Arthur Symons, Critic Among Critic

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Published by ELT Press

Symons, Arthur.
Arthur Symons, Critic Among Critic: An Annotated Bibliography.
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overview of criticism by [AS and others] ... tracing the similarities and differences among aesthetic and decadent visions of the seventeenth century. Finally, it suggests a number of areas for new work on the topic” (195). Abstract from the beginning of the article.]


Mansfield “was taught what she most needed, what she could not acquire in New Zealand: modern languages (French and German), music and modern literature: under the mentorship of Walter Rippmann she was encouraged to read ... Arthur Symons” (55).


Eliot read AS’s _The Symbolist Movement in Literature_ and was strongly impressed by AS’s discussion of the power of symbol and by his discussion of French poets. Eliot was most enthralled by AS’s inclusion of Laforgue, a man whose style and character were startlingly close to Eliot’s notion of an ideal artist. While not imitating Laforgue, Eliot’s art was nevertheless significantly changed by this encounter. After his undergraduate work at Harvard, and prompted by AS’s preference of Paris to London, Eliot decided to spend a year in Sorbonne to experience firsthand the legacy of Laforgue and Baudelaire (30). [Also published London: Garland, 1971.]


The psychomythic tale is one species within the minor genre of Gothic fiction, and two chapters “examine the conventions that contribute to the uniqueness of the psychomythic tale in the period 1886 to 1905” (490). One chapter of the book is focused on AS’s “Extracts from the Journal of Henry Luxulyan” (1905). [Passing reference.]


“Sarojini’s outstanding success brought her fame throughout India, but strangely enough, being famous did not in any way fascinate her. She disliked publicity and renown.” She told AS, “‘Honestly, I was not pleased; such things did not appeal to me’” (23). After their meeting at Cambridge, AS “was enthralled by this child of the mystic East who could not only write verse but possessed the joyful gift of laughter. Sarojini also met members of the Rhymers’ Club who further influenced her and made her understand ‘the verbal and technical accomplishment, the mastery of phrase and rhythm’ of English verse, without which she could not have translated her visions and experiences into melodious poetry” (30). AS “introduced his young Indian friend to the English-speaking world” (53). AS felt that her poems “written up to 1905 possessed an ‘individual beauty of their own.’ He realized their intrinsic worth and wrote accordingly to Sarojini; but she hesitated to publish her poems for she was humble to the core” (55). She wrote to AS, “‘I am not a poet really. I have the vision and the desire, but not the voice’”
(55). AS “felt that ‘it was the desire of beauty’ that made her a poet” (56). He praised her for “her wisdom, passion and humour” (58).

[Last chapter relates Yeats, and to a lesser extent, AS, to the occult societies and the Symbolists.] (Stern)

[This thesis is an exploration of the relation of occultism to the symbolist movement in nineteenth-century French and English literature.... This thesis is meant to be exploratory rather than definitive, and its final contentions are therefore tentative. They are these: 1) that symbolist poets had direct connections with specifically occult movements, in their reading and often in personal experience, and 2) that the world-view behind the symbolist movement as a whole is essentially occult.] [Annotation edited from Dissertation Abstracts 17 (1957): 1769–70.]


The rose in AS’s “Rosa Flammae” appears as “a typical decadent metaphor of sacrilegious lust.” In “Rosa Mundi” it faintly approaches at least the theory of symbolism. “Rosa Mundi” illustrates well the “weakly imitative condition of the waning poetry of the nineties.” [References to influence of AS’s The Symbolist Movement in Literature on Yeats and Yeats’s hand in its writing.] (Stern)


“Among the poets of the day whom John Gray knew best were Ernest Dowson and Arthur Symons. His final verdict on the poets of the Rhymers’ Club occurs in a letter written to Mrs (later Lady) Maclagan in February, 1906: ‘I enclose you the Book of the Rhymers’ Club. It is an interesting relic of all that history. It only means a little in respect of Dowson Lionel Johnson & Yeats. The rest (excepting Arthur Symons) were preposterous’” (56).


“The revolt against naturalism evoked a new interest in the mask and marionette” some eighty years before World War II in Europe. Unlike the hand puppet whose movement comes from inside, the Italian marionette is attached to strings. AS considered “seeing the wires in operation” extremely important.


“Arthur Symons’ remarks on the occasion of Millais’ death indicate what had happened to his reputation during his later years” (15n2). [Passing reference to AS.]


In the years 1800–1922 “an anti-urban viewpoint dominated English poetry” (preface). Along with contemporary poets, AS’s poetry portrayed “city life as the representative condition of the modern age” (abstract). “The most brilliant burst
of Modernism in English poetry, Eliot’s *The Waste Land* directly and indirectly owes much to Whitman and Baudelaire” (iii). AS praised Whitman (“‘a salvation’ to him”), and made it clear in *London: A Book of Aspects* (1909), “that it was as a city poet that Whitman made his impact” (157). However, “even the ‘saved’ Symons was by 1906 [in “Edgar Allan Poe” (1906) in *Figures of Several Centuries* (1916)] naming Poe’s verse ‘the only essential poetry to come out of America; Walt Whitman’s vast poetical nature having remained a nature only, not come to be an art’” (159). French *vers libre* better suited the London scene of the time, and while “Arthur Symons is well known as French Symbolist poetry’s most devoted English apostle…. Symons should also be recognized as an important pioneer in the shaping of modern English city poetry” (160). “Those artificial, fleeting, perverse moments [described in *London Nights*] became Symons’s trademark” (162). [Annotated from dissertation. See also DAI 44 (1984): 2776A.]


“Eliot thus seeks to establish his own originality, the ability to deal in English with the ‘intractably unpoetic,’ by claiming that his largest debt was to a foreign poet [Baudelaire]. He later admitted that the late Victorian poets of London’s darker side, such as John Davidson, Arthur Symons, and James Thomson, had also influenced his writing” (197n29). [Brief acknowledgment of AS.]


“D’Annunzio seduced his lovers with the power of his voice, and men fell under his spell as well.” AS “commented on the mesmerizing power of d’Annunzio’s voice” (160). “Ironically, while d’Annunzio was replacing Duse both in his life and his art, her art was in full flower. During the fall in 1903, Duse was on tour, first in Switzerland and then in London. She invited the critic Arthur Symons to visit her in Zurich, and he saw her act there in *La citta morta*, *Magda*, and *Hedda Gabler*. He believed her art had taken a great leap forward” (213). [Brief mention of AS.]


[Sherard asserts that Harris’s memory of Wilde’s insulting dicta on AS is accurate; he also reports he visited Dowson’s grave with AS and accuses Harris of having plagiarized from his essay on Dowson.] (Stern)


“Aestheticism, the literary theory that dared not speak its name, has started to come back into view…. The nineteenth-century Aesthetic Movement has been the object of lively attention, not just from conventional literary historians, but also from critics working in such fields as cultural materialism, gender studies and deconstruction…. In Britain, a link between nineteenth-century Aestheticism and the central assumptions of academic literary criticism had been suggested in a book published in 1993 by Josephine Guy and Ian Small, *Politics and Value in English Studies: A Discipline in Crisis*? Though Small had previously made several distinguished contributions to the study of the Old Aestheticism, this was
not a ‘Beauty is Back’ polemic. Rather, it was a carefully argued defence of the status of English studies as an intellectual discipline which cautiously noted the contribution made by writers such as A. C. Bradley and Arthur Symons to the establishing of literature as ‘an autonomous object of study’” (9).


“The book is not a treatise upon the Romantic Movement at all. In his preface the author explains that he does not use the term in its usual historical sense. There is, from his point of view, nothing in this development of English poetry so definite as a conscious ‘movement’” (314). AS covers all poets who were alive during 1800, the oldest, John Horne (1722–1808), to the youngest, Thomas Hood (1799–1845), including many “half-forgotten if not altogether unknown names” (314). AS’s “discussion of Wordsworth’s poetical quality is one of the best that has been written” (315). AS’s “comments are incisive, sound, and stimulating. Originality of view and definiteness of judgement are stamped on every dictum” (316). “This is indeed a book which reflects the positive personality of a brilliant mind” (316).


Jayne Marek includes in her work Women Editing Modernism “the contents” page for Vol. 4 no. 11 of The Little Review, of March 1918, which features names such as Hueffer, Pound, AS, and Joyce, as well as the editor of the magazine, Margaret Anderson. Anderson is just one of the examples of the traditionally over-looked but immensely influential female artist of early modernism. Male artists relied heavily on female artists such as Anderson, while at the same time derided their female counterparts’ literary achievements. In a generally balanced and engaging tone, Marek successfully deflates this “balloon of male modernist supremacy” (117). [Brief mention of AS.]


