man is a puppet, life a performance, and only art offered salvation. In pursuit of the ideal of art, AS admired the Wagnerian Gesamtkunstwerk, the total art form (while disliking writers like Shaw, and to a lesser extent, Ibsen, for their realism). In an attempt to make his life into art, AS prowled the music halls, and studied the artful illusions he found there: singers, dancers, ballet observed from the wings—half spectator, half participant. “*London Nights*, published in 1895 … illustrates in detail how Symons adapted the traditional theatrum mundi to his own needs” (164). “Madness, the utmost separation from reality, was one possible result of Symons’ struggle against the world, perhaps even a half-conscious goal for him” (163), until ultimately, “the most that Symons could hope for at
any time was an escape from the horror of the self and the conditions under which it existed” (180). [Chapter 6, 159–85, deals with AS.] [Annotated from dissertation. See also DAI 35 (1974): 2238A.]


“With the French symbolist poets as his inspiration,” AS “writes about their perfection of form as a necessary annihilation of traditional poetic forms…. Instead of turning to the example of French poetry in order to break the regular beat of verse,” Alice Meynell “returned to the English metrical law exemplified in Patmore’s odes.” Her “late essay ‘Coventry Patmore’ can be read as a response to Symons and his contemporaries” (278).


Examines several ballets by choreographers at the Alhambra and the Empire in London near the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth century. Focuses on the work of Katti Lanner, the ballet mistress of the Empire, and Joseph Hansen and Carlo Coppi, choreographers at the Alhambra. Discusses their work in an historical context. Remarks that ballet at that time was popular entertainment rather than high art. Describes the collaborative process between the choreographer and the composer. Includes descriptions of other theaters of the same period and a list of some of the members of Lanner’s company at the Empire. [Abstract from International Index to Performing Arts.]


“Dance criticism as a serious concern in Britain dates only from the 1920’s, when T. S. Eliot, among others, contributed to the arguments stimulated by Diaghilev.’ This was the opinion expressed by Peter Brinson in an address to the Royal Society for the Encouragement of Arts, Manufactures & Commerce in 1989. Many others subscribe to this view, which is the result of the prevailing belief that there was no dance of real significance in this country prior to performances by Serge Diaghilev’s Ballets Russes and the pioneering works of Marie Rambert and Ninette de Valois. This small selection from the writings of Arthur Symons, a prolific commentator on dance in the 1890’s and early 1900’s, will, I hope, encourage reassessment of such attitudes” (36). AS “was one of a handful of critics who wrote enlightening reviews of the dances and dancers of the late nineteenth century” (36). AS’s “newspaper criticism may be regarded as the raw material that he would later work up into his better-known features and poems” (36). AS “became intimately involved with the dance and dancers of the decade in which the bulk of his reviews appeared” (37). “Like others who wrote on dance in the 1890’s, Symons aspired to write scenarios for productions” (38). “In his writing Symons often emphasised the impression of his involvement in the dance. He was fascinated both by the spectacle of the presentations and by the experience of theatre and he recorded his reaction to the dancers and the audience. He attempted to capture the atmosphere both on-stage and front of
house” (38). If AS had not suffered a breakdown in 1908, he “could have charted the significant developments and changes in dance in Britain over the fifty years 1890–1940” (39). “Reviews of seven ballets and seven individual artists (one of whom was appearing in a ballet at the Empire) have been included in this selection” (39).


[“By recovering the lost voices of women poets and by reexamining the canonical literature of Aestheticism in light of recent work on the place of art in commodity culture, the dissertation attempts both a revision of the literary historical concept, ‘Aestheticism,’ and a revaluation of the works of nineteenth-century women poets. To that end, I examine the employment of the language of gender in Victorian poetry to express changes in the status of the poet under nineteenth-century industrial and commodity capitalism. Such language both reflects social constructions of ‘femininity’ and participates in the formation of these constructions. I take as my starting point the use, in the art and poetry of male Aestheticists and their critics, of the concept of feminization to figure anxieties about the economic and social position of the male artist. Alfred Tennyson’s ‘Lady of Shalott,’ for example, uses a woman to figure the plight of the artist cut off from the public sphere. In revisions of the poem by Dante Gabriel Rossetti, Algernon Charles Swinburne, Walter Pater and Arthur Symons, among others, I trace, in the readiness or reluctance of poets to cast the lady as poet-figure, a range of attitudes towards the privatization of poetry, from resistance to reluctant acceptance to celebration. Whereas for male poets, ‘feminization,’ by recasting economic and social anxieties as gender anxieties, both figures and distances some of the more disturbing aspects of the poet’s marginalization, for women it offers no such escape.… Chapter Two looks at the problems facing later figures: Swinburne, Pater, Oscar Wilde, Symons, and Max Beerbohm…. ”] [Annotation edited from DAI 51 (1991): 3420A.]


 “[Christina] Rossetti was an aestheticist poet. Richard Le Gallienne, Arthur Symons, Edmund Gosse, Alice Law, William Sharp, and Oscar Wilde all focused on her formal mastery, compared her work to that of men associated with aestheticism, and described her poetry in language associated with the aestheticist prose of Algernon Charles Swinburne and Walter Pater. Symons noted, ‘The thought of death has a constant fascination for her, almost such a fascination as it had for Leopardi or Baudelaire’” (104). “Similarly, aestheticism’s association with passionate emotion and sensation, often seen as feminizing male poets and artists, also seems compatible with the participation of a woman poet. Symons wrote of Rossetti, ‘This motive, passion remembered and repressed, condemned to eternal memory and eternal sorrow, is the motive of much of her finest work” (104).

“The first short story to appear in the Fortnightly was ‘A Modern Idyll’ published in June 1891, the story of a love affair between a Baptist Minister and one of his deacon’s wives. It caused a furore.” AS “found something turbulent and disturbing in the story. It occurred to him to turn ‘this rather revolting material’ into a one-act play on which he and George Moore collaborated; The Minister’s Call was performed on March 4, 1892” (148). AS “said during the seven years that he knew Harris intimately while he (156) edited the Fortnightly and the Saturday he seemed to him a man of prodigious talent which all too often he misused; he had immense vitality, vivacity, and violence, his voice reminded Symons of a beaten Eastern gong; he was the best and least exacting editor Symons had ever come across” (157).

[Reissue of Pullar’s Frank Harris. London: Hamish Hamilton, 1975, with subtitle and different pagination.]


[Contains one letter to AS. See annotation for Vol. 7. Item 903.]

