Arthur Symons, Critic Among Critic

Symons, Arthur

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[The contents are divided into the following sections each containing at least one poem by AS, with notes on the poems: “All the Arts,” “London! London! Our Delight,” “London Types,” “The Hound of Heaven,” “Love and Death,” “Fire from France,” “Poems and Ballads,” and “The Roses Fall.”] “The place of the ’nineties in literary history, where it is sometimes regarded as a dead end, is somewhat clarified if one sees the close relationship of Decadence to Symbolism, which had a much wider influence. Symons’s *The Symbolist Movement in Literature* (1899), which led Eliot to discover Laforgue and the other French Symbolists, is a later form of a book announced earlier as *The Decadent Movement in Literature*” (20). AS “created myths out of the raw material of his friends’ lives, most obviously in his account of Dowson” (24). Later writers “have repeatedly tried to rectify the errors” (25). In spite of the moralizing after Wilde’s trial, AS “stuck to his artistic principles and summarized the position in the preface to the second edition of his *Silhouettes* (1896)” (26). AS “is Paterian at the end of the Introduction to the second edition of *London Nights* (1897)” (28). He “educated himself by writing and lived by his pen” (257).


The 1970 first edition of this anthology “attempted to rescue the 1890s from the simplistic picture of a decade dominated by Decadence or even divided between Decadence and Anti-decadence. We now see ‘how partial the picture was.’… But the main area which was in need of revision was that of women’s writing … [which] was ignored or undervalued” (xxiii). “The poetry of the 1890s as it had been portrayed in the first edition was coloured by decline and a sense of foreboding at the end of the century; but many women writers reject this preoccupation and look forward to a new century with hope bolstered by a confidence in science and the new theories of evolution. While the anthology begins by stressing the 1890s celebration of artifice, it now ends with a glimpse of the new hope founded on science and nature” (xxiv). [The poems of AS from the 1970 edition are retained in this revision, but two new sections are added: “The Making of the New Woman” and “She Is an Artist, Too.”]


Early AS poetry searches for the bizarre effect; about 1906 he begins to look more towards nature in his verse; finally, in *Tristan and Iseult* he writes like a Symbolist and practices poetic drama. AS is one of the few writers of his time and that can produce a beautiful and satisfying work of art in this genre. [Overgenerous in its assessment of AS’s success with the verse drama.] (Stern)


AS “came from a background very similar to Gosse’s.” Therefore, “It was not surprising that he was particularly welcome at Delamere Terrace and that Gosse was trying to use his influence to get Heinemann to publish AS’s poetry” (327). Gosse wrote about French Symbolism before AS’s “initial study of the new
movement” (370). Gosse “was instrumental in raising financial assistance for” AS after his breakdown in 1908.


Verse of AS owes as much to Pater as to Baudelaire; his criticism is impressionistic. For a period AS flaunted his “decadence” and wrote hothouse verses; later, he fell under the spell of Symbolism and produced his masterpiece, The Symbolist Movement in Literature. He was a translator of Mallarmé’s and Verlaine’s verse. [Good sketch of AS’s contribution to literary history from 1885–1947.] (Stern) [Later edition, Forces in Modern British Literature, 1885–1956, published New York: Vintage Books, 1956.]


AS was right to consider Yeats the chief representative of Symbolism in England, but his peculiar rightness came in distinguishing European Symbolism from French and placing Yeats within the former group. More recent critics have been too quick to credit Yeats with a knowledge of French that he lacked. What knowledge he did have came by way of AS’s translations. Actually, his Symbolism predated his acquaintance with the European movement and properly grew out of his debt to Blake, Shelley, Rossetti, and the occult writers. [Sound, convincing piece of criticism.] (Stern)


AS and Moore dramatized Harris’s A Modern Idyll. A comparison of AS’s article on Dowson with Harris’s suggests that Harris probably plagiarized from AS’s; nonetheless, Harris’s piece is still “incomparably superior.” [Prejudiced account.] (Stern)


“From 1909 Agnes Tobin devoted much of her genius for friendship to Arthur Symons. Augustus John wrote: ‘Although I cannot remember dates I know it was sometime before the last war (circa 1909) that I met Miss Tobin. At that time she was befriending the well-known poet and critic Arthur Symons who had recently had a terrible mental break-down in Italy. The specialists whom he had consulted gave him about a couple of years to live and I think it highly likely that Symons owes it to the kindness and devotion of Miss Tobin that he proved them wrong and is still alive’” (xii). [From the introductory “Biographical Sketch” by Francis Meynell.] On June 16, 1900, George Bernard Shaw replied to Agnes Tobin who had written Shaw about AS’s breakdown, to say “But a sane man whose mind
has become affected by illness just as his digestion might be, may be as mad as a hatter whilst he is ill without being a real lunatic. If he gets well bodily he will get well mentally. There is not the slightest sign of lunacy about A. S.” (78).