“Under Pater’s influence Symons subscribes to three theories of literature in relation to life, derived mainly from The Renaissance…. The theories may be summarised as follows: (1) Art provides an escape from life (in the sense of society). (2) Art creates something new and autotelic, and as such has nothing to offer life (in the sense of the needs, emotions and institutions of mankind). (3) Art expresses the artist’s vision or experience of the world, and its merit depends on the fidelity of this expression. Now these theories are mutually incompatible” (63). “Though it is true that Symbolism widened the vision of Symons the critic, it is also true that this widened vision is more frequently exhibited in his art criticism than in his more purely literary criticism” (78). “The fact is that after writing The Symbolist Movement Symons regressed, in his literary criticism, from the symbolist insights that Yeats had helped him to attain, back to his earlier mode of criticism” (79). “[T]he criticism of Yeats represents the development of almost all the theories and ideas that we encountered while studying Pater, Johnson and the early Symons” (130). “Yeats’s distinction is that he is a more consistent practitioner of Symbolism than Pater, and a finer theoretician than Symons” (131).
[Revised from the author’s Ph.D. diss., Yale, 1971, “A Study of the Concepts of Art, Life and Morality in the Criticism of Five Writers from Pater to Yeats.” There are passing references to AS throughout the book. This annotation focuses on Chapter 4, “Arthur Symons with Walter Pater and W. B. Yeats.”]


AS “adopts the decadent doctrines of Pater. Under the influence of Yeats he veers for a while towards a symbolist view of art, holding that art reconciles us to life and death. But his final conclusion about the relation of art to morality is similar to the decadent Pater’s” (v). [Includes chapter entitled “Arthur Symons with Walter Pater and W. B. Yeats,” 94–129.] [Annotation edited from DAI 32 (1971): 3331A. Later revised and published as Singh’s The Development of a Critical Tradition from Pater to Yeats, Delhi: Macmillan of India, 1978.]


AS was “a great critic of the 1890s and the 1900s now unwisely neglected” (4).


“For many years I have read with the fury of a cannibal hunting heads, with the reverence of a pilgrim approaching Mecca upon his knees. As a result of these—perhaps contrasted—passions, I have been in the habit of keeping notebooks, filled, not only with my own reactions towards poems, but also with passages from other writers—some artists in the other arts, some mystics, and with passages from the writings of the Saints that seemed to me to throw light on the various problems of poetry” (xi). [Sitwell from her “Preface.” She includes passages from AS’s writings on Blake, Baudelaire, and Verlaine.]


“The Pan-Celtic Society was founded in 1899; Celtia: a Pan-Celtic Magazine published its first number in 1901…. In their enthusiasm for the Celtic virtues, many writers of dubious national heritage claimed a share of the spoils. AS “qualified doubly as a member, being of Welsh birth and Cornish parentage” (5). “Like all successful autocrats inclined to create, alter, or discard on the sincerity of the moment, Yeats was willing to extend his interpretation of Anglo-Irish letters not only to embrace his good friends Lionel Johnson and Arthur Symons, but to sense an undefined Celtic sympathy even in such opposite forces as William Blake and Maurice Maeterlinck” (10). AS invited Aubrey Beardsley to be the art editor of Savoy, “intended as a rival to The Yellow Book” (28). “Yeats’s criticism of The Yellow Book and The Savoy as ‘gloomy magazines’ was echoed by many people.” Yeats lived for a time with AS in the Temple in 1895 and 1896 and “had first-hand knowledge” of AS’s translations of symbolist writers. He helped AS “to some extent on The Symbolist Movement in Literature (1899)” (45). “Edward Martyn dedicated his plays The Heather Field and Maeve to Moore, Yeats” and AS. “[T]he most successful scene in Maeve is the dream sequence in Act II, which although conceived by Martyn was ‘polished’ for the stage by Symons” (176).

AS was the spokesman of his decade and the only man in France and England who understood the theory of Symbolism in literature. His work should be judged on the basis of what he wrote before his mental breakdown in 1908. AS was an Epicurean, a “Promethean individualist.” [Sympathetically reviews AS’s publications from 1886–1909; sees his mental breakdown as the result of an intolerable tension between AS’s penchant for Hedonism and his strict Calvinist upbringing.] (Stern)


A “series of facsimile editions of 1890s verse ... makes available in their original printed form the first and second *Book of the Rhymers’ Club*” (435). “In one of the few notices [In a Music-Hall, and Other Poems] received Yeats linked Davidson and Arthur Symons as interesting examples of young poets in ‘hectic search for the common pleasures of common men’” (436). “Davidson himself resented the comparison and seems to have Yeats’s review in mind two years later when he described Symons’s fascination with prostitutes and carnal pleasures as ‘a common mood of common men’” (437).


[Reviewed with John Sloan’s *The Book of the Rhymers’ Club* above.]


[Reviewed with John Sloan’s *The Book of the Rhymers’ Club* above.]


AS “to whom Yeats introduced Joyce in December 1902, was responsible for the publication of *Chamber Music* and for much of the praise it received. Symons submitted the manuscript to Grant Richards for Joyce in September 1904. When Richards refused to publish it without a subsidy from Joyce, Symons offered it to Constable. Eventually Elkin Mathews accepted and published it at Symons’ urging. Symons also gave it the very favorable review cited above” (8–9).


“Apart from a commitment to scholarship, the *Encyclopedia* is also informed by a strong sense of the kind of writer Wilde was, and this in turn is structured by Beckson’s understanding of the 1890s. So we find long entries on writers such as Arthur Symons and Richard Le Gallienne who have been seen to epitomize the ‘quintessence’ of the 1890s” (332).


[Not seen.]
1023. Small, Ian. Rev. of Strangeness and Beauty: An Anthology of Aesthetic Criticism, 1840–1910, by Graham Hough and Eric Warner. British Journal of Aesthetics 24.3 (1984): 276–77. “The editors of Strangeness and Beauty argue that the ‘central assumption’ of their anthology is the ‘relation of modern art and aesthetic thought to their nineteenth-century predecessors.’ We are invited to observe the movement of the Victorian to the early modernist as it is manifested in critical practice” (276). The anthology “is fundamentally a tradition of English writing on pictorial art and aesthetic experience, but French, Irish and American writers have been affiliated to that tradition” (277). [No specific mention of AS.]


1026. Smith, A. J., and Catherine Phillips, eds. John Donne: The Critical Heritage. Vol. 2. London: Routledge & Paul Kegan, 1996. xxxiv, 170–79. AS and others “firmly established Donne’s standing among the great English poets” and “a place in the canon” (v). “It is clear that the ideas of what constituted poetry were changing away from those held by Collins and Welsh or even” AS. He thought that “Gosse’s account of Donne’s character [Life and Letters of John Donne] is summed up in two well-known representations of Donne, the one as a youth of 18, and the other the engraving of the dying man in his shroud” (170).

1027. Smith, Angela. Katherine Mansfield: A Literary Life. Houndmill, Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave, 2000. 31, 32, 34. “Mansfield’s home life and her schooling gave her access to libraries and plenty of time to read. A list taken at random from the notebooks for 1908 reads: ‘Does Oscar—and there is a gardenia yet alive beside my bed—does Oscar still keep so firm a stronghold in my soul? No! Because now I am growing capable of seeing a wider vision—a little Oscar, a little Symons …’” (31). “Apart from Wilde, the writers who most evidently affected her literary development were Walter Pater and Arthur Symons” (32). “Mansfield’s awareness of the possibilities of symbolism was developed through her reading of” AS (34). “The influence of Symons on Mansfield’s speculations about art is evident throughout her notebooks” (34).

“One of Mansfield’s early mentors, Arthur Symons, whose *Studies in Prose and Verse* she quotes from in her early notebooks, writes that ‘human life and human manners are too various, too moving, to be brought into the fixity of a quite formal order.’ This seems to chime with Mansfield’s experience as it is represented in her journals” (16). [Brief reference to AS.]


A letter to the editor of the *Athenaeum*, wherein “it is with compunction that I, a great admirer of Mr. Symons’ genius, note that his marvellous essay on Leonardo da Vinci, in the current issue of *Fortnightly Review*” (746) contains two or more (the letter-writer believes) probably innocent, inadvertent plagiarisms from Walter Pater’s writings on Leonardo.


Decadence is difficult for critics to define: many felt that the so-called Decadent movement between the Romantic period and the early twentieth-century was simply a lack of creative genius: imitation and style over substance. AS was one who cried out against this “very disease of form” (643). “Many writers treated literary decadence from a moralistic point of view, seeing it primarily as a cultivation of evil for evil’s sake” (649).


Although Australian poet Christopher Brennan read and translated the poetry of the French Symbolists, seemed to admire AS, and share many of his interests, Brennan’s rugged poetry shows little formal similarity to AS’s poetry—although the two poets share the same interest in the subject of the wanderer.