[AS in the General Index: no AS in Vol. i; ii. 90n, 273, 274n, 299; iii. 143; invited to Max Gate ii. 263, 267; iii. 31, 133; presentation copies sent to iii. 125, 133 and n, 198, 305; country cottage iii. 222 and n, 226 and n, 305; nervous breakdown iii. 344, 352, 353n; v. 80 and n; portrait painted by Augustus John v. 2212, 222n; unwelcome visit to Max Gate vii. 29n; Cleopatra in Judaea iii. 253 (“the play”) and n; Figures of Several Centuries v. 197 and n; The Fool of the World and Other Poems iii. 231; Images of Good and Evil ii. 258–59; An Introduction to the Study of Browning iii. 252, 253n; “The Life and Adventures of Lucy Newcome” v. 105 (“pages you sent”), 106n; Lyrics iii. 58 (“little book”) and n; Plays, Acting, and Music iii. 125 (“book of yours”), 126n; Spiritual Adventures iii. 183–84, 222 and n; The Symbolist Movement in Literature ii. 258 n; Tristan and Iseult iii. 295n; (comp.) A Sixteenth Century Anthology iii. 133 (“book of old verse”) and n.]
[Letters to AS ii. 90, 120, 258, 263, 267; iii. 21, 25, 31, 58, 125, 133, 142, 176, 183, 198, 209, 210, 222, 226, 230, 231, 241, 252, 295, 305; iv. 248; v. 48, 105, 197, 221, 304; vi. 67; vii. 20]

[Contains one letter to AS. See annotation for Vol. 7. Item 903.]

In a letter dated October 20, 1905, Hardy wrote that he preferred the stories in *Spiritual Adventures*, that AS had sent him, that were not “slices of life solely.” He considered “Seaward Lackland” to be “an almost perfect bit of narrative art. Should not studies of the other sort which end nowhere, like an ‘Autumn City,’ be confined to actual beings?” (3:183). Hardy prefers “a tale with an ending, & to forget the more numerous incidents of life which come to nothing” over stories that are of the “the slice-of-life school or impressionist” type. He concludes, “I infer from your book containing specimens of both kinds that you have not as yet come to any conclusion on this point” (3:184). Of the poems in AS’s *Fool of the World*, Hardy wrote on October 21, 1906, “The songs seem to me to be the highest achievement of the book and the book altogether considerably in advance of anything you have done previously in verse that I have seen. In the quality of your note you seem to come in the middle between Shelley and Swinburne” (3:232). [See annotation for Vol. 7. Item 903.]


Letter from Thomas Hardy to AS, October 28, 1895, regarding a list “of prospective contributors to the *Savoy*: “My dear Sir: If nothing will be expected from me as yet, & if a hope that I may be able to contribute, are sufficient to admit me to the list, I am willing that you insert my name with the rest. I like everything I hear about the magazine except the name” (2:90). In a letter to AS on May 17, 1896, Hardy acknowledged receiving a copy of the *Savoy*, but deferred committing to submitting something, writing, “I hope to be writing some short stories again soon, but I cannot quite say when; & I no longer like to enter into a positive engagement till the MS. is ready, or nearly” (2:120). Hardy “did not in fact pub. anything in the magazine” (2:90). In a letter to Florence Henniker, June 1, 1900: “I have just been reading Arthur Symons’s new book of poetry ‘Images of Good & Evil.’ Also his essays on ‘Symbolism’: the latter are disappointing; the verse I like some pieces particularly” (2:258). [See annotation for Vol. 7.]


AS’s *The Symbolist Movement in Literature* “was to have significant influence on Yeats and Eliot” (28). A comparison of AS’s 1896 translation of “Scène” from Mallarmé’s *Hérodiade* with that of Australian poet Christopher Brennan “shows Brennan giving a far more literal version, often at the expense of gallicisms and archaisms. He is also given to using indirect analysis to cover over erotic reference … [and] at these particular points Symons is the more faithful to the original” (29). Brennan’s translation of Mallarmé’s *Hérodiade* is heavy and worked, a pastiche, compared with “Symons’s relative freshness…. The vitality of the British *Yellow Book* milieu had little influence on Brennan’s image of Mallarmé, nor indeed on the Australian’s own verse” (29).

Striving to find a religion beyond traditional Christianity, Freer turned toward collecting Romantic and Aesthetic authors such as Symons, Pater, Wilde, Swinburne, Emerson and Thoreau, among many other artists (79).


[Includes two-paragraph biographical sketch of AS's life and a complete listing of all his works, autographed manuscripts, proof-sheets, and first editions, held in the John Quinn Collection. Reference to revisions made by Yeats on certain proof-sheets. Two references to AS in biographical sketches on Dowson and Verlaine. Valuable source for AS bibliographer.] (Stern)


In *The Symbolist Movement in Literature*, AS “presents D’Annunzio as the Italian protagonist of Symbolism … but the judgment of Symons and Yeats … has had no following in D’Annunzio criticism” (311). [Passing reference to AS.]


AS and Rémy de Gourmont both held a deep admiration for the writings of their contemporary, Villiers. AS even translated a few of Villier's works into English. A rumor circulated that AS even wanted money and permission to translate *L’Eve future*, but AS actually never had that intention. Regardless, Garnet Rees once wrote to Villiers for the request, even though that was never AS’s goal. Previously, AS had written to Villiers several times to ask for bibliographic information. AS was writing a literature review for an English journal called Woman’s World and was hoping to get some leads from Villiers. [The article ignores whether AS got a reply.] Gourmont even wrote to Villiers in an attempt to help AS get his needed information.


Considering AS, “Dr Singh notices the conflicting ideals of decadence and symbolism that establish him as a ‘link’ between Pater and Yeats. While Dr Singh has not disputed Johnson’s use of Christian morality as a critical tool earlier he now thinks that if Symons is limited as a literary theorist in his early criticism it is because his interests and concerns were too ‘moral’ and not ‘metaphysical.’ Per-
haps he has himself registered a progress in his outlook and so demands more!
He also notes, that despite Symons’s progress from decadent to symbolist vision,
finally, even he fails because ‘he does not maintain his symbolist vision steadily’
(p. 80)” (72). “Dr Singh brings in Pater and Symons frequently to show that
Yeats was a more consistent practitioner of symbolism than Pater and a finer the-
oretician than Symons and that he truly possessed ‘the synthesizing vision’ that
reconciled all divergent theories into a transcendent unity through symbolism”
(73). “Dr Singh’s sense of discernment in putting each critic in his place cannot
be denied. They all belong” (74).