“Discusses various themes and elements portrayed in Arnaud Desplechin’s film ‘Esther Kahn,’ an adaptation of a novella [short story] by Arthur Symons. Looks at the commonalities and differences between the film and Symons’ original work. Talks about the various sequences throughout the film, focusing on the development of the main character Esther.” [In French. Abstract from International Index to Performing Arts. See comments under Desplechin, Arnaud.]


This biography “is fuller and more accurate than Roger Lhombreaud’s 1963 biography,” and “yet one still feels the absence of Arthur Symons, and that one encounters the materials for a life, rather than the life itself” (238). The reasons: the style is academic, with too many asides. The biography is lacking in its account of money (amount and problems) in the marriage of AS and Rhoda Symons—“for whom [Beckson] is an apologist” (239).


This volume contains many (perhaps too many) letters from AS’s post-mental breakdown (1908) period. Some business letters from his time as editor of the Savoy should have been included. The picture that emerges from the letters is that “Symons had a wonderful time up to his marriage” (429).


Under Pater and the French Symbolists, Wilde, Yeats, Sharp, and AS turned to an impersonal, analytic impressionism. Henley, Davidson, Binyon, and AS each wrote of the city impressionistically in their own manner. Davidson wrote in the English tradition exclusively; AS’s models were Parisian. AS’s impressionism in literature is as thoroughgoing as Sickert’s in art. Davidson’s verse on the music-halls is full of enthusiasm; AS’s is characterized by art and subtlety. (Stern)


“It has been observed more than once that the ‘typist’ section of The Waste Land has some echoes of the poem ‘White Heliotrope’ (London Nights, 1897) by the fin de siècle poet and critic Arthur Symons…. [However,] ‘White Heliotrope’ is much less poetically polished than the ‘typist home at teatime’ section of The Waste Land” (19).

“To Pound, Symons was a personal ‘god’” (41). [Passing reference to AS, 40–41.]

Kuriyagawa Hakuson first introduced Chinese readers to AS and The Symbolist Movement in Literature (which was later translated by Hasegawa Tenkei). [In English. Passing reference to AS.]

AS has followed the same arrangement in this second edition of The Symbolist Movement in Literature. “Very little is done” (outside of the introduction) to explain the Symbolist movement, or how the authors treated in the work relate to the Symbolist movement (503). Other portions contain excellent criticism, but there is no indication of a connection with the Symbolist movement.

Because of AS’s perceptive and sympathetic study of Beardsley, the duty is now to try to understand, and go beyond “the first repulsive impression of the bulk of Aubrey Beardsley’s work” (390). Beardsley was young, pagan, but—according to AS—probably would have “gone altogether to the good” (391). Anyone reading AS’s description of Beardsley’s drawings “would be justified in inferring that the dead artist did not draw very nice things,” and “one might even argue from Mr. Symons’s pleasure in his own descriptions that he himself is somewhat youthful” (392). Contrary to AS’s conclusion, Beardsley was not mature enough, not experienced enough to raise evil to the level of aestheticism, rather (than representing evil) “the general impression given by most of the subjects of the drawings is truly one of much vulgarity” (392). [Irritating review of AS’s Aubrey Beardsley. Critical that AS writes so insistently of the evil and corruption in Beardsley’s art as merely coarse and vulgar. He faults AS for not placing Beardsley in perspective, but does little better himself.] (Stern)

More than Byron’s, Keats’s imagery moves from images of touch to images of sound. AS is another poet whose “semantic regularity” follows this pattern of moving from lower to higher levels of sensation where images of touch transform into synthethetic images of sound. William Morris, Wilde, and Dowson are also among the group of poets who practice this synesthesia (813).

[Reliable account of Verlaine’s acquaintance with AS and of his lecture tour in England. Analyzes AS’s writings on Verlaine.] [In French.] (Stern)


AS provided “an interesting critical introduction” to a translation of Mérimée’s short stories. In the introduction, AS describes Mérimée as having the temperament “of the scholar, not of the artist.” AS writes that Mérimée saw art as a scholarly endeavor and he repeatedly forced himself to try new techniques “for the sake of proving to himself that he could do them.” According to AS, Mérimée experimented with short plays, ballads, historical novels and finally, the short story. Of Mérimée’s short story AS writes that he has “a mastery over effect.” Furthermore, AS writes that Maupassant followed Mérimée’s style, believing he was following Flaubert.