[“This study investigates the metaphysical foundation of Victorian “Decadence” primarily through examining the critical writings (and to a lesser extent the fiction) of Walter Pater, Oscar Wilde, and Arthur Symons and the earlier poetry of A. C. Swinburne.” The “fin-de-siècle writers known as the Decadents attempted to reestablish some stable standard of value by boldly fashioning a life-style and philosophy in which Art itself replaced God at the controlling ‘center’ of man’s world. Pater’s writings convey an attempt to rediscover or create a sanctified aesthetic ‘center.’ “Symons and Wilde carry Pater’s ambivalent proffered precepts to their ultimate extension: aesthetics becomes the only legitimate measure of life and conduct.”] [Annotation edited from *DAI* 35 (4560-A): 1975.]

AS “had reservations about Beardsley’s literary work, but he acknowledges Beardsley’s breadth of knowledge of literature” (106), and held Beardsley’s artwork as the standard for art in the 1890s, even claiming Beardsley’s painstakingly drawn pictures challenged the primacy of the text. AS notes the transitory poster-art-like work of Beardsley’s, describing it as “Art of the day and hour, coming into competition with newspapers” (96) and other popular mass media. AS also is privy to Beardsley’s intense concern about religion and sin and argues for Beardsley’s greatness on the basis that Beardsley’s art reveals a type of “abstract spiritual corruption … in beautiful form; sin transfigured by beauty” (142). AS, “in his landmark obituary essay, pairs Beardsley with Baudelaire” (175). AS also comments on Beardsley’s insecurities, his intense desire to be accepted as a valid talent, his impeccable sense of fashion, his “obsession with control” (132), and his “urge to scandalize” (46) in his drawings.

1034. Snodgrass, Chris. “Beardsley Scholarship at His Centennial: Tethering or Untethering a Victorian Icon?” English Literature in Transition 42.4 (1999): 17, 363–99. “James Gibbons Huneke anointed Beardsley ‘the one “genius” of the Eighteen-Nineties,’ a customary characterization dating from even before Arthur Symons’s dazzling obituary in the Fortnightly Review (May 1898), which reified the view of Beardsley as a diseased decadent genius” (364–66). In The Beardsley Industry, Jane Haville Desmarais “stretches a bit when she claims that Symons (whom she eccentrically refers to as ‘A. W. Symons’) ‘became friends with Beardsley’ (17), since their relationship was at best problematical” (390).

1035. Snodgrass, Chris. “Decadent Mythmaking: Arthur Symons on Aubrey Beardsley and Salome.” Victorian Poetry 28.3–4 (1990): 61–109. While AS was in many personal respects quite mild and tame, he also helped to perpetuate the myth of “decadence,” and the “yellow nineties”: “after the Wilde debacle, it was largely left to Symons to try and salvage the Decadent ‘Religion of Art,’ to spiritualize and thereby justify the nineties’ attraction to ‘evil beauty’” (61). Much of AS’s Decadent philosophy reflected his view of the world. In Aubrey Beardsley, AS found a kindred spirit: someone with “compulsive work habits, fastidious cleanliness, a similar taste for dandified black costumes” (62)—a “keystone for his own Decadent vision” (62). AS’s opinion of Beardsley never waned, and Beardsley’s reputation is “one of the most brilliant … of Symons’ subtle mythifications” (62–63). For AS, Beardsley’s grotesque figures possess “a special redemptive truth” (65); “Symons defends Beardsley’s art on the grounds of its morality, albeit an aestheticized morality” (67). Beardsley’s illustrations for Oscar Wilde’s Salome contained symbolic references to (inside jokes about) Wilde’s homosexuality. Beardsley’s illustrations for Salome, and AS’s comments about them, reveal fascination with the hermaphrodite, with emasculation, and with identifying “the female with the monstrous, particularly the snakelike” (79). In his poem, “Salome’s Lament,” AS revisits his fascination with dancers, and especially hysteria-inspired dance. For AS, Beardsley’s drawings embodied the paradox of Decadence: “that decadence may merely expose the unsettling possibility that life is at its very core undecidably ambiguous, merely an endless paradox of vexing and finally irresolvable self-contradictions” (102). Ironically, although AS was willing to ponder Beardsley’s vision, “it was precisely the kind
of view of life—and of the Decadence—which he could not allow himself to embrace” (102).


Ernest Dowson, since the publication of AS’s “Literary Causerie,” “which initiated the notorious ‘Dowson Legend’ … has been regarded as virtually emblematic of what Yeats called the ‘tragic generation’” (162). Dowson had an aesthetically sanitizing view of art, holding out against an impure world. It was just this worship of purity—both moral and aesthetic—that Arthur Symons saw as defining Dowson’s attachment to ‘Missie’…” (167).


AS, W. B. Yeats, Ernest Dowson, Lionel Johnson, and John Davidson were the most notable members of The Rhymers’ Club. And, [these poets] “far from being devotees of art for art’s sake, or ‘absorbed simply in deriving the maximum of sensation from life’ were, in fact, ‘confronting the problem of the relationship which art could bear to life’ (v); theirs was an attempt to restore in modern terms the ‘notion that poetry was a necessary adjunct to life’” (288). “The fifth chapter captures masterfully the psychological vectors of Arthur Symons’s intellectual development during the early nineties, mapped by the influences of Rhys, Havelock Ellis, and key early trips to Paris. Alford joins Symons’s famous Harper’s article on the ‘Decadent Movement’ (1893) with an incisive and still instructive ‘defense’ of the Decadent movement itself. He explains that instead of exhibiting the self-denial of ‘John-Bull-type writers’ who valued a ‘polite disregard of “what the eye doesn’t see,”’ Symons and other ‘modern’ Decadents ‘did not shrink from a full awareness of the true spiritual condition of fin-de-siècle Europe,’ in which ‘humanistic culture … had been perverted and degraded by a commercially governed popular press’ (65)” (289). Alford “devalues much of Symons’s poetry on the grounds that it captures only the ‘superficial characteristics’ of Charles Baudelaire and Paul Verlaine” (62–63).


While a student at Harvard, T. S. Eliot discovered The Symbolist Movement in Literature, and was thereby introduced to the French Symbolists. “The effect of Symons’s introduction was immense…. ‘I myself owe Mr. Symons a great debt,’” wrote Eliot (137). Through AS’s writings on Laforgue, “Eliot found a new beauty in the directness of speech” (139). AS also noted Laforgue’s “scrupulously correct” style (139), and focused on his vers libre poems.


[Critical of AS’s account of Rossetti’s art. Relates AS’s “Stella Maris” to Symonds’s sonnet sequence bearing the same title.] (Stern)

“Eliot recalled that at twenty ‘the kind of poetry that I needed to teach me the use of my own voice, did not exist in English at all; it was only to be found in French.’ This discovery dated from December 1908 when, in a Harvard library, Eliot came across the revised edition of The Symbolist Movement in Literature (1899, 1908) by Arthur Symons. This book, he said, influenced the course of his life. It was remembered by him ‘as an introduction to wholly new feelings, as a revelation.’ For the first time he met the work of Laforgue, Rimbaud, Verlaine, and Corbière. Symons’s chapter on Laforgue drew a temperament very close to his own. Although he found Symons’s criticism ‘execrable,’ the translations fascinated Eliot, especially of Laforgue” (6). [No index. First edition appeared in 1968, most recent edition (6th), published San Diego: Harcourt, 1994.]


If AS “was thought capable of looking after Verlaine, William was thought capable of looking after Symons” (63). Rothenstein wrote, [1895?] AS “is too awful for words but very good-hearted. He has decked himself out in a whole suit of French summer clothing from the Belle Jardiniere, and although it suits his particular style very well, one is not exactly proud of his companionship”” (88). [Passing references to AS.]


“With Eliot, the situation is quite different. His juvenile poems are skillful but perfectly conventional imitations of Keats, Tennyson, Kipling, and the like. The change comes with startling abruptness early in 1909; and we know from Eliot’s own account what the primary stimulus was: Arthur Symons’s The Symbolist Movement in France [sic: in Literature], which he read in December 1908. From this book he went on to the poets therein discussed and quoted, and he made his ‘deliberate choice of a poet to mimic’: Laforgue” (139). “In the fall of 1921, his senior year at Vanderbilt, where he was a Classics major, [Allen] Tate met [Robert Penn] Warren for the first time. At this time he had read Symons’s The Symbolist Movement in France [sic: in Literature] (the same book, we remember, that had introduced Yeats and then Eliot to the French Symbolists) and had gone on to Baudelaire” (165).


“Not all his [Saltus’s] admirers indulged in the turgid and the hyperbolic, for others, more judicious and well known, include Arthur Symons” (14). “Apparently, therefore, the Joris Karl Huysmans style, ‘le style tachété et faisandé’ ‘high-flavored and spotted with corruption,’ as Arthur Symons, the definer of the ‘The Decadent Movement in Literature’ translates the phrase is not the Saltus style. His is more Flaubertian and Parnassian” (67).


AS’s “first book for Heinemann was his study of The Symbolist Movement in Literature (1899) which showed his acute understanding of French literature, a book which had a decided influence (136) on Joyce and Pound. Symbolism stood for
Art possessing a transcendental power and he became spokesman for ‘art for art’s sake’ and for the quest for ‘the universal science of Beauty.’ Art and morals had nothing to do with each other” (137).