913. Ramakrishnan, E. V. Rev. of Selected Poetry and Prose, by Sarojini Naidu, ed.
AS was responsible for the publication of The Golden Threshold (1905), which
launched the poetic career of Sarojini Naidu, Indian poet, nationalist leader, and
orator. Naidu’s other works never quite surpassed the poetic and public success
of The Golden Threshold.

1953. 4, 192, 193, 194, 199, 224, 232.
“The Symbolist Movement in Literature (1899) represented a change of heart. Six
years earlier Arthur Symons had published an article not calculated to (192)
introduce anyone to any very significant aspect of French literature. In a carp-
ing essay entitled ‘The Decadent Movement in Literature,’ he had touched none
of the more wholesome connotations of the term ‘decadent,’ had lumped Deca-
dence, Symbolism and Impressionism all together” (193). AS’s “main argument:
that Laforgue, an artist ‘of the nerves’ in the Goncourtian sense of that term,
found release in utterance fundamentally paradoxical. And the chapter has more
illuminating criticism of Laforgue than any that Eliot, inhibited by his polemical
classicism and his instinct to yoke Laforgue with the English Metaphysicals, has
been able to produce” (194).

915. Randall, Sir Alec Walter George. Rev. of Arthur Symons als Kritiker der Literatur,
by Max Wildi. Times Literary Supplement (1 August 1929): 608.
“This is the latest volume in the series of ‘Anglistische Forschungen,’ disserta-
tions in the familiar German manner, showing much care and close acquain-
tance with the literature of the subject. The present example has a less weighty
bibliography than most of its predecessors, but it shows an adequate knowledge
not only of all Arthur Symons’s works, but of the general literature of the time,
and with previous criticisms of him, including the latest…. Where Dr. Wildi ven-
tures on independent judgment—and this is comparatively rare—he may some-
times be open to question, but as a survey of Symons’s critical work, placed in
relation to the literature of his time, this thesis is worth attention” (608). [Origin-
ally appeared in TLS as an unsigned review; TLS Online now adds the contrib-
utor’s name.]

[Unpublished M. Phil. Thesis. Not seen.]

Regrets he has not been asked to review the new volume of poems by AS that recently appeared (1913). AS should be asked to write the preface to McAlmon’s *Contact Collection of Contemporary Writers* since the writers gathered around Pound in that collection are like the circle around AS in the days of the *Yellow Book*. (Stern)


AS’s *Spiritual Adventures* “offer[s] an opportunity to observe how Aestheticism modulates into Decadence” (64). The stories in *Spiritual Adventures* are “bound together by the opposition of idealism and suffering” (67). “Symons’s early poetry consists largely of Naturalistic scene painting” (116). “Much of Symons’s poetry is love poetry … [and] traditional; others have a decadent aura” (118). “Symons sensed the strain in Beardsley’s work and likened the artist to Verlaine’s *Pierrot gamin*” (159). [AS’s stories and several poems are considered individually.]


Three collections of short stories published in the late nineteenth century “offer an opportunity to observe how Aestheticism modulates into Decadence” (1). Along with Pater’s essays, *Imaginary Portraits* (1887), and Dowson’s (diary-like) *Dilemmas* (1895), the “downright autobiographical [accounts in] Arthur Symons’s *Spiritual Adventures* (1905) constitute a miniature history of the movement from Aestheticism to Decadence” (1–2). All three collections “share a common theme—yearning after an elusive ideal” (10). AS’s stories are “bound together by the opposition of idealism and suffering” (7), wherein during the pursuit of esthetic ideals, “grace yields to force, delicacy to intensity” (8). “Each of Symons’s stories shows the peril, suffering, or defeat involved in the self-destructive desire of the physically sensitive individual to attain an esthetic ideal” (9).


Yeats himself presents the generation of AS as “a sleeping generation, dreaming of things to come” (66) to present his own art as distinctive and new (66). [Brief mention of AS.]


“Quinn found Symons’s eclectic intellectualness imposing enough to lead him to describe him to Huneker as ‘the best critic in England since the death of Pater’” (31). Quinn “estimated that he had read thirty books on Shelley and all the important studies of Blake. Now he cited Arthur Symons’s *The Romantic Movement in English Poetry* as a model of scholarly but graceful criticism much preferable, he thought, to such pedantry as Courthope’s *History of English Poetry*, the last volume of which, on the Romantics, he had been reading” (83). AS became
“Quinn’s main link with the social side of artistic life in London” and continued to give AS considerable financial support, “five or six hundred dollars a year,” by purchasing AS’s manuscripts (462).

[Passing reference to AS’s comments on Christina Rossetti, Elizabeth Barrett Browning, and George Sand.]

[First saw AS as he stood on the steps of the British Museum. An editor of the *Camelot Series*, he turned in the 1890s to the Rhymers’ Club and wrote poetry of the music-halls. References to AS are slight, but valuable to the critic attempting to construct a biography of AS. Rhys’s dating is not to be trusted.] (Stern)

[Reproduces two letters from AS and comments on his role in the nineties.] (Stern)

[Invited AS to do critical prefaces for the *Camelot Series* and later came to know him better through the Rhymers’ Club.] AS is a typical Bohemian of the ’80s and ’90s. Balzac and Pater were major influences on both Moore and AS. (Stern)

In a letter dated October 30, 1896 Hubert Crackanthorpe wrote to Grant Richards to say that he had just heard from AS “that the Savoy is to cease in December. Would you be disposed to consider the idea of taking it over then with me as editor?... I believe without vanity that my name (for certain reasons which I need not specify) would be more valuable” than AS’s (18). [Brief mention of AS.]

Remembering AS’s article describing the *rue Pigalle* and the cabaret where Brabant sang, I searched out those spots while in Paris. In London, you could count on seeing AS and Horne in the Crown every evening shortly after the Empire and the Alhambra closed. [Only a few references to AS.] (Stern)

"*Women and British Aestheticism* makes a major contribution to the history of women’s writing. It also reshapes the category of aestheticism—long held to be the refuge of the dandy, and associated most readily with Oscar Wilde, Aubrey Beardsley, Arthur Symons, J.-K. Huysmans, Ernest Dowson, Max Beerbohm, and Lionel Johnson—revealing women’s involvement to have been far more widespread, controversial, and important than has hitherto been thought” (370).