Frank Harris possessed the one capital attribute of a born editor—the ability and power of choosing men. AS joined his brilliant literary staff to write on “the younger men and movements in literature” for the *Saturday Review*. [Describes Harris’s editorship of the *Saturday Review* and AS’s role as contributor.] (Stern)


“It may be said at once that the personality of the ‘imaginary hero’ is very much more tolerable than that of those heroes whom Mr. Symons formerly had the temerity to introduce to the public. ‘Amoris Victima,’ with all his faults, seems to have been capable of experiencing love—or at least a part of love—and of being made exceedingly uncomfortable by it. The depth and permanence of his discomfort are indeed such as to make it almost respectable.... Mr. Symons’s choice of subjects for his art has ever been a source of regret to all who perceived how delicately beautiful that art could be .... In ‘Amoris Victima’ Mr. Symons records impressions that are worth recording, and he sets them before us with that fineness and delicacy of which he is a master. Certain subtle shades of emotion and sentiment, certain elusive qualities of atmosphere and landscape ... could not have been more fitly and faithfully presented by any other living poet” (447). “Mr. Symons’s poems will, we fear, always lack the breadth of treatment and the variety of theme which distinguish the work of the great poet” (448).


AS’s “translation is admirable—nay, beautiful” (466). [Except for this statement, the review focuses on the play, not the translation. See Item 1112.]


“Arthur Symons’ essay on the art of Aubrey Beardsley is worth reprinting ... [and] this fine appreciation of his friend is the more significant because it serves to show how far from Beardsley’s imperious art are the toadstool productions of his ubiquitous imitators” (436). “But however good the intention of such vol-
umes as [this, it is] too apt to fall into the banal, to become [a] cheap [Chautauqua] where the earnest uniformed grow heady on red ink” (436).


Welby’s treatment of AS “as one of the few honest analysts of that “modern love” which is at least as old as Catullus is admirable.” AS’s “critical writings are his greatest accomplishment.” Welby’s work shows “a critical insight and a grace of style for which he is perhaps a little in Mr. Symons’s own debt.” Welby is a “purist” who “accepts” AS as a literary critic “without demur,” but in treating him “as a critic of the other arts,” Welby “fears that some personal element, some too active alloy of the creative imagination, may have crept in.”


Princeton recently acquired “a significant section” of AS’s personal papers. [Best collection in the country.] (Stern)


[Includes a brief biographical entry on AS and lists a few general biographical, critical sources.]


[Includes sections on personal information, career, writings, biographical sketch (“Sidelights”), and biographical and critical sources.]


AS, “the well-known English poet, is credited with having added ‘an entirely new note to his native literature’; but, if we may judge by the verdict of an American critic, that note is morbid and abnormal. Mr. Paul Elmer More, the writer who takes this view, finds ‘extraordinary psychological interest’ in Symons’s poetry, but maintains that it simply reproduces in English ‘the peculiar modes of thought and emotion which we attribute to the French decadence.’” “Mr. More believes that he is able to trace through the various volumes of verse published by Arthur Symons during the past thirteen years ‘the progress of his poetic mood from the first illusion to its consummation in a false disillusion.’” [A digest of an article by Paul Elmer More in The Independent, April, 1902.]

[Gives a biographical and critical overview of AS and his works, and includes a brief bibliography of his primary works. Reprints 22 articles or reviews of secondary criticism on AS ranging from 1887–1982 with a short descriptive note preceding each item. Also includes an “Additional Bibliography” of other critical studies of AS, each with a brief annotation.]

   “Two works in memory of the late Aubrey Beardsley lie before us: Volpone the Fox (Smithers) and Aubrey Beardsley (the Unicorn Press). In the latter volume Mr. Arthur Symons examines the art and character of his friend, and in the other Mr. Robert Ross performs a like office (546). Mr. Symons is the more subtle, Mr. Ross the more gossipy and externally informing…. Mr. Ross, in Volpone, offers many biographical details, and in that way supplements Mr. Symons, whose criticism is more acute and searching” (547).

   “‘Boule de Suif’ is one of the most artistic short stories ever written, and suffers at the hands of the translator no more than is absolutely unavoidable.”

   “The greater part of the little book* is a sort of running commentary on Mr. Browning’s work, an advertisement of the treasures which, buried or not, are to be found there, and is not badly done. Unluckily, Mr. Symons has put his ‘general characteristics’ in the forefront, and here he is decidedly weakest. He says that ‘the first, and perhaps the final, impression we receive of Mr. Browning is that of a great nature, an immense personality.’ All our desire to be polite to Mr. Symons, who is, we believe, a young hand, and from whom we have seen some not unpromising work elsewhere, cannot prevent us from echoing that rude but excellent man, Mr. Burchell. Fudge! good Mr. Symons, fudge! ‘Immense personality’ is fudge; and ‘great nature’ is not much better.” AS “does not know his nineteenth century, or his sixteenth either.” “Let us only say this:—God has made Mr. Browning a very great poet, but the Browning Society persons of the type of Mr. Symons have sought out many inventions about him.” “Compared, however, to Professor Hiram Corson**, of Cornell University, Mr. Symons is a Longinus, doubled with a Sainte-Beuve” (596). [*Review of “An Introduction to the Study of Browning. By Arthur Symons. London: Cassells. 1887”; **“Introduction to Browning. By Professor H. Corson. Boston: Heath” (595).]