“This is the third volume in the series Studies in European Cultural Transition, the aim of which is to explore identifiable moments of transition in European culture in a fresh and stimulating manner. To begin the series ‘decadence’ has been chosen as the subject for discussion, as differences in the way in which that particular concept has been defined through time suggest very clearly the forces of cultural transition at work” (ix). “The first example is an obviously political idea of decadence taken from the twentieth century, the second an apparently apolitical and predominantly psychological definition of decadence made some sixteen centuries earlier” (ix). [No mention of AS in this introduction, but this frames the collection in which references to AS do appear. See essays from this collection by Andrew Hammond, Vincent Newey, and Julian North.]


AS was a precocious and isolated child. He taught himself to read languages, and always retained his early interest in the piano. As a young writer and critic, AS patterned his style on Pater. He translated French Symbolist poetry (Verlaine and Mallarmé), and most embraced Verlaine’s style. He influenced Yeats. AS believed that Symbolism and Impressionism were “really working on the same hypothesis, applied in different directions” (213). Although he had his critics, and in spite of the mental breakdown which essentially ended his literary career, AS is now recognized as an important figure in modern English literature: “Symons’s work, in verse and prose, extends beyond the nineteenth century” (215).


AS deserves “to live as something more than a footnote to Yeats.” Modern poetics center on a consideration of what A.G. Lehmann called “an aesthetic monad.” The critic attempts to fix the connection between symbol and image. It is difficult to associate AS in “any exact fashion with the theoretical aspects of modern poetics,” but his concern with the concept of the image and symbol and his understanding of the dangers of Symbolism (its tendency towards obscurantism) foreshadow the writings of the critic of modern poetry. Kermode is perhaps too generous when he credits AS with glimpsing the possibilities of the metaphysical conceit in modern poetry and when he maintains that AS sought to synthesize Blake and the Symbolists, but he is right to acknowledge the seminal influence The Symbolist Movement in Literature had on twentieth century poetics. [A centenary piece; largely a resumé of then recent criticism on AS.] (Stern)

AS’s career as a critic began with his defense of impressionism, moved to define decadence, and turned at the end of the century to celebrate Symbolism as a “kind of Second Coming to be made manifest with the birth of the new century.” It is difficult in AS’s criticism of 1899 to distinguish between his and Yeats’s views of mysticism. [Stanford erroneously asserts that Symons and Yeats were together at the performance of *Ubu Roi.*] (Stern)


Although Frank Kermode has pronounced AS a “crucial” figure, and Dame Edith Sitwell called him “a great critic of the 1890’s and 1900’s,” he remains out of print, and a reissue of AS’s work is needed (210). “Both in theory and practice, Symons modernised Pater. He applied to contemporary situations, ideas which Pater applied to the past” (211). Through *The Symbolist Movement in Literature,* AS introduced English writers (and especially Yeats) to the French Symbolists. Symbolism may now be thought of as “an art of suggestion instead of an art of statement,” but “for Symons, writing in the fin-de-siècle years, it was very much more than this—a kind of Second Coming to be made manifest with the birth of the new century” (213). In turn, Yeats influenced AS to include “Mysticism” in his master plan of Symbolism.


From about 1912, the Symbolism of the 1890s gave way to Imagism. The use of both Symbolism and Imagism is governed by a “certain aesthetic exclusiveness: a desire on the part of the poet to present his state of mind, his feeling about his subject, without recourse to discursive thinking.… [Poets] wished to dispense with all save the phenomenal element in poetry—to leave out all abstract, expository or argumentative matter. Symbolist and Imagist poems were to be essentially high-voltage poetry, with all the low-voltage connective equipment omitted” (265). Then “the Imagist secularised and superficialised the symbol, giving it an objective treatment foreign to the self-obsessed subjective-minded Symbolists” (266). “Symons, as a practicing critic, was at the center of the Symbolist Movement” (267).


“In part the weakness of the English ’nineties comes from their poets taking Verlaine, not Baudelaire as their example” (46)—*The Symbolist Movement in Literature* does not include a study of Baudelaire—“No better epitaph of the English ’nineties, in their failure to understand Baudelaire, could be found than Symons’s last book of verse *Jezebel Mort*” (46). After his mental breakdown, AS never fully regained his mental powers (although he continued to publish much). AS’s poetry of city landscapes was followed by T. S. Eliot, Edgell Rickward, and John Betjeman. AS recognized in Rossetti the change that occurred in his female subjects: “a transition from docility … from beatific exaltation … from wistful sadness … to baleful beauty … and sultry narcissism” (55). “Historically, Symons’s development as a critic begins with his defence of impressionism.… The essence of Symons’s thought as a critic is to be discovered in his essay ‘The Decadent Movement in Literature’” (111). “As Symons sees it, the outward
characteristics of Symbolism are those of an anti-movement (111).... But the key-word in Symons’s master-plan of Symbolism is ‘Mysticism,’ behind which lies the influence of Yeats” (112). AS presented an adequate picture of the lives of the French Symbolists, “a general impression and survey of their work,” but “Yeats is a finer authority” (114). Although he lacks a real standpoint, and moral point of view, “in a generation of impressionistic critics, Symons was the impressionist par excellence” (115).

AS felt that The Ballad of Reading Gaol was not traditional ballad verse, but an “interrupted reverie,” wherein “it is the asides which count, not the story” (56).

Yeats thought of AS “as a writer who has carried further than most ... that revolt against the manifold, the impersonal, the luxuriant, and the eternal’ by which four qualities he refers to the moralising, sermonising verse of the Victorians with its descriptive, idealistic, over-literary bias” (22). “Symons’ poetics bear indeed a striking resemblance to those of D. H. Lawrence” (22). “The poetry of Lionel Johnson ... lacks” AS’s “sophisticated inquiry” (24). Oscar Wilde’s “Harmonies” and “Impressions” “Look towards Imagism, and possibly influenced Arthur Symons” (26). “But no collection of short stories by a ’nineties author deals more authentically with the life of art than” AS’s Spiritual Adventures. “The arch-modernist Ezra Pound held it in the highest esteem.” “Like Pater’s Imaginary Portraits, Spiritual Adventures constitute a set of ‘studies in strange souls.' They are highly evocative accounts of persons unadjusted to reality who, to make life endurable, must interpose their own vision of the world between themselves and existence. In three stories out of the eight, this vision is the vision of art of painting in The Death of Peter Waydelin, of acting in Esther Kahn, of music in Christian Trevalga” (64). “Anything like a critical statement on the nature of modernity in literature is first fully found in Arthur Symons, whose poetical practice exemplifies his theory. It is W. E. Henley whom he selects as illustrating the quality of ‘modernity in verse’” (101). “In part the weakness of the English ’nineties comes from their poets taking Verlaine, not Baudelaire, as their example.” AS’s The Symbolist Movement in Literature “contains no study of Baudelaire, though it goes back to such earlier Romantics as Gerard de Nerval” (106). “No better epitaph on the English ’nineties, in their failure to understand Baudelaire, could be found than Symons’ last book of verse Jezebel Mort, published in 1931” (106).
[No index, but commentary on AS appears on the pages noted. AS figures in all three sections of the book: “Poets of the ’Nineties,” “Stories of the ’Nineties,” and “Critics of the ’Nineties.”]
Paradoxically, the nineties are essentially modern. They introduced us to the urbanity, lightness, irony, and wit that figures so prominently in the poetry of T. S. Eliot. AS’s “poetry, along with that of Laforgue, is behind Eliot’s early compositions” (267). AS helped establish “an aristocratic poetic” which displaced Victorian “insistent moralisms” (268). (Stern)


AS’s Days and Nights (1889) “were lurid enough; but they did not contain a certain dramatic power, a certain determined modernity, as well as examples of that synaesthesia that combining and transferring of sense impressions which marks much symbolist poetry” (96). “Up to 1896, it is the impressionist interest and technique which dominates” AS’s poetry. “Impressionism is an art of appearances, an art of superficies; not an art in depth. The ‘deeper meaning’ which Symbolism seeks was not to be found in Symons’ poetry until he had been deeply hurt by experience” (97). “Along with Mallarmé and the French symbolists, his verse began to show the influence of those writers associated with the ‘Celtic Twilight’” (98–9). AS’s writing “in verse and prose, extends beyond the nineteenth century. It is, however, renewed by few ideas after 1900” (99). [Stanford includes 23 poems by AS and includes a brief biographical and critical introduction, 94–100.]