“Its complexity can be seen even in attempting to define the elusive word ‘decadence.’ For most readers it has a connotative, pejorative meaning, not a denotative meaning designating certain men, particular movements, peculiar ideas. This confusion endures. Arthur Symons, for one, drew attention to the essential problem from the actual scene: ‘The latest movement in European literature has been called by many names, none of them quite exact or comprehensive—Decadence, Symbolism, Impressionism, for instance’” (2). [Quoted from AS’s *Dramatis Personae* (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, n.d.): 96.] “By distinguishing between the essential and the unessential, the permanent and the transient, Symons, who has been in disrepute of late, points to the problem which many others have ignored: The connotative meanings are numerous, certainly, but they must be dismissed, for the moment, if the idea of decadence is to be probed with understanding. With this in mind Symons formulates his own concept along denotative lines: ‘… [It] is certainly not classic, nor has it any relation with that old antithesis of the Classic, the Romantic. After a fashion it is of no doubt a decadence; it has all the qualities that mark the end of great periods, the qualities that we find in the Greek, the Latin, decadence; an intense self-consciousness, a restless curiosity in research, an over-subtilizing refinement upon refinement, a spiritual and moral perversity’” (3) [*Dramatis Personae*, 96–97.]


Beerbohm and AS were seen together in the music-halls and at the evening gatherings at Henry Harland’s. “Christmas Eve in Picadilly” was Beerbohm’s unpublished Christmas garland parodying AS. Beerbohm was critical of AS’s quietism. [Contains excellent bibliography of Beerbohm’s writings.] (Stern)


AS felt that Nerval was a precursor to the Symbolists. Thanks to AS, Nerval was introduced to the English. [Passing reference to AS. In French.]


“Putting ‘The Dead’ into the context of Symbolist thinking may help to get beyond the hermetic barriers of Joycean writing” (49). Joyce read and was influenced by AS’s *The Symbolist Movement in Literature*, and through AS, the French Symbolists. “Night” is a particularly favorite theme and/or setting used by the Symbolists (connoting an other-world). “*The Savoy* and *Yellow Book* are teeming with poems and stories conjuring up dawn, dusk, twilight, night, or just darkness in general. It makes itself felt in works like Arthur Symons’ *Days and Nights* (1889), *Silhouettes* (1892), or *London Nights* (1895)” (51). The image of darkness is used in the other stories of *Dubliners*, but “arrives at its most systematic realization in ‘The Dead.’ Night, as a complex metaphor, binds the various episodes together” (51). Joyce employs other Symbolist metaphors, such as “white” and “whiteness” (often mixed with “night”), as well as the Symbolist colors of green and yellow, together with the Symbolist “gaslight” atmosphere.
Arthur Symons, Critic Among Critics


The influence of Symbolism on Joyce’s “The Dead” has not been sufficiently explored. Joyce read AS’s The Symbolist Movement in Literature the year it was published, then while in Paris where Symbolism was “in full bloom,” he met AS who “had been for about ten years ‘the principal middleman between Paris and London’” (146). “Symons’s Symbolist orientation was bound to have a bearing” on Joyce’s early works (147) and “The Dead,” as well as AS’s poems, reflect Symbolist motifs such as night, white, and death.


Eliot charges AS with making Baudelaire a poet of the nineties, whereas he was actually a Christian and classicist born out of his time. Eliot further charges that AS’s translations of Baudelaire’s poetry (“Voyage à Cythere”) do not powerfully render “the words of Baudelaire into English” (352). However, such criticism can be quickly challenged by the “precise accuracy and considerable appeal” of AS’s other translations of Baudelaire (“Petits Poèmes en Prose” and “Châtiment de l’Orgueil”). AS’s mistranslations of Baudelaire occur not because of inability with language, but rather because AS misinterpreted Baudelaire’s poetic spirit—believing Baudelaire’s genius to be Satanical. “So there is nothing dishonest in Symons’ translations. He attempted to render faithfully what he thought to be the ‘real spirit’ of Baudelaire” (365).


[“An understanding of the concept of decadence in the late nineteenth century is not dependent on a purely linguistic approach to the various forms of literary language in which it may be manifested. Rather, the label of decadence invokes (and deliberately flouts) perceptions of normality in a number of cultural spaces, not all of them strictly textual. Importantly, the personality of the artist figure is also a part of the definition of decadence…. Decadence, then, is about reception, as well as conception … and given that the late nineteenth century was a period of conflicting discourses of sexual politics, the definition of decadence is bound up with the matrix of associations around such concepts as sex, gender and sexuality.” AS’s “decadence … came from his flouting of the rules of masculinity, … his exposure of the gender and class ideology of the gentleman, by speaking aloud of its implications.”] [Annotation edited from Index to Theses 48.1 (March 1999): 30.]


Oscar Wilde’s poem “The Ballad of Reading Gaol” attempts to explore the opposition between innocence and guilt in order to comment on cultural boundaries. AS views Wilde’s work as a failure because Wilde wrote the poem not only with an aesthetic purpose, but a social one as well. AS commented that it was “a plea
on behalf of prison reform, and so far as it is written with that aim, it is not art” (155). [Brief mentions of AS.]

   “Bibliographically,” Dramatis Personae “is an atrocious volume”—lacking supporting references, etc. It also suffers from a lack of arrangement, and its criticism is often “dated”—obviously not including the most recent works by the authors it studies. Still, “Mr. Symons has never been guilty himself of blandly reprinting his journalistic articles as though they were critical literature” (48), and there is much in Dramatis Personae to commend it (including essays on Francis Thompson, Joseph Conrad, and Coventry Patmore).

   [Appreciative review of Figures of Several Centuries. Commends AS’s breadth; finds him best on his contemporaries, although he is not equal to doing justice to Ibsen.] (Stern)

   AS’s art, his commitment to the visible world, measures well against the follies of today’s Vorticists. Occasionally, his style becomes too elaborately picturesque or his curiosity becomes almost morbid, but generally his sketches of cities, those of London in particular, exhibit his “vivid” accuracy and “fanciful truthfulness.” (Stern)

   “In The Symbolist Movement in Literature, which introduced French Symbolism to English readers, Arthur Symons writes: ‘Every age has its own symbols; but a symbol once perfectly expressed, that symbol remains, as Gothic architecture remains the very soul of the Middle Ages.’…” [Furthermore,] as a symbol, the Gothic has been invested with a variety of meanings since its earliest days of the medieval revival, but in the twentieth century it has also been a focus for exploring the significance and value of aesthetic form itself” (181).