   AS “in his introduction to The Poems of Ernest Dowson, published by John Lane, raises a false hope in calling the writer ‘undoubtedly a man of genius.’ A talent, and a very frail one, a pathos partly borrowed from what we know of the poet’s life, a feeling for the haunted word, a faint, new strain here and there amid much unconscious limitation are about all that any one who never met the man himself will find in his poems. He died five years ago at the age of thirty-three, having hastened the course of an incurable disease by his excesses” (203).
AS's “method is very different from that of the ordinary traveller-author. He writes only of what really appeals to him, keeping himself well in the background. He has a keen power of analysis and, as we should expect, a fine feeling for words. His essays are consequently brilliant impressionist pictures, full of color and movement, very subjective, yet real and convincing” (425).

Remembering Anatole France's definition of “criticism as ‘the adventures of a soul among masterpieces,’... we may describe this book as the adventures of a soul among cities.” “The old method” of travel criticism “was to generalize your impressions,... eliminating the personal and private.... The new method is to avoid generalizing your impressions,... and present a kind of egoistic view” (641). AS's book “is, therefore, a record of a stage in the journey of the human soul towards spiritual suicide, for it is beyond question that unawareness is essential to sanity, and here we see a delicately nervous temperament.” AS “is master of a prose style which responds to every breath of his protean temperament. Doubtless the influence of Pater has shaped it, but it is easy to read into it too much resemblance” (642).

AS's “treatment becomes purely a consideration of the local manifestation of the art spirit.”

AS's book is “beautiful and quiet” and “full of delicate observation and fine criticism.” He attempts to convey “universal life, rather than to write as it were of himself.” “[T]he best chapter in the book is that on Ravenna.”

AS's “translation is entirely admirable” (338). [Review focuses on the play with this passing reference to AS.]

Even the reprinted essays not “from the nineties are redolent of that perfumed time.” AS's “prose ... remains unchallengeably immaculate.” The book's “charm” is AS's studies of “the luminous attractions of material Paris” and of “those rare figures—Verlaine and the rest.”

AS “contributes to the current number of ‘Harper's’ a vivid and well-wrought impression of Constantinople.” AS's “descriptive work is always admirable, particularly when it deals with the East.”

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“It is quite becoming the fashion for our bards, however young they may be, to issue an edition of their ‘collected poems.’ The latest to succumb to the temptation is Mr. Arthur Symons, who surely can look forward to a good many years of poetic effort” (254). However, “is it not a little too early to ‘collect’? Perhaps what Mr. Symons really intends to do is to sift, to select—which is a very different thing, when you come to think of it” (254).


“Out of Mr. Frank Harris’s ‘Modern Idyll’ Mr. Symons has extracted a play [*The Minister’s Call*] which is uncomfortable and unsympathetic. No pulse of passion justifies the commonplace amours of a dissenting parson and the faithless wife of his deacon” (352).


AS is “quite the proper person faithfully to render Signor d’Annunzio,” although his style is a trifle too precious, and too indebted to the style of Pater and John Addington Symonds. [Review of AS’s translation of *Gioconda* by D’Annunzio.] (Stern)


“The trivialities of yesterday, as shown in Leigh Hunt’s graceful essays, and as illustrated by H. M. Brock, are full of charm. No one could have better caught the spirit and gentle fancy of Leigh Hunt than this illustrator. The drawings are quite delightful, as is the whole ‘get up’ of the book.” [Brief mention of the book, with no reference to AS as editor.]


“The plain silk cloth cover with a gold monogram as its only decoration has an air of quaintness and distinction that is quite in keeping with the contents of these two little volumes. Mr. Brock’s pen and ink drawings will be a surprise even to those who know his work best. Their dainty finish, quaintness of conception, delicate humor, and perfect appreciation of the text are as unusual as they are delightful.” [Brief description of the volumes with no reference to AS as editor.]


AS makes a “bitter complaint” by asking “‘Is there anything more tedious, more annoying, than to look at pictures in a public gallery?’” Then he “hints that half the trouble … [would be] eliminated were half the pictures excluded” (180). [Includes illustrations of “Suburbs of Antwerp” by J. C. Cazin and “Evening in a Studio” by Lucien Simon.]

AS’s book has a “mechanical make-up” and is an “assemblage of component parts.” It is “a book of varying values and curious arrangement—a book in which the reader browses at will and take his chances.”


AS’s play has “strong dramatic power,” and its “amount of passion” and “force of climax set us wondering whether, after all, the future of Mr. Symons as a poet does not lie in the poetic drama” (498).


AS’s book is “inspired in about equal degree by nature and by art.” He shows us “an extraordinarily sensitive temperament and a fine artistic sense of the fitness of words. Something like a creed appears to be formulated in the ‘Hymn to Energy.’”


AS “has the prose ear” and “is one of the most accomplished writers that we have.” However, AS’s poetry has “discords in rhyme and infelicities of rhythm,” (284) yet “his poetry is full of sensitive beauty,” but at times “uses inartistic images.” The title of *Studies in Seven Arts* “savours of audacity” because “it is not given to any man to know much about seven arts.” The essays are “largely literary.” Their “charm … lies not in their critical or technical exactitude, but in their incomparably delicate impressionism” (285).