The essential modernity of the 1890s is neglected by the critics who remember that epoch as a time of decadence, Satanism, or “contrived naughtiness.” AS, the critical spokesman of the decade, was to the heavy, serious prose of the Victorians what Verlaine was to classical French verse: AS replaced the bookish grandiloquence of the Victorian with a simple, urbane style just as Verlaine destroyed the alexandrine and replaced it with his colloquial idiom. AS and his friends from the Rhymers’ Club at their most distinguished achievement are remembered not for the verse that took its style from Baudelaire and Swinburne, but for the verse that struck a light, urbane, witty note in imitation of the spoken word. In the 1890s Yeats was still imitating the Pre-Raphaelites while AS, Dowson, and Johnson created a new intimacy of tone which was later much admired by poets as different as D. H. Lawrence and T. S. Eliot. (Stern)


Despite the fact that Dowson favored “‘chablis and soda,’” AS falsely claimed that Dowson’s “‘favourite form of intoxication’” was hashish simply because it fit his ideal “decadent” image (11). According to AS, Dowson’s translations for Smithers invariably had “‘some traces of his peculiar quality of charm in language’” (13). AS observed that Dowson never exceeded his limits. Lionel Johnson wrote that AS was a prisoner to impressionism, nevertheless, AS’s images were rarely “‘precious’” (21). Both AS and John Davidson came from Methodist homes, and both rejected their religious ancestry. By allowing their life-styles to influence their verse, AS, Ernest Dowson, Lionel Johnson, and John Davidson disprove the argument that all twelve members of the Rhymers’ Club could
competently compose verse. While at Harvard, Eliot remarked that only the nineties poets, especially Davidson, Dowson, and AS, had anything to offer him. Eliot claims to have drawn more from AS's work than Davidson's; content, however, suggests otherwise. In Eliot's estimation, with the exception of AS, only Ernest Dowson, of all English translators, manages to capture the essence of Verlaine in his translations.

AS recalls Beardsley's "insistence on describing himself as 'a man of letters'" and believes that Beardsley desired more to become a great writer than a great artist (44). Unfortunately, AS observes that Beardsley's "plans for writing changed even more quickly than his plans for doing drawings, and with less profitable results in the meantime" (44). AS regarded Beardsley's *The Three Musicians* as poor work, but admits that Beardsley's determination created the poem despite the fact he lacked "a natural aptitude for" writing (45).

"Arthur Symons was, in his day, the most influential, if not the most successful practitioner of Aesthetic poetry, and because he was more analytic than his colleagues he has more to say than they do about the value of the city to poetry" (490). "In the ‘Prologue’ to his first book of poetry, *Days and Nights* (1889), Symons attempted a kind of anti-Tennysonian ‘Palace of Art’ sixty years afterwards" (490). "Symons' imagistic exercises are genuinely innovative (and indeed their effect was not lost on Pound and Eliot), but his achievement as a poet of the city involved a larger and more coherent use of his material. He becomes increasingly able to give the scattered facts of the city a metaphoric significance, and is, in fact, the first English poet who was able to write about London with something like Baudelaire’s mythographic sense, to make the city a convincing milieu of spiritual adventures" (491). In *Silhouettes* (1892), "the city is more than setting or subject; it embodies the emotional state which is the subject of the poem" (492). "In *London Nights*, a book that the poet described as having been received with 'a singular unanimity of abuse'...[.] Symons evokes a landscape which is new to English poetry.... This poetry is close in feeling to the paintings of Sickert and the lithographs of Charles Conder; like them Symons projects a bizarre sense of the color, the harshness, the almost brutal artificiality of London and Paris at the end of the century" (492).

AS and other poets of the '90s attempt with varying success that “realization of the poetry of London” which Chesterton celebrated. The city inspires the verse in both *Silhouettes* and "City Nights" [he means *London Nights*] and sets the stage for the great poetry of the city that was to come. [References to AS are slight and minimize his importance.] (Stern)

Letters surrounding Conrad’s life from figures such as Arnold Bennett, Bertrand Russell, Jean-Aubry, Edward Garnett, Max Beerbohm, and AS have been neglected as vibrant portraits of the writer. AS’s letters to his wife display Conrad as “seen in the privacy of his study with an equal” (38) even though their friendship after AS’s breakdown is characterized by a Conrad “capable of entering into sympathy with him both as suffering human being and as a fellow creative artist” (37).


“As he frequently stayed in France, where he got to know Mallarmé and Ver- laine, who influenced his life remarkably, Symons became the most competent authority in French contemporary literature, and dedicated many articles to decadent and symbolist writers. During a journey in Italy (1908) he suffered a nervous breakdown and became constrained to remain two years in a hospital. During this time he continued to become a prolific writer, although the last of his books lack the originality and incisiveness (or sharpness) that his first works had. Recently Symons has received great attention as a poet and critic” (23). [Notes with brief explications on “Twilight,” “The Loom of Dreams,” “Rest,” “The Crying of Water,” “Satiety,” “On The Beach,” “Memory,” and “A White Night.” Poems in English, biography and explications in Italian.]


AS more than any other writer in England was responsible for the “propagation of French influence in England.” In his Rhymers’ Club days he wrote under the influence of Pater, Verlaine, and Baudelaire. For the *Yellow Book* he celebrated the decadent ideal he had formulated. His own journal, the *Savoy*, gave Decadence a new lease on life in England. Finally, he introduced the Symbolist movement to his countrymen, and later, via his book, to Eliot and Joyce. [Often inaccurate on biographical details. Overestimates Baudelaire’s impact on AS, but offers one of the earlier extended discussions of AS’s writings from 1890–1899.] (Stern)


AS’s descriptions of Sarah Bernhardt at work illuminate the “self-expressive mode” of great actors “whose genius rests in the fact that they ‘play themselves,’” and make use of interstices, or “solo variation” (character traits which are not explicitly stated in the text) (363). [Quotations taken from AS’s *Eleonora Duse.* Passing reference to AS.]


Yeats and Eliot were introduced to the French Symbolists via AS. Yeats (*Letters to The New Island*, 147) criticizes AS’s poetry for its “imaginative dimness and dis- tance” from its subject. (Stern)


“As its title suggests, *Virginia Woolf’s Rediscovered Essays: Sources and Allusions* is intended as a survey of sources for, and literary allusions within, a vital body of literature heretofore unexplored in book form. Many cultured persons, including scholars, are unaware that Virginia Woolf, though known the world over for her exciting lyrical novels and six impressive books of collected essays, wrote as many essays again, which until recently remained buried in periodical files on both sides of the Atlantic. The main role of the present study, as I see it, is to act as an introduction to these rediscovered works” (ix). [Lists sources that have material relating to AS for two of Woolf’s essays: “Mr. Symons’s Essays,” *TLS*, December 21, 1916; “Romance and the ’Nineties,” *Nation and Athenaeum*, 3 July 1926.]


Joyce’s techniques in a *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, *Ulysses*, and *Finnegans Wake*, radical as they seem, translated aesthetic doctrines current at the time into imaginative fiction. This can be clearly seen by examining Joyce’s fiction alongside AS’s *The Symbolist Movement in Literature*. The notion that the artist is impersonal, a God to his creation; that art should imitate reality as perceived by the unconscious; that the impressionistic search can be translated into an epiphany, all touch on matters discussed in AS’s book. (Stern) [A revised version appears as Chapter 13, “The Sources of the Stream,” *The Stream of Consciousness and Beyond in Ulysses*, Erwin R. Steinberg. [Pittsburgh]: U of Pittsburgh P, [1973]. 257, 258, 259, 269.]


“The following bibliography contains all critical studies and the most important reviews about Arthur Symons and his writings which I have been able to locate, except those references which make too slight mention of him or his works to be worthy of inclusion…. On the question of reviews, whether they should be included or left out, I was governed by a simple principle. If the review is either by an important writer, such as Pater, Yeats, Beerbohm, or Le Gallienne, or of the kind that elicited a flurry of critical response, then it is included; if it fell into neither category, then it is not…. The bibliography traces the critical reception of Symons’ writings from 1889 to 1973 and attempts to provide the scholar and literary historian with a record of both Symons’ literary career and the shifting responses of the critics to it” (77).


[Adds two entries to Stern’s 1974 bibliography. It is a subsection of the section entitled “Bibliography, News, and Notes.”]

ism in the 1890s; but these poets, and, more recently, critics, have been reluctant to take note of Symons’s understanding of Symbolism, or to recognize the quasi-Symbolist character of some of his poetry. Further, they have tended to ignore the Victorian tone of his early writings. Consequently, Symons has come to be considered only a purveyor, and not a practitioner, of French Symbolism, and the terms Impressionist and Decadent have seemed to be adequate to describe his criticism and poetry…. This dissertation attempts, accordingly, to free Symons from labels of Impressionist and Decadent, and to view his poetry and criticism more justly. Symons is seen as a transitional figure whose writings look back to Browning and forward to Yeats and Eliot. Chapter I establishes the scope and purpose of the dissertation. Chapter II places Symons in his century. It offers a close critical study of Symons’s early writings and focuses particularly on An Introduction to the Study of Browning…. The chapter concludes by tracing Symons’s growing interest in French literature from its earliest stages in 1885 to his journey to Paris in 1889 when his interest in the French writers finally supplants his preoccupation with the Victorians. Chapter III involves a careful examination of Symons’s poetry and attempts to show that it reflects, not the narrowly defined Decadent qualities so often attributed to it, but a diversity of modes and techniques…. Chapter IV concludes the dissertation with a study of The Symbolist Movement in Literature. It attempts to assess the permanent value of the book as a piece of criticism. It compares Symons’s writings on the French with those of Gosse, Moore, Wilde, Ellis, and Yeats, and concludes that in the 1890s Symons was the best informed and most relevant English critic of Symbolism.] [Annotation edited from Dissertation Abstracts 29 (1969): 2282A–83A.]