   “There is … an unbroken continuity in avant-garde aesthetics from the fin de siècle to Vorticism” (xiii), and to reveal this, “a radical reinterpretation of the relationship between Yeats and Pound” is needed (xiii). In Symbolist poetry, “the setting of the poem … [is] transformed by the empathetic imagination into a symbolic articulation of the mood which it inspires in the poet. Many of Symons’s poems attempt to emulate this procedure; it was to become Pound’s principal Imagist technique” (13). AS was a precursor of Modernism, and “repeatedly stressed Whistler’s art of evocation rather than transcription or anecdote paralleled
the transition in poetry from Parnassianism to (Verlaine’s) Symbolism” (31).
“Symons’s poetic development parallels that in painting from Impressionism to Post-Impressionism” (40). AS’s first formative influence was “Pater’s Hegalian account of the increasing ‘complexity’ and self-consciousness of the arts” (40); for poetic models, “Symons turned initially to the sophistication of Meredith’s Modern Love,” and then to Browning’s lyrics (40). In Paris, with George Moore’s influence, and inspired by Verlaine, AS sought to “reproduce in words the same effect as Impressionist painting” (41)—an Impressionist poetry that “aspired towards an imaginative suggestivity related to French Symbolism” (42). AS wrote of Decadence, “which in fact describes what he understood by ‘modernity’” (42), and was uncertain of the “distinction between ‘impressionism’ and ‘symbolism’” (43). “In summary, the aesthetic legacy of the 1890s was the replacement of naturalistic objectivity by varieties of anti-materialist transcendentalism” (56–57); “Symons’s work develops from empathetic and abstract expressionist Symbolist poetry towards an empathetic, animistic aesthetic” (237).

[“Ezra Pound is noted for his Herculean efforts to transmute the discoveries he made in his researches into various poetic traditions, from the medieval troubadours to Chinese and Japanese poetry, into his own personal aesthetics. Given the extent and intensity of his interests in foreign poetic traditions, it is significant that he virtually omitted Baudelaire, and French Symbolism, from his poetic canon… Part One considers Pound’s reactions to French poetry within the wider context of the reception of Baudelaire and French Symbolism in Edwardian London, focusing on his contacts with Edmund Gosse, Swinburne, Wilde, Whistler, and Arthur Symons—all of whom had important encounters with Baudelaire and nineteenth-century poetry in general, whether as poets or critics…”] [Annotation edited from DAI 57 (1996): 2482A.]

“The thought of a pleasure so strong it could wipe out consciousness in an instant exposes the impulse in Swinburne to self-transcendence. In some ways anticipating Arthur Symons, D. H. Lawrence and Eric Gill, this attempt to oppose puritanical attitudes to sex was one of Swinburne’s main gifts to an age notorious for denying the body” (66). “Swinburne was an idol to many of the writers of the 1890s, among them” AS (279).

AS “has come to be seen as not only one of the best poets of the 1890’s, but also as a critic who occupies a key place in the transition between Victorian and modern literature” (35). “By the time of his death on 22nd January 1945, Symons was a largely forgotten figure” (41). “His reputation has grown as the vital part he played in laying the ground for Modernism has come to be appreciated” (42). “Symons is now recognised as one of the best poets of that era” (42). “He was also a sensitive translator, a gifted travel writer and, without any doubt, the finest critic of his generation” (42).
By AS’s definition, Conrad is a decadent. His impressionism and pessimism make him sympathetic to the aesthetic movement. So, too, does his tendency to relegate narrative line to form. (Stern)

AS is “foremost of English poets now that Mr. Swinburne is past his prime.” AS’s “view of Italy is many-sided. He sees not merely the Christian exterior but the profound and ever-enduring paganism that underlies the veneer of Italian Christianity.” Thus “he is a humanist, not a saint.”

The poems of Joyce and Beckett, “replete with semantic overload and underachievement,” seem to belong to the Decadent model (195). “Their poetry recapitulates the Decadent redundancy and crypticism of their immediate literary predecessor, while incorporating the ironic tuning of their mentor contemporaries” (196). “With Symons, a member of Yeats’ generation, we have one of the most seminal intermediaries in modern literature, surely as significant as Pound in preparing a grammar for the rhetoric of Modernism…. When he was in full command of his faculties, he wrote as an English poet and made his translations sound as if they were original English poems” (196).

Decadence has been a troublesome term “because it is a historical term appropriated by literature” (141), and to understand Decadence, one needs an understanding of the historical setting of Decadence and its attendant personalities. For AS, Villiers de l’Isle-Adam (whom AS never met) personified genius and charisma simply with his presence: “the dangerous gift of a personality which seems to have already achieved all that it so energetically contemplates” (142). In translating Villiers’s poetry, AS often reinterpreted them to sound more like his own poetry.

“One of the most useful critiques of Flaubert’s *Salammbô* (1862) was written by Arthur Symons” (213), who recognized the authenticity of the Carthaginian customs, and lack of any “Christian tinge” in the characters (213). Flaubert’s *Salammbô* would be rediscovered in 1961, “For the 1960s showed the same cultural symptoms that Symons had recognized over fifty years earlier in another essay ‘The Decadent Movement in Literature.’ The four symptoms are intense self-consciousness, restless curiosity, over-subtilizing refinement, and spiritual and moral perversity” 214–15).

“Both casual readers and seasoned scholars find Decadent writers verbose. Sometime sympathizer Arthur Symons’ plain-spoken diagnosis of the impulses of Decadence as intense self-consciousness, restless curiosity, over-subtilizing refinement, spiritual and moral perversity may suggest why we eventually find Decadent writing repugnant” (144).

In a letter to the editor of The New Age dated April 2, 1914, Lewis wrote, “Mr. Walter Sickert, for twenty or thirty years, was the scandal of the neighbourhood (as a painter) and he very proud of it. His bedroom realism, cynical and boyish playfulness with Mrs. Grundy, his French ‘legerte’ (as he would write), all marked him out as the Bohemian plague-spot on clean English life, part, indeed, of that larger Yellow Plague-spot edited by Arthur Symons” (58). The letter “refers to the close links between the New English Art Club and The Yellow Book” (58n2).

[The entire work of Arthur Symons offers one of the most representative and clear expressions of the idea of art for art’s sake in English. Since Symons was not in fact an innovator of ideas, a detailed study of his work would only show delicate and penetrating expressions of doctrines already presented by the first defenders of the idea. The work of Symons, nevertheless, is an important contribution to the literature of art for art’s sake. His was an essentially artistic temperament delicately sensitive to both English and foreign influences in the atmosphere of his time. He expressed them with a distinction, without alterations that the controversies of Swinburne or the eccentric personality of Wilde would have subjected them to. Having run through the gamut of different phases of the attitude of art for art’s sake, starting with the artificial genre of his first poems and up to the faithful obedience to the ideal of Pater in criticism, Symons follows finally the curve of the development of this tendency in France, thus making himself a disciple of the last phase and defender of contemporary French Symbolism—the state of the spirit to which all artistic writers of England should also aspire. In French.]