“To-day (Friday) witnesses the publication of Mr. Arthur Symons’s English version of D’Annunzio’s *Giaconda*, the play in which Signora Duse made so deep an impression in London some time ago. D’Annunzio is a comparatively recent ‘star,’ and it is only within the past three or four years that his work has been put before us in English dress…. D’Annunzio, therefore, cannot complain that he has been neglected in England” (234).


Considering AS’s young age, “it seems premature to have this collected edition of his work.” He “is an experimenter in life; and, according to the burden of his song, experimentation has brought satiety…. It is the art of the transitory, of the flying minute—at the opposite pole from the massive art of the past (627). AS’s “emotion is almost entirely the emotion of melancholy, the pathos of tears; and that pathos confined to a weary sense of the unsatisfactoriness of things in general.” AS “riots” in “the pathos of disillusionment…. It is a kind of dyspepsia of the feelings, and suggests early outrages on the emotional digestion.” He “has possibilities which may carry him beyond the covers of these two volumes—perhaps into a healthier, and therefore more fertile, art” (628).

[Announces a new Dutton edition of An Introduction to the Study of Browning by AS, “long favorably known to students of the poet.”]


The “bulk” of AS’s Knave of Hearts contains “paraphrases from Catullus and from the French poets of love.” The muses of AS and Richard Le Gallienne have “a close kinship.” We doubt “the sincerity of these songs of satiety; the pose is so easy for the young poet, and so unnatural” (66).


“In London at the end of the 19th century, early cultural manifestations of modernism, marked by scientific advances and experimental expression in the arts, began to disturb the relative stability of the Victorian age.” Beckson’s book “explores the ‘arts for art’s sake’ Aesthetic movement led by writer Oscar Wilde, the Naturalistic techniques of novelist Emile Zola and the mysticism in the poetry of William Butler Yeats” (46). [Refers to Beckson as AS’s biographer.]


Of Massinger’s editors, AS is “perhaps the least enthusiastic; yet, though he is very hard on his author’s faults and shortcomings, he is not grudging of praise where praise seems to him due.…” [Review of The Best Plays of the Old Dramatists: Philip Massinger, ed. with introduction and notes by AS (London: Vizetelly, 1887).] (Stern)


“The verse of Mathilde Blind has not the true poetic quality. It has little or no imaginative insight; no creative, and little interpretative power.… Some faint notion of her complete lack of control may be gathered from the poem called ‘The Street Children’s Dance,’ which we think Mr. Arthur Symons has been ill-advised to include in his selection.”


“The promise of The Savoy is rather fin de siècle, but not extravagantly so, and we who live at the end of our century like our literary pabulum spiced to the occasion” (55). [Announces and describes the contents of the new quarterly to be edited by” AS.]


“Like Gautier, he [George Moore] is at pains to announce himself a pagan, by which is apparently meant an anti-Puritan. It has never, we suppose, occurred to a true pagan to boast of not being a Christian, or of not being bound by a moral code. Yet the affirmation which solidly underlies these negations, the affirmation responsible for whatever is good in Gautier, or Mr. Moore, or Arthur Symons, or D’Annunzio that life is an art, and that the purifying influence … of art is aesthetic rather than moral is essentially pagan” (62). “Mr. Moore has wished
to record the achievements of a master of the craft of love, one who with subtle and fastidious art has drawn from life its purest essence and sweetest music the essence and music, that is, of the sexual experience. Arthur Symons has done this; Mr. Moore does not do it” (63).

AS’s poetry “is always dexterous, neat, adroit, singing and celebrating trifles, either elegant or squalid in an accomplished and highly limited manner. His is entirely emotional verse, unconnected with the loftier sides of life and art.” He “writes ... with too little humour and humanity to be a poet of fine distinction.... But what we miss in Mr. Symons’s verse we find plentiful in his prose. He possesses, in a degree uncommon among English critics, the personal vision and apprehension of books, men, places, which makes French criticism so fresh and vivid a thing.... There is probably no French master of style in modern times unknown to him.” AS “should go far in this field of literature; he is the very man to give us a series of essays upon literary movements in France.” [An appreciation.] (Stern)

Welby and Burdett have praised AS’s achievement although they are not in agreement about the area in which he has achieved. One celebrates the poet, the other the critic. A more balanced assessment of his work is needed. Good as his criticism of Verlaine and Symbolism is, his translations of Baudelaire are bad. [Review of Welby’s Arthur Symons, and AS’s translations of Baudelaire’s Les Fleurs du Mal. Occasional references to Burdett’s The Beardsley Period.] (Stern) [TLS Online now identifies John Middleton Murry as the reviewer. See Item 804.]