AS, “in 1892, … gave himself the pseudonym ‘Silhouette’ and became a reviewer for the Star, writing about the London music halls for that newspaper. The appointment offered him the perfect opportunity to meet and sleep with chorus girls every night, even as he devoted his days to the pursuit of poetry through membership in the Rhymers’ Club. At the same time, he tried his hand as a playwright” (59). His short story “‘Esther Kahn’ … was progressive in its willingness to take seriously a woman’s professional ambitions and desire to turn herself into a great actress (and doubly progressive, because it employed a Jewish heroine). Yet it was also backward-looking in its reaffirmation of the old cliché that the true source of education for a woman artist could only be heterosexual experience and disappointment in love” (59).


“It is Nelson’s contention, throughout Publisher to the Decadents, that Smithers’s firm bravely and self-consciously made itself the successor to John Lane’s,” for example, by “establishing a new magazine to rival the Yellow Book, the Savoy” (416). Smithers’s “beautiful formats for his publications regardless of their questionable content, as well as his adherence to the 1890s philosophy of limited editions, … made his firm the natural home for works by Beardsley, Symons, Dowson, and, after his release from prison in 1897, Wilde” (417). Nelson “makes
An Annotated Bibliography

stext::a perfect case not only for looking at the publications of that often-overlooked period, but also for recognizing at last the contributions of Leonard Smithers—the man, according to Arthur Symons, with the ‘diabolical monocle’ … and the undeservedly diabolical reputation” (419).

   [This is a “Catalogue of the exhibition, *England in the 1890s: Literary Publishing at the Bodley Head*, held 15 December 1989–March 1990 in the Gunlocke Room, Special Collections Division, Georgetown University Library.” It contained autographed letters of AS and a copy of his *Silhouettes* (1892) with commentary that “This volume demonstrated Symons’s love of variety and of unusual experiences in its poems about the differing faces of cityscapes and nightscapes, as well as in lyrics such as ‘The Absinthe Drinker,’ a hymn to the drug-induced ‘dance of mere forgetfulness’” (36–37).]

   In *A Study of Thomas Hardy*, AS “writes well about Hardy’s immense capacity for visualization.” (Stern)

   AS, “though born in the nineteenth century, is scarcely a Victorian poet…. [He is] a leading light in the Decadent movement, he is also well known as a dramatist and critic” (285).

   Dorothy Pound in 1966 recalled Pound’s first meeting with AS. It was at a tea at the Shakespeare house to which AS and Alice Tobin came. (Stern)

   “Living and working in the increasingly tough world of journalism Symons turned to Pater’s aesthetic view of art as a kind of spiritual salvation” (668). AS enjoyed sensual pleasures, the dance halls; however, AS’s letters reveal more about the 1890s than they do about him.

   “Beckson demonstrates very clearly that Symons was unstable (if not ‘mad’) long before 1908 and that his writing had a powerfully febrile edge virtually from the start” (451), and yet leaves open further study on AS’s travel writing, journalism, and his “catalytic function in the history of modernism” and *vers libre* (451).

   AS expected his *Romantic Movement in English Poetry* to be his “magnum opus and at least equivalent to his *Symbolist Movement in Literature*” (133); however,
the work “has never been influential, nor even widely read” (133). While AS’s work shares many similarities of ideas with earlier treatments on Romanticism—namely, those of Arnold and Pater—AS sees Romanticism as something other than a school, other than a “movement” composed of players who share a common purpose. “The individualism of Romantic writers was linked to their awareness that they were living through a revolutionary epoch, and this later produced in Symons a criticism that searched for essential identity at the same time as it surveyed the Zeitgeist” (144).


“Fin-de-siècle myths can be particularly dangerous (both inhibiting and compelling), because they feed on data in order to confirm fears” (1). When after an especially bad review, AS teamed up with Aubrey Beardsley and Leonard Smithers to create the Savoy to take the place of the Yellow Book, he declared the publication would have no critical agenda, but rather would consider art-for-art’s-sake. “Here, surely, is the supermarket approach to literature…. The ‘Editorial Note’ is also a move away from the authentic mood of fin de siècle because this kind of entrepreneurial variety is a retreat from the multiple or provisional personality…. The ‘Editorial Note’ to The Savoy stands as a memorial to [Symons’s] attempt to open up the boundaries of literature as if there were no assumptions about the subjectivity of the reader built into the very concept of ‘literature’ itself” (11).


Once AS’s rather hypothetical “definition of the Decadent Ideal” (151) assumed a public presence, it became “unteachable” (152). Finding his “mirror” in the paradox-fraught female dancer, the Decadent became a connoisseur of the “debased” dancer and the theatre (153). Particularly, the Decadent hoped the provoking notion of the “anti-star,” which Eleonora Duse strikingly embodied, would resolve the “Decadent’s public dilemma” (154). Indeed, Duse captured the interest of AS and like Pater’s description of the Mona Lisa, AS imagines Duse as more of a “suggestion and renunciation rather than a statement,” “both process and result,” as well as a combination of both “the individual and the universal” (155–56). While Duse’s seemingly intractable paradoxes intrigued AS, later he talked less favorably of her. [Also published New York: Holmes & Meier, 1980.]


*The Memoirs of Arthur Symons: Life and Art in the 1890s* edited by Beckson “although hardly … a coherent book,” is “useful for its reprinting of some obscure pieces” and “unpublished fragments” of AS’s memoirs (335). These memoirs reveal AS’s largely failed attempts to recover after his 1908 breakdown.


“In this chapter [“Romantic Reincarnations”] I set out to define the distinctiveness of the Wildean reconstruction of the Romantic hero by drawing comparisons with the very different perspective on Romanticism achieved by Wilde’s near
An Annotated Bibliography

contemporary Arthur Symons” (89). “Read in the light of Wilde’s quite different aesthetic (and of the critical predecessors both men shared: Swinburne, Arnold, Pater) [AS’s] The Romantic Movement in English Poetry can be seen as a revealing symptom of a bias towards metaphysical abstraction that was to last long into the twentieth century” (89). “For Symons, writing at the turn of the century, Romanticism presented itself, in retrospect, as the source of a continuing epic between artistic visions and historical phases” (89–90). “In other respects, though, Symons’s survey marks a characteristic shift away from both Arnoldian moral absolutes and Paterian materialist convictions towards the realm of the spiritual” (91). “For those such as Arthur Symons who, unlike Wilde, continued writing into the twentieth century, a more spiritually based doctrine of ‘individualism would eventually prepare the way for a more dangerous Nietzscheanism” (107).


“The importance of the 1889 production of A Doll’s House, performed in front of an audience which Arthur Symons described as a ‘family party,’ can hardly be overstated” (11). “George Moore, in company with Arthur Symons, visited Paris to see Ghosts at the Theatre Libre. On their return both men wrote articles about the performance, and both ended with a cri de coeur for the play to be produced in England” (135). AS “was to say of Villiers de l’Isle-Adam’s Axël that it was “the drama of the soul, and at the same time … the most pictorial of dramas” (175). “W. B. Yeats and Arthur Symons saw Ubu together in Paris” (177). “Symons, eager to account for the amazing experience in terms of his all-embracing symbolist programme, ventured that the means developed by Maeterlinck for the evocation of sublime states had, in Jarry’s mischievous hands, become inverted so that it was a way of releasing terror, bestiality and (the word seems proleptic) cruelty” (178).


“Authentic aestheticism reproduces the explorations of the individual mind with all its arrogant solipsisms and flashes of perception…. The final exemplar of aestheticism, Arthur Symons, spent a lifetime wondering at Baudelaire’s capacity ‘to be such a moralist with so keen a sense of the ecstasy of evil’” (332). The editors have covered AS well: from his contribution to modern poetics via The Symbolist Movement in Literature, to the journalistic deadlines that caused so much of his writing to be uneven, over-excited, and his arguments weak.


[Contains references to several of AS’s publications in late-nineteenth- and early-twentieth century magazines, including brief evaluative comments such as “The second most outstanding prose genre in the Savoy is literary criticism” (386), including AS’s “essays in criticism, the best of which is ‘Walter Pater: Some
Characteristics’ (no. 8:33–41), a well-informed, sensitive, disinterested, comprehensive interpretation of Pater unsurpassed even today” (386).


[Brief references to AS’s contributions to British literary magazines in the twentieth century. AS is referred to as an “established author … associated with the nineties” (92–93).]