In Fool of the World, AS “has chosen to be deliberately modern in his presentation of time-worm symbols, so that the effect produced on the audience is precisely the same as a Morality must have produced on the more intelligent spectators of the middle ages” (383).

“The Church becomes an elaborate paradox filled with gem encrusted objects of fetishistic wonder and mystery, which produces a sensual literature, in which, according to Arthur Symons, ‘the visible world is no longer a reality and the unseen world is no longer a dream’” (168).

Harris employed AS for *Saturday Review* but disliked the man. He resented what he called his “literary exclusiveness” and blamed him for pressing Beardsley on the public. [Firsthand account of Harris’s attitude towards AS.] (Stern)


Told AS of Verlaine’s willingness to lecture in London and AS undertook to make all the arrangements and host Verlaine during his stay in London. While the music-halls were a workshop for Sickert and the rest of us, for AS they were a “pleasant dissipation.” In them, he gave us ecstatic accounts of his latest amour with a ballet-girl. In the days of the Savoy, AS, Beardsley, Smithers, and Conder complained regularly of Smithers’s offensiveness and AS’s lack of originality. [Anecdotal account.] (Stern)


“While Yvette [Guilbert] was singing, I caught sight of a white-bearded figure sitting in the front row surely I knew that face, yes, it was Arthur Symons, Symons who had written with such ardent enthusiasm of Yvette in the nineties. And as he left the hall in opera hat and winged cloak, modish in those distant days, the past and the present drew together. I scarcely expected that Symons with his delicate state of health would be almost the last survivor of the poets’ circle of the nineties. For now Yeats was to see his last winter” (305).


“Dowson lacked the intellectual vigor that distinguished Clare and Blake and Mangan. He possessed to an abnormal and intensified degree their sensibility. It was this tortured sensibility that drove him, when his dreams eluded him, into sordid surroundings and grossest human contacts” (262). “There was never a simpler or more attaching charm,’ writes Arthur Symons, who knew him, ‘because there was never a simpler or more honest nature. It was not because he ever said anything particularly clever or particularly interesting, it was not because he gave you ideas, or impressed you by any strength or originality that you liked to be with him; but because of a certain engaging quality which seemed unconscious of itself, which was never anxious to be or do anything, which simply existed as perfume exists in a flower”’ (262).


AS “was recognized in his day as the leading aesthetic critic of the Nineties” (253). *The Symbolist Movement in Literature* was “a cardinal work ... [which] remains the best account of the French Symbolists,” and the work that introduced T. S. Eliot to their work and to a new idiom, transforming his early writing towards a style of his own; “the influence upon him of this now forgotten classic was life-long” (253). (For example: the influence of Laforgue’s understated idiom can be seen in Eliot’s “The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock.”) AS
was a competent poet; however, it is as a critic that he is remembered: “an all-around critic of the arts, the complete aesthete” (253). “Sympathy is the essence of Symons’ nature and what makes him a good critic” (253).

This book is a “careful study” (1295), but somewhat “belated in that Alford’s manuscript dates from the 1960s and, therefore, despite extensive revision, it does not always reflect recent scholarship” (1296). One instance of this is Alford’s reliance on Roger Lhlombreaud’s 1963 biography of AS, and not Karl Beckson’s 1987 biography.

AS’s place in the avant-garde movement in England is secure. As a critic he does not practice the objective brand of criticism, but rather he practices a creative brand in which the boundary between art and criticism is often blurred. [Review of AS’s *Portraits anglais* (Bruges: Collection d’Antée, 1907). In French.] (Stern)

[Depends on AS’s definition of *fin de siècle*.] (Stern)
[The purpose of this study is to trace throughout the nineteenth century evidences of decadence which resulted in the so-called Decadent Movement and to show that the decadence was not entirely the result of borrowings from the French. Using Arthur Symons’ definition of *fin de siècle* as a critical implement, this thesis attempts to find decadent elements in the works of Keats, Tennyson, Rossetti, Swinburne, and Pater…. The conclusion of this thesis is that far from being a mere French importation, the decadence was conceived on English soil and was as old as romanticism itself.] [Annotation edited from *Dissertation Abstracts* 17 (1957): 3004.]

Pater became the “inheritor of the Romantic mantle of Coleridge,” and the new philosopher of the cult of inaction (56), while Wilde became its High Priest. With Wilde inactivity also became an ethic and a religion” (58–59). “The desire for escape from action led the Decadents of the nineties into a desire for death…. The death wish was seemingly an essential part of the Decadent personality” (59). “The longing for death caused young Arthur Symons, who proclaimed that ‘the only world is the world of dreams’ (‘The Loom of Dreams’), to write, ‘I tire of all but swift oblivion’ (‘Satiety’)” (59).

Decadence as a literary term describing the literature of the nineteenth century is “but a sub-phase of romanticism and exists … wherever the romantic impulse exists;… if romanticism is the state which results when the classical synthesis has begun to disintegrate, then decadence is the result of the complete disintegra-
An Annotated Bibliography

In decadence the grotesque elements dwarf the natural and the balance preserved in romantic art is upset. Romantics subordinate their egotism to their ideals; decadents, lacking ideals, celebrate sheer ego and seek sensation for its own sake. AS’s definition of decadence is only partially accurate; he errs when he denies that decadence has its roots in romanticism. [Robert Peters retorts to the essay in JAAC 18 (December 1959): 258–64. He calls it a complete oversimplification of the terms and the poetry that supposedly embodies the characteristics he is discussing.] (Stern)


AS “was an avid and thoughtful traveler. In 1930 he published a collection of observations called Cities. A more focused volume, called Cities of Italy, followed in 1907…, and in 1918 another collection of travel essays called Cities and Sea-Coasts and Islands.” The last part of the book “is an assortment of pieces on places touched, not always gently, by the sea: Dieppe, Cornwall, Winchelsea, Dover, and the Aran Islands. It was summer of 1896 when Symons visited the islands. He was thirty-one and already established as a poet. Note that he climbs into the boat with book in hand and can’t help but deliver a literary opinion along the way” (1–2).


“Because writing, as he claimed, bored him … [Oscar Wilde’s] listeners often reaped the profits for tales that he never bothered to publish … [yet] some dozen writers are known to have recorded Wilde’s unwritten stories, and a handful more—including Frank Harris, George Moore, Arthur Symons, and Evelyn Waugh—published Wilde’s oral tales as their own” (65).