AS “is thoroughly conversant with French language and French literature. He is an authority on les jeunes; but he has produced one of the most careless translations it has ever been our lot to encounter. These may seem strong words: after glancing at the examples given below we think our readers will acquit us of any charge of exaggeration” (370).

Among the younger poets of England, Mr. Arthur Symons has held for some years a position of honor. He is distinctly a minor poet, however, and his recently published book, “Images of Good and Evil,” is regarded by the leading English critics as displaying all the chief limitations characteristic of his work in the past. The London Academy terms him a “poet with a heartache” and says that he is “all cries, and laments, and regrets.” [Digest of unsigned review, “A Poet with the Heartache” in Academy 58 (1900): 446] [“The St. James’s Gazette views Mr. Symons in a similar light.”]

“The pose of Mr. Arthur Symons is his constant endeavor to ‘escape from life.’ The writer who gives us this formula explains that he uses the word ‘pose’ with no unfriendly intention. To him, it seems, all men are posers, more or less; and the popular writers of England rather more than less. Mr. Symons, sometimes called the foremost prose essayist in England to-day, is said by Mr. Francis Gribble to differ from his contemporaries in that he poses for himself.” [Digest of Gribble, Francis. “The Pose of Mr. Arthur Symons.” Fortnightly Review, n.s. 74 (July 1908): 127–36.]


AS is one of those poets “who believes in the heart of him that a man who lives in a flat and has the misfortune to write verses must of necessity write for the inhabitants of flats.” AS’s muse “walks in swishing skirts, she has a fine taste in perfumes, she is a devotee of the bath, she dines in cafes, and she goes home at two in the morning in an equipage labelled Coupé” (818). “In addition to his genius for the embroidering of impropriety Mr. Symons has a gift which if properly cultivated would bring him well into line with certain of the comic writers.... We see no hope for him as poet” (819). [See Item 242.]


“In this grave and admirably-written volume Mr. Symons has a subject which suits his idiosyncrasy; and the work is, in most respects, better—more spontaneous, more sympathetic, more constructive, and more homogeneous—than any section of Studies in Two Literatures.” AS is at his best in The Symbolist Movement in Literature, “and his best is really something quite distinguished.... Essentially Gallic in literary temperament, Mr. Symons yet owes more to Walter Pater than to any other.... As a critic Mr. Symons perceives gradually rather than by instant intuition.” “Regarding the ‘Symbolist movement in literature’ (Mr. Symons should have said ‘in French literature,’ for he deals with nothing else), it appears to us that there is no Symbolist movement. There is a movement, but it is not Symbolist. Or, rather, it is no more symbolist than all poetry is symbolist. Mr. Symons fails, brilliantly, to justify the term.” “The essay on Mallarmé is the most brilliant in the whole volume; it stands unequalled among all Mr. Symons’s critical work, with the possible exception of his appreciation of Aubrey Beardsley. It belongs, indeed, to a very high order of criticism” (247).


AS “was so much an active force, both as critic and as editor of the Savoy, in the once passionate controversies of his contemporaries that it is hardly possible to consider him outside their ranks merely because his attitude so often differs from that of the group mind. Yet that is the theory to which this study is devoted—that Symons was an isolated and unique figure, uninfluenced by the people about him save incidentally.” Welby’s “personal bias ... is too often apparent, yet as a tribute to a great critic and one of the few living writers of truly distinguished prose, it is worthy of all praise.”

“PAH! Mr. Arthur Symons is a very dirty-minded man, and his mind is reflected in the puddle of his bad verses. It may be that there are other dirty minded men who will rejoice in the jingle that records the squalid and inexpensive amours of Mr. Symons, but our faith jumps to our hope that such men are not. He informs us in his prologue that his life is like a music-hall, which should bring him a joint-action for libel from every decent institution of the kind in London. By his own showing, his life’s more like a pig-sty, and one dull below the ordinary at that. Every woman he pays to meet him, he tells us, is desirous to kiss his lips; our boots too are desirous, but of quite another part of him, for quite another purpose.” [Note: this is the complete review, not an abstract.]

1188. Unsigned. Rev. of Poems, by Arthur Symons. Dial 32 (1902): 317–18. The “frank sensuality” and “morbid eroticism” of AS’s poetry “are characteristics reflected from the French decadents—from Baudelaire and Verlaine—rather than illustrations of the noble spiritual tradition of Shelley and Wordsworth and Tennyson” (317). AS “runs the whole gamut of carnal passion until, satiety being achieved, he can find no nobler refuge than a nauseating mixture of faint sensuality and religious mysticism.” Furthermore, the poems’ “verbal magic is potent to charm even when they glorify what is most base in human nature.” However, the poem “The Crying of Water” “seems to us one of the most beautiful things in English song; its tender pathos is fairly matched by the subtle music of the verse, and the result is quite beyond criticism” (318).