AS possessed natural literary ability, talent for friendship, and a desire for beauty and new sensations. He was influenced by his trips to Paris, by the dance halls and the girls who worked in them; his *Symbolist Movement in Literature* introduced English writers (among them T. S. Eliot) to the French Symbolists. AS traveled in Europe, and developed an appreciation for Italian art and literature. However, during a trip to Italy, AS suffered a mental breakdown in 1908, and never fully regained his full mental acuity (he went on writing, but now drew upon material he had previously published). “Symons will be remembered as a refined connoisseur of English literature, as a pillar of the artistic and literary Entente Cordiale of the 1890s, as an enthusiast for great acting and music, and as a perceptive explorer of French Symbolism and the Decadent movement” (296).


“Paradoxically, although Whistler never tried to convey a specific message in his Nocturnes and was intent only on exposing the artistic qualities inherent in night-fall, contemporary men of letters responded to his pictures with considerable sympathy.” AS was “among the writers who found inspiration in the painter’s novel subject-matter.” Some of “the purely descriptive character” of AS’s poetry “recalls Whistler’s painting” (69). “Whistler maintained that an artist transcended his period. However, in some respect, his work partly reflects the cosmopolitan decadent trend of the 1880s and 1890s. AS described literature of the end of the century as having ‘a spiritual and moral perversity.’ The last element is not really discernible in Whistler’s art” (138).


Venice in the 1880s “had become a magnet for those bewitched by an aesthetic way of life” (367). AS gave copies of *London Nights* and *Cities* to Horatio Brown, a noted writer about Venice. AS’s inscription in *Cities* reads “To Horatio F. Brown who helped me to know Venice, Arthur Symons, Venice: October 10, 1903” (372).


“Beardsley stands as the central figure in this study. In his drawings and literary work, and in his friendships and collaborations with other Wagnerians such as Shaw, Wilde, Arthur Symons, and George Moore, he was at the forefront of British artistic and literary Wagnerism in the decade” (7). AS and others helped doc-
ument and explore “the exceptional significance of Wagner within their work” in the 1890s. Along with George Moore, AS wrote about Wagner and was “fascinated, even enthralled” by him (12). AS attributed his 1908 mental collapse “partly to the effects of (Wagner’s) music” (78). Jews were often associated with “the intuitive, instinctual, and ‘feminine’ aspects of aesthetic creativity, performance, and consumption. Similarly, ‘Esther Kahn’ (1902), Symons’s Bildungsroman of a young Jewish actress inspired by a visit to a Yiddish theatre in 1890, suggests the conjunction of racial and sexual discourses in perceptions and representations of aesthetic sensibility” (112). AS, “and perhaps Beardsley too, saw Wagner’s dramas, and the contemporary style of staging at Bayreuth, as liberating developments in dramatic practice, which accorded with their interest in other forms of ‘poetic drama’” (191). AS’s “evaluation of Wagner was characteristic of the double focus of Edwardian Wagnerism: on the one hand, Wagner’s art was ‘historicized,’ characterized as distantly removed from the historical context and aesthetic and ideological concerns of the ‘modern’ commentator, an art appreciated through a process of recovery and recollection; yet Symons also termed Wagner an ‘artist of our time,’ affirming his affinities with Edwardian culture” (193). “The relationship of Symons and Joyce itself suggests the continuities, as well as the disjunction, of fin-de-siècle and Edwardian Wagnerism” (194).


The book is at first disappointing; the title is misleading: readers expect AS to interpret (what has been generally understood to be) the Romantic epoch, but then AS “implies, or seems to imply that no such movement—the conscious effort of many minds to develop in art some great aspect of man’s vision of things—ever existed or possibly can exist” (376). AS is proud that he has disregarded scholarship, and not consulted earlier literary histories. “Mr. Symons’s book is, then, an independent study of individual poets, even the insignificant and forgotten, in the Romantic period, not of the Romantic Movement, not of the relation of these poets to a common dominant vision they sought to realize” (377). And yet, “there is not anywhere in the covers of a single volume of English criticism so much readable, illuminating comment, as here, on the greatest period of English poetry” (377).


Literary fashion towards the end of the nineteenth century was to blur the borders between traditional forms of critical works and fiction. Symons, Huysmans and Moore were authors of note who did just that, they explored a narration combining journalistic-like critique and creativity found in novels. AS especially explored the concept between official critique and official fiction, seen in “The Death of Peter Waydelin,” found in Spiritual Adventures. He recounts a meeting between an art critic and an artist, thus exploring the mode of visual art and offering his own opinion on this modern esthetic. The story itself is about a painter, and AS uses this innovative narrative form to pose the problem of the relationship between literature and visual arts, through a type of dialogue between the artist and the writer. The narrator focuses his regard on the details of the real people who have become subjects of paintings. He realizes that the
real-life effect of a narrator is completely different from the artistic effect. Thus, AS juxtaposes the novelist perspective alongside the role of the critic. He accomplishes this through realizing the visual and fictional form, arguing that a good critic is also a good artist, and he is perhaps the most fundamental figure in literature to develop this idea. [In French.]


Cities became a critical subject for symbolic writers, where the goal was to capture the personality of a city in a similar fashion to describing the personality of a person. AS’s Cities of Italy (1907) is a bit of a paradox. It's not exactly a fictional novel, nor is it completely a travelogue. He followed elements used by Zola, while at the same time adding his own biographical take, in the sense that he added his own artistic observations of a monument. The goal is to transform a place into a symbolic and poetic reference. AS attempts to give the city a soul. Parisian Nights is about AS’s evaluation of a Parisian quarter, its favorite places. These places are preferred not only by artists, but by artistic characters, like the women that the visual artist Lautrec took on as subjects for his paintings. AS plays with the narration, giving a sense of fragmentation and speed. This gives an immediate visual effect. He metaphorically puts static images into movement, which contradicts itself but AS accepts this as his task to describe the Parisian nights in a personal and literary memory. AS’s collections are part autobiographical essay, part critique of art. He creates a series of essays which give the impression of fragmentation, underachievement, and obliqueness. His narrative approach is always indirect. His works are a recount of the history of a place, but aimed only for those who are interested by it. It is a unique artistic vision shared by Balzac, Flaubert, Cladel and many others. [In French.]


“If he [AS] is remembered at all today it is as a figure of the Nineties, and he is indeed the super-typical literary man of the decade.” [Assumes AS is neither a great poet nor a great critic, but he does not deserve the oblivion into which he has fallen. Sketches the outlines of AS’s career from his childhood to death.] (Stern)


Both William Wordsworth and AS incorporate within their poetry the romantic belief that a poem exists as a carefully crafted yet spontaneous expression of self-reflection and revelation. [In Japanese.]

“Victor Hugo had the greatest impact of any French Romantic writer [on Japan]. Rousseau should probably be considered as next in importance.… Nerval was known, but only indirectly. Critical works by Arthur Symons, Gustave Kahn, and George Saintsbury were the sources for a good deal of what was known about French Romanticism in Japan” (468). *The Symbolist Movement in Literature* influenced Iwano Homei, and “Iwano’s indebtedness to Symons in introducing Nerval is noteworthy” (466). “In October 1913 Iwano published his translation of Symons’s *The Symbolist Movement in Literature*” (467). Kurihara Kojo and critic and professor Kuriyagawa Hakuson were also indebted to AS and *The Symbolist Movement in Literature*, Kojo using the sixth chapter as his source for “Stéphane Mallarmé Ron” published in *Shincho* in 1910.


[From chapter five, “The Nineteenth Century,” in a section entitled “The Decadent Illusion”] More sees that “the aestheticism … of Pater and Wilde became the dominant theme in … ‘the spasmodic irruption of decadent wit into English art and literature’” in the ’nineties (165). “More traces the origins of the decadent movement to … German romanticism…. And he sees a more immediate foreign source in French and Russian and Scandinavian writers” (166). In an essay about AS, More contrasted the decadent illusion or the false illusion with the true illusion which is “the poet’s power to lend reality to his imagined world of ideas” (167), and concludes that AS’s poetry—which More calls “the first full and sincere expression of decadence in English” (168)—proceeds from the true illusion to the false illusion, culminating in a “false awakening” (168).


“I wonder who are your gods? One has too many to confess.—I find my sanity in Plato, Dante, Spinoza, Pater, Symons, Longinus—(This is not intended for a chronicle)” (118).


The American reviews of French symbolism and the Symbolists seem insignificant when compared to those of the English critics. AS, who began writing on the French Decadents in 1891, culminated his work in the most important piece of criticism of the period, *The Symbolist Movement in Literature*. [In French.] (Stern)


“Mr. Adlard has not managed to turn up much new about this period, but he has done his work on the published sources thoroughly, and gives us a previously unpublished essay by Arthur Symons (a characteristically incoherent piece from
the years after his mental breakdown) for good measure.” [Originally appeared in TLS as an unsigned review; TLS Online now adds the contributor’s name.]