“In Decadent Style John R. Reed attempts to ‘unravel’ the confusion which has dominated criticism of nineteenth-century decadent literature” (435). “Reed’s basic problem is this. Having found a few fin de siècle works which he admires, Reed constructs a definition which describes their structure” (435), and any works that don’t fit his definition are rejected as examples. Much English literature from the period is so rejected. “In Symons he finds ‘a silhouette’ of Decadent style” (437).


“[I]n this book Mr. Symons turns out to have a sound perception of beauty and its values,” while he “has the air of rejecting all academic criticism; of uttering his casual impressions as if they were valid because his and being casual” (63). AS’s writing is “in the mood given vogue by Verlaine” (63). “Mr. Symons has a fine
perception of delicate things, an honest sense of proportion, and, as the mass of his criticisms will show, he has real vision” (63). AS’s criticism has the qualities of “independence and usual sanity. Its fluency is the fluency of ideas rather than of words. If occasionally one hesitates in agreement, it is from the feeling that now and then the author resents the inevitableness of logic when it is opposed to the tempting thrill of momentary impression” (64).


AS and Pater “anticipated [the Modernist] quest for mystical experience in their own celebration of ecstasy” (422). AS and Yeats “write of literature as a surrogate for religion, as Matthew Arnold had written the generation before” (423). [Passing references to AS.]


[On Yeats and Symons. Not seen.]


“In the early 1890s, [Katherine] Bradley and [Edith] Cooper’s [alias Michael Field] journal entries are filled with references to eminent male literati such as Browning, George Meredith, Pater, Wilde, Arthur Symons, and Lionel Johnson. Very rarely are women mentioned, and when they are it is usually as hostesses of literary gatherings or social mediators of eminent literary men” (198). [Brief mention of AS.]


Walter Pater’s contemporaries, including AS, described Pater through “the metaphor of the mask,” which is “the essential mode of the homotext” (20). AS described Pater’s writing: “the timid and yet scrutinizing eyes,… the whole outer mask, in short, worn for protection and out of courtesy” (20). AS’s description “is more complex; he seems to have recognized both the gendered implications of the mask, and the fact that a mask is not simply an erasure or a concealment of personality…” (20).


“Before giving symbolism up, [Eugénio de Castro] gave it more support, not the least of which was the founding of Arte: Revista Internacional with his friend Manuel de Silva Gaio. The Journal lasted only from November 1895 to June 1896, but during that time it presented the whole world of symbolism to its public. It printed contributions in Portuguese, French, German and English and translations from other languages, and in its pages appeared a host of writers: Verlaine, Gustave Kahn, Stuart Merrill, Pierre Louÿs, Laurence Binyon, Arthur Symons, and others” (128).
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Unpublished M.A. thesis completed at University College, London School of Librarianship, 1958. [A partial primary bibliography with a selected list of secondary criticism. Of limited use because the bibliography of AS’s contributions to periodicals is truncated.] (Stern)


“In a review of Richard Le Gallienne’s The Romantic ’90s, Woolf reiterates what was already becoming the standard description of the period. It was the minor ending to the enormous Victorian age, a period that included only male writers: ‘Dowson, Oscar Wilde, Arthur Symons, Aubrey Beardsley, and John Davidson.’” (195). “In 1926 Woolf listed the writers with whom she associated the 1890s—Dowson, Wilde, Symons, Davidson—and, with the addition of Yeats and Johnson, the canon remains the one Woolf knew” (249).


“Christina Rossetti’s influence on Swinburne helps explain his focus on feminine dreaming and liminal states, a focus that continued in the work of later aesthetic poets like Michael Field, Marriott Watson, Dowson, and Symons. Such a history must recognize that both men and women read and drew inspiration from the work of both men and women: Swinburne may have been influenced by Rossetti and gone on to influence not only men like Symons or Eliot but also women like H.D. The essays in this collection dealing with poetry—those by Psomiades, Linda K. Hughes, and Edward Marx—make contributions to a new genealogy for aestheticist poetry” (11).


“This collection of essays aims to demonstrate that women’s participation in aestheticism was widespread, significant, and controversial and that recognizing this participation will reshape our views of both aestheticism and the history of women’s writing. Most of the scholarship on aestheticism has seen the movement as reflecting the masculine concerns of its male producers. By presenting scholarly work on a number of heretofore neglected women writers and on the cultural contexts in which they wrote, we seek to redress this imbalance” (1).


AS “is a distinguished critic and a poet of an intense and veritable gift, however he has elected to limit the range of his melody. Clearly, Mr. Symons caught the torch of his erotic song at the altars which Swinburne lighted to the same great goddess, but he has not followed his master into the fanes of other deities and his music is less dithyrambic and diverse” (289). In AS “there is a neurotic note,
unlike the cynicism and flippancy of the Carolan lyricists and the sentimentality that followed in later generations. The ecstasies, the raptures of love, the fatalism with which its brevity and its haunting memories are met, the acknowledgement of passion’s imperious mastery, these are decadent notes: notes that seem those only of singers that have made ‘pleasure’ the end of life and, joying in it to the full, have known to the full its vanity” (290).

“Let us first of all praise [AS] for his wisdom in not attempting to define once more Baudelaire’s poetry” (201). “On his translation Symons worked, as he says, with these words of Rossetti in his mind: ‘The only true motive for putting poetry into a fresh language must be to endow a fresh nation, if possible, with one more possession of beauty.’ His work is one of love, and one must hesitate to pass judgment on it” (201).

“Even before Yeats lived in daily contact with Arthur Symons in the 1890s while Symons was working on The Symbolist Movement in Literature, his conception of lyric poetry involved the aesthetics of symbolism” (376). For Yeats, lyric poetry, in contrast to epic or dramatic poetry, “requires ‘an ever more elaborate language, an ever more subtle rhythm,’ and a ‘growing complexity of language and thought’” (376). “In his contact with Symons, Yeats encountered an aesthetic which helped him to develop a broader literary context and a more articulate syntax for his symbols. The Symbolist Movement in Literature defines a movement and—implicitly—a rhetoric of literature of which, Symons says in his Dedication, Yeats’s early lyrics are ‘the chief representative … in our country’” (383). “It is appropriate that Symons called this style of literature a ‘movement’ because Symbolism is, for all its disclaimers to the contrary, the most ‘literary’ of literary styles” (383).

AS sees the progress in The Wind Among the Reeds as the choice “of the unseen over the seen” (78–79). [Passing mention.]

Of all the Delius part songs on this recording (including settings of verses from Tennyson and James Elroy Flecker), AS’s “On Craig Dhu” and “Wanderer’s Song” are the “[m]ost appealing … in terms of sheer lush lyricism” (99).