1189. Unsigned. Rev. of Poems, by Arthur Symons. Athenaeum 3873 (1902): 74–75. AS’s “most characteristic poems are the very essence of the modern spirit, for they ache from beginning to end with the sad self-knowledge that is its dominant characteristic.” We might hastily call AS “artificial, but the paramount note of his best poems is sincerity.” He is “almost too sensitive” (74). “The new poems, entitled ‘The Loom of Dreams,’ show a welcome extension of theme and outlook.… Taken as a whole, these volumes ought to win for Mr. Symons a high place in the ranks of contemporary poets” (75).

1190. Unsigned. “A Poet with the Heartache.” Rev. of Images of Good and Evil, by Arthur Symons. Academy 58 (1900): 446. AS has “a wan and weary muse; his philosophy of life is attenuated and anaemic.” However, AS’s “diction is simple and often exquisite…. He is all cries, and laments, and regrets…. Many of his passages have a haunting and melancholy beauty, but it is the beauty of emotion, not of feeling.” Furthermore, “the sensuousness, to say nothing of the falseness, of some of his verse is objectionable.” He “is an adept in the choice of words, and his thought, such as it is, is never obscure. He attains simplicity without baldness. Many of his descriptions are beautiful.” AS “lacks … virility, and that wide and sane outlook upon life.” In addition, “he works the emotions of regret and satiety threadbare, and he uses certain phrases and epithets again and again.… He has the heartache before he has packed
his bag.” [A digest version of this review is in the unsigned review “Mr. Arthur Symons—‘A Poet with a Heartache.”’ Literary Digest 21.1 (1900): 11.]

   “No. 5 of the Dome, just issued, is quite a distinguished little number, for it contains ten poems by singers of such note as ... Mr. Arthur Symons.” [Brief announcement of an issue of the Dome; quotes AS’s poem “Prologue: Before the Theatre.”]

   “In a little book, nicely printed and nicely bound, Mr. Ernest Dowson presents to the world some forty or fifty sets of Verses (Smithers), almost all of them inscribed to big-little people, such as Mr. Arthur Symons.” The “influence” of AS “is also to be noted here, and Mr. Dowson follows him in every affectation of style. In two things, however, he differs from his exemplar: he has not Mr. Symons’s audacity not his spark of genius” (210).

   “Few living writers are so competent to deal with the Symbolists as Mr. Symons, for few have either so sensitive a perception or a style at once so delicate and so penetrating” (634).

   [Reminiscences on the artistic achievements associated with Paris in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries illustrated by works from the Musée Carnavalet, Paris. Seen mainly through the eyes of the English writer Arthur Symons who first arrived in Paris in 1889, the cultural life and his associations with artists and writers such as Toulouse-Lautrec, Rodin, the Symbolists, Manet, and Degas are discussed.]

   “He has become a ‘kind of classic in neglige.’ Thus Mr. Arthur Symons hits off Henry Murger in the translation of Scènes de la Vie de Bohème, which Mr. Grant Richards issues under the title of The Latin Quarter. [Brief reference and quotation from AS’s translation.]

   AS’s Silhouettes “are graceful and musical poems, with the finish beseeming their briefness.... They are not instinct with deep thought or great emotions ... they aim at ... a subtle indefinite suggestiveness of things implied.” “Emmy” is “the most striking poem in the book” because “the outburst of the last verse is in exceptional contrast with the inconclusive tone of the poetry throughout the volume.”


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Images of Good and Evil “cannot be said to contain a feeble, amateurish or banal effort of rhyming, and at times we are given something which approaches to live poetry. Yet nowhere, search though one may, does one come across the satisfying article.” AS “rather handicaps himself by his somewhat jaundiced view of life.”


Although AS is “not accustomed to express himself in this medium,” the stories “are surprisingly well told” but he “expounds too much.” AS “interests us in the thesis, he does not interest us in the story. The story, qua story, misses fire; and neither Esther Kahn nor her lover exist for us as individuals. They embody points of view, but they are not of flesh and blood.” Furthermore, AS “lacks humor” and “his distinctive note is to take the morbid seriously.” “One of the causes” of AS’s “disdainful melancholy … is religion, presented in the guise of Methodism.” “The more sensitively organized are more seriously frightened” by this kind of religion; “as a consequence, if they continue to believe, they are apt to frighten themselves into lunatic asylums under the impression that they have committed the unpardonable sin; and even if they cease to believe, they may still inherit a legacy from the days when the fear of hell had hold of them.… That Methodism makes for madness is one of the ideas that he here sets forth” (1148). [Possibly prophetic of AS’s breakdown in 1908.]


“In order to enjoy” Spiritual Adventures “one must have a strong taste for analysis, for intricate psychological problems, for self-revelation so searching as to be decidedly foreign to the Anglo-Saxon temper” (201). “Most of the ‘experiences’ are tragic; all are thoroughly subjective and tantalizingly incomplete. Indeed one wonders whether it is by intention or chance that Mr. Symons always keeps back the salient point of the story. His skill in analysis must be admitted, and his command of telling epithet and of a certain poetic, though wholly undramatic, charm. But his very cleverness and facility make it more to be regretted that he has wasted his time in portraiture, brilliant but without significance, of subjects that are hardly worthy of such distinction” (202).