Pound, Eliot, and the New Critics owe a considerable debt to the “Aesthetic” critics, AS, Moore, and Swinburne, who cultivated a taste for French Symbolism and its practices in England and imitated the French models in their own verse and criticism. Comparing AS, Moore, and Swinburne to Gosse and Arnold, the three aesthetic critics deserve a far better reputation than they have enjoyed. On matters of French verse forms and symbols these critics are superior to either Gosse or Arnold. “The virtú of the renaissance of the nineties was impersonated in no single man more strikingly” than in AS. “He was poet, critic of all the arts, theorist of poetry and of criticism; he shared the decadent taste for the artificial and for man’s creation, the modern city…. In no way was he more typical of the nineties than in his enthusiasm for French literature.” He synthesized the seemingly diverse practices of French contemporary poets in the term Symbolism. Nerval, Gautier, Borel, Baudelaire, Verlaine, and Mallarmé are celebrated by AS for the precision of their verse, for their preoccupation with the invisible world, and for their concern for the evocative quality of language. AS’s poetry and his translations of French verse both reflect his debt to the Symbolists. His treatment of French writers is uneven in *The Symbolist Movement in Literature*. His essay on Laforgue is a “model of impressionistic criticism.” On the theory of Symbolism, Yeats is better than AS, but on matters of technique AS is superior to Yeats, Gosse, or Moore. [This study of AS is one of the earlier pieces of responsible analytic criticism of his relationship to the French Symbolists. Temple’s insights and judgments of his critical practices are generally sound although she does not fully dispel the pejorative connotations of the terms “impressionism” and “aestheticism” as she hopes to do. Lacking access to the bulk of unpublished AS material, she underestimates his interest in Rimbaud, but she is right in saying that AS is less interested in the man’s poetic practices than in his life. She deliberately excludes Pater from her study and in so doing she neglects one of the major influences on AS’s poetry and criticism.] (Stern)


“Eliot as a Symbolist can best be approached through his French sources” (295), especially Laforgue, and it was *The Symbolist Movement in Literature* that pointed the way for Eliot to the French Symbolists.


The criticism of Pater, Moore, and AS paved the way for the New Critics and gave distinction to the nineties as a period of rich literary criticism. (Stern)


John Gray first met André Raffalovich at the offices of AS (28), an ironic meeting because AS did not like Gray (28n47). Gray showed anxiety for AS’s men-
tal illness, and tried to arrange treatment (47). Gray, like AS, imitated Verlaine (55). Neither AS nor Gray could translate Baudelaire though Gray does better at it (56). AS was a sensitive translator of French (58).


The labels used to describe the literature and literary movements of the late Victorian period have not been used correctly. “Most of these labels have attached to them connotations which are no better than vulgar errors” (201). Aesthetics was the caricatural term of the 1880s, and was followed by the more sinister term, “decadence.” “Decadence is, even out of context, a loaded word; few there are who react neutrally to it” (214). The misconception of “decadence” changed the meaning of “fin de siècle”—“which earlier had occasionally connoted progress” (214)—to mean a “falling off, marked by a languid concern for mere polish and a freakish interest in the unusual” (214). Gautier, Baudelaire, and AS have sought to define “decadence” in literature.


Near the end of the 19th century, the literary world was so different from Jane Austen’s earlier “secure world view” that “new historical divisions” (273) in literary studies which highlight the often neglected 1890s would be justified. Woodstock Books’s publication of twenty-seven volumes and twenty-two poets of this period should help turn attention to the neglected decade. Included in the series will be authors such as John Davidson, Michael Field, Ernest Dowson, and AS. The AS volume features his 1896 Silhouettes and 1897 London Nights, as well as AS’s prefaces. These prefaces place AS, like Davidson, as a poet of the city, and unlike Davidson, “as a poet of city life” (275). However, AS found inspiration in “shadier” spheres (275).


AS “unabashedly expressed his boredom with the countryside and proclaimed that the best environment was the city” (147–48). AS shows his “love for the artificial aspects of the city and his determined individualistic stance to write in his own style” (153). Oscar Wilde and AS “were both influenced by Baudelaire’s revolutionary conceptions of an urban poetry of beauty” (169). AS was not “indifferent to the disturbing social problems of London. Like most lyric poets, Symons rarely provides the full details of a prostitute’s or a derelict’s life; however, his volumes reflect his sympathetic willingness to make them subjects of poetry on his own terms” (174). AS’s poem “Nocturne” “underscores the transient security of the city. All the qualities that Blake hoped would flourish in the city: love, magic, mystery, warmth, freedom are present in Symons’s poem, but only fleetingly. Here an insulated society of two is presented and the bond is temporary at best.” “Critics responded censoriously to London Nights not because of Symons’s presentation of urban material but because of his nonchalant attitude toward the seamiest sides of the urban experience” (179). “Although Symons’s artistic declaration of the individual independence of the artist is adamant in the
London Nights preface, it is only in reading Symons’s prose that one detects any hints that his social experience of London is actually comprehensive and disturbing” (199).


    Review of Knave of Hearts. The wide variety of poems allows us to see how AS has advanced from his “cloistered aestheticism” to a sensitive, reflective mood which is appreciative of nature’s simplicity. (Stern)


    [Unpublished ms. printed here for the first time. Speaks charitably of AS’s sympathetic memoir of Dowson.] (Stern) [Reprinted Westport, CT: Greenwood, 1975.]


    Studies in Prose and Verse is a valuable reference book for the literary scholar, but of little interest to the more general reader. The sketches are incomplete, impressionistic, and too prone to emphasize the nerves of the artists to the neglect of their intellect. (Stern)


    “One finds Dowson sandwiched, paper-thin, between Symons and Yeats on one page; as part of the generation of Lionel Johnson and Ernest Dowson on another” (498). “I want to avoid reference to a period of Modernism, with a clear before and after, given that the possibility of saying when and to whom the necessary break of awakening would have happened is what is in question. It is entirely to the point that the first critical account I will look at is the work of a ‘forerunner’ (Arthur Symons); that is to say, one who is seen, paradoxically, as both running before and falling behind the current of history” (499). “In 1899, Arthur Symons’s The Symbolist Movement in English Literature already seems to herald something like Modernism, replacing lifestyle Decadence with the Symbolism of the word. As usual, it is a matter of waking up” (499). According to AS, “Decadence was an interlude; it ‘diverted the attention of the critics while something more serious was in preparation.’ The critique of this diversion continues in Symons’s posthumous ‘Memoir’ of Dowson, which can be read as a pendant to the Symbolist Movement. Indeed, Dowson is something of a sacrificial victim on the altar of Symons’s new dawn. He appears as a walking refutation of the con-
nection between art and extreme living. Symons’s argument, however, wavers between denying any relevance to the life of the artist, and making it precisely the basis of his diagnosis of Dowson’s failure” (500).


According to Jessie Conrad, AS’s poetry was virtually the only verse that Conrad read (147). Comparison can be made between the girl in AS’s poem “At Fontainebleau” and Taminah in Conrad’s novel Almayer’s Folly (148).


AS “must always be at the centre of a discussion of Decadence” (16). Although in the Savoy AS disassociated himself from movements, “If one does link the Savoy with any movement, it is more likely to be Symbolism than Decadence; indeed this was the direction in which Symons was moving” (17). Johnson’s comment on Symbolism “is as Paterian as it is French, and looks forward to Symons and Eliot” (20). AS wrote “The Decadent Movement in Literature” as a reply to Le Gallienne, “and one wonders with what maliciousness Symons chose ... to represent Decadence in England by the work of Pater and W. E. Henley” (24). “So closely was Symons involved in the question of decadence in the minds of the critics of the nineties that, even when Symons had abandoned the term, W. B. Yeats had to defend him against it” (25). “What becomes clear from even a brief survey of the decade on its Decadence is the centrality of the notion of what I would like to call the Decadent dilemma. The Decadent is a man caught between two opposite and apparently incompatible pulls: on the one hand he is drawn by the world, its necessities, and the attractive impressions he receives from it, while on the other hand he yearns towards the eternal[,] the ideal, and the unworldly” (26). “Symons saw this polarity when he wrote that ‘Impressionism and Symbolism convey some notion of that new kind of literature which is perhaps more broadly characterized by the word Decadence’; and the incompatibility of the two poles gives rise to the characteristic Decadent notes of disillusion, frustration and lassitude at the same time as the equally characteristic self-mockery” (26). AS continued to move “away from Decadence to Symbolism, from the impressionistic world of the theatre to the symbolist landscape of the mind” (29). [Also published New York: Holmes & Meier, 1980.]

1117. Thornton, R. K. R. The Decadent Dilemma. London: Edward Arnold, 1983. For AS, “Symbolism grew out of Decadence.... Decadence was ‘half a mock-interlude’ taking place while Symbolism was growing ready” (25). [From chapter 6 “Arthur Symons” (134–64) where AS’s individual poems are considered]: “The movement from impressionism to symbolism is not as far as it might seem. The moment, the impression, the sensation, realized distinctly at its most intense, might well be the occasion when one could transcend the real” (148).