[Explains that the music halls granted AS “that exquisite sense of the frivolous, that air of Bohemian freedom, that relief from respectability, which one gets here, and nowhere more surely than here” (350). AS, who identified himself as an “afi-
cionado of the music halls” was one of the spokesmen of the new generation, who rebelled against the prudish and holier-than-thou ethics of Mrs. Grundy. In 1892 AS wrote: “In a music-hall the audience is part of the performance” (353). (In German.)


En route to Paris, Joyce visited AS in December 1902. The poetry of the French Symbolists provides a background for Stephen’s villanelle. AS’s discussion of Gerard de Nerval’s belief in metempsychosis as it relates to “Artemis” may have been in Joyce’s mind when he wrote A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man. (Stern)


“Plainly, [AS] sees an attraction in decadence quite apart from (if related to) its disgusting illumination of the malaise of the time” (6). AS introduced continental decadent literature to the English-speaking world in his essay “The Decadent Movement in Literature” published in Harper’s Monthly Magazine (November 1893), and praised Gabriele D’Annunzio’s “marvelous, malarious Piacere” (1889) as “a triumph of exquisite perversity” (29). AS later functioned as an advisor in the English translation, The Child of Pleasure (1898), and “rendered ‘the sonnets and other verse contained in the novel into English verse’” (6). Understanding the importance of sound in literature, AS wrote in The Symbolist Movement in Literature (1899) “[Verlaine] paints with sound, and his line and atmosphere become music” (208).


AS’s poems, Days and Nights, are too good: too perfect in form, too much thought, too little feeling. He is a remarkable man. [Scattered references to AS in Schreiner’s letters to Havelock Ellis, 1888–1889.] (Stern)


AS was an original and important member of Yeats’s dramatic society, the Masquers. Yeats explained to Gilbert Murray that AS “will I suppose be our critical voice” (433–34). [Passing references to AS.]


[Exchanges between Symonds and AS on their poetry. (Stern) In a letter to AS on April 5, 1886, Symonds summed up his estimate of AS’s efforts: “all your work in verse seems to me so far mature, and my own judgment about it is so very doubtful to myself, that I can see for you no other test than publication of the pieces which you think best, in one volume.... That you are far too fluent seems to be apparent. But that you have already great metrical facility, command of dic-
tion, and dramatic force to some extent, is equally obvious…. I am so tired and stupid that I doubt whether I have made my meaning clear. It really amounts to this: (1) That I am too diffident of my own faculty, to judge your verse, especially in MS. (2) That I am sure you write too much and on too slight suggestion. (3) That in these circumstances I believe it might not be bad for you to risk a volume, provided you can launch it without actual payment to the publisher” (131).]


[Brief mention of AS referring to the idea that experience for the sake of experience, as he and Walter Pater would have demanded, opened up new areas of reality for art which Victorian decorum had precluded to that point (140). (In German.)]


AS was one of the critics most often mentioned in Huneker’s columns. AS and Huneker were often compared: their versatility, subject matter, and critical method were quite similar. The two men met for the first time in 1903. (Stern)


“Arnaud Desplechin, who adapted ‘Esther Kahn’ from a short story by Arthur Symons, presents Esther’s milieu with a raw immediacy unusual in period films. The drab streets, crowded tenement apartments and grim factories are untouched by nostalgia or picturesqueness. The camera pushes into dim rooms to capture the claustrophobia of their inhabitants, and well-timed jump cuts impart a syncopated, present-tense rhythm of anxiety and disconnection to their lives. This long-ago London was photographed by Eric Gautier” (E22). [See comments under Desplechin, Arnaud.]


“It is usual, and justified to trace the sources of the English free verse of the twentieth century to the French Symbolist verslibristes. What, indeed is remarkable about the period is the way in which French and English versifications moved towards each other” (127). In “Modernity in Verse—Mr. W. E. Henley,” AS supports rhyme in poetry, and in a reply to F. T. Marinetti “Symons’s view is that English verse is already so free, especially in relation to French versification, that it hardly needs to stir its stumps to remain abreast of the times” (128). But “Symons’s remark is quite without force for the English prosodic liberator and is hard to square with his own careful unsettling of English prosodic habits” (129). Ezra Pound expressed admiration for the cadence in AS’s translations of French poetry. “Efforts in translation were influential in the liberation of English versification, not only by providing direct models which the translators took over in their original work … but also by stimulating English poets to create an English
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AS’s poetry exhibits “the suggestive adverb ... verbal inaccuracy ... [and] accumulations of adjectives ... which suck the sense almost to skin and bone” (214). “There is an obsession with considerateness and with being understood” (215). In AS’s “Stella Maris’ we find an incongruous combination like ‘frank delight’; the delight of the thorough-going decadent has no need to apologize for itself with a word so rich in self-righteousness” (215). “Ultimately the nineties poet is rather more concerned with the fruit of experience than with what Pater argued for: the experience itself. Hence, even the more overtly erotic poems are tendentious.” AS’s “Bianca’ cycle (London Nights, 1895) can be usefully compared in this respect with Verlaine’s ‘Filles’ cycle (Parallélement, 1889).” AS “has not the verbal control to deal with physical contact unembarrassingly, his sublime moments involve contortion and over-intensity” (215–16). “[W]e should not forget just how much Pound and others owed to nineties sensationalism, a debt that Pound himself acknowledges in an article on Symons: ‘And with all our past ten years’ talk of direct treatment and hard phrasing I do not know that the ‘next generation’ has gone much further toward the desirable plainness of Villon than had Symons” (225). [See Pound, Ezra. “Arthur Symons.” Athenaeum 4699 (1920): 663–34.]


AS planned to sue the Pall Mall Gazette for its attacks on London Nights but lacked the money to do so. (Stern)


The 1893 date for AS’s first meeting with Beardsley noted by Ian Fletcher may well be accurate, but probably only dates an “isolated casual encounter.” The summer of 1895 is the vitally important date to recall for it marks the close collaboration of the two men over the Savoy. [See letter by Ian Fletcher, TLS, 18 Aug 1966: 743.] (Stern)


[Passing mention of AS’s description of the Pierrot and how it relates to James’s novel. 275.]


[“The 1890s witnessed an explosion of interest in the metaphysical and other seventeenth-century poets, a fact that warrants further scholarly exploration. This article outlines the background of the revival: the cultural and religious politics that shape mid-century commentary on the metaphysicals, and Coleridge’s marginalia which rehabilitate the poets, especially Donne. It then presents an