“These stories, each of which deals with a separate personality, are studies of decadence. They explore the relation between life and art. The modern mind is not haunted, like Hamlet, by material ghosts. It is haunted by obsessions.” In “Christian Trevalga,” “The moral is plain—to wit, that morbid absorption in even a purely imaginative sensation imperils the equilibrium of personality.” In “Seaward Lackland,” AS “presents us with a religious decadent who delights in outraging his own conscience.” In “The Death of Peter Waydelin,” “we have an artist whose obsession is grossness” (161). “Esther Kahn’ is a vigorous study of a Jewish actress whose histrionic genius is suddenly matured by a spasm of baffled passion.” “A Prelude to Life” “is a vivid piece of self-portraiture. It is the adolescent decadent beginning the pursuit of life as a sensation” (162).

“Studies in Elizabethan Drama, by Arthur Symons (261 pages; Dutton), adds to the publishers’ recent Symons volumes a collection that includes ten essays on Shakespearean plays, and essays on Massinger, Day, Middleton and Rowley. Penetrating criticism here reinforces a scholarship devoid of pedantry.” [Brief announcement of the book.]


“Some of the writers” AS “discusses are barely worth the pains taken with them….The excellent essays on Hawthorne and Yeats, more elaborate in treatment than usual … teem with … felicities of criticism…. Sometimes he may seem to refine overmuch, as when he propounds a sort of apology for the imbecilities of Tolstoi’s art criticisms” (8). The book gives “an unfavourable notion of the sanity of nineteenth century literature.” However, “he has in one instance gone far afield with excellent effect, in the case of the Spanish poet Campoamor” (9).


“When we have eliminated all the characteristics due to artifice, the verbal tricks and affectations, the conscious reiterations of phrase, there is still left an undiscovered element which eludes the courser tests…. These essays … are full of fine and subtle thought and freshly delicate appreciation.” AS “is essentially modern in his passion for the outline of sensation, and in his revolt against the outline of action. He hates abstract ideas, and he winces at the touch of exteriority.” He “is stung by the energy of humanity. He does not see the Gargantuan humour of it all” (487). AS “is not fascinated by the great full-blooded giants of literature” (488).


This work of AS’s “is here reissued because of a continuing demand…. We are also indebted to him in this book for his account of the life and verse of the Spanish poet Campoamor, of whose twelve collected volumes few moderns know anything.”


AS “has maintained a high ideal of the rhythmic and expressive beauty of our English language, and we are bound to accept with appreciation even so slight and rambling a work as these *Studies in Strange Souls* (Charles J. Sawyer), in which he gossips.” The “happiest passages” have “intimate biographical appeal” because AS “gives his personal experiences of those ‘strange souls.’” … “The book is, however, so slight that it leaves an appetite whetted and not mended” (211).

“There are three kinds of critics of importance. The critic of the first order is a man of feeling, to use a faded phrase, in whom exquisiteness of taste is carried to the point of genius and transformed into the power of creation: the critic of the second order is either a philosopher with an extraordinary force of intellect who takes some province of kingdom of art by violence, or a man of great learning with an uncommon versatility of mind who invents some new method of criticism: the critic of the third order; to end our catalogue, is an admirable rhetorician with a gift for re-stating the sentiments and ideas of more original writers” (629–30). Ultimately AS “is a critic of the first order” (630).


The book “is one of pure criticism, subtle, penetrating, sympathetic—the ablest book we venture to think … that the particular school from which it has come has yet produced.” (Stern)


AS's criticism reads too much of his own personality into the mysterious personalities under consideration. [Review of revised reprint of AS’s The Symbolist Movement in Literature.] (Stern)


AS notes in the introduction to The Symbolist Movement in Literature, that Symbolism “would have not special value in the writers of our day if it were not found, in one shape or another, in a very great imaginative writer. The essential distinction between the old symbolism and the new is that the latter has become conscious of itself and, as consciousness tends to generate intellectual force, so intellectual force is prone to develop a body of (more or less coherent) objective doctrine” (470). “Mr. Symons is well within his right in naming Gérard de Nerval as the first practitioner in the new kind ...” (470). However, “we need not agree with [AS] in thinking that Symbolism has replaced all previous literary gospels.... Symbolism will pass to where the old moons go, after doing much less than its friends hoped and its opponents feared. And, at all events, it will never find a more accomplished, acute, and appreciative critic than Mr. Symons” (470–71).


AS “is an ingenious and incorrigibly scrappy author. He also happens to be one of those authors who may be said to live on their reputations rather than by reason of work accomplished.” We cannot speak of most of AS's work with “respect” because “almost all of it is desultory, fortuitous, and brought together carelessly and without real intention.” We expected someone with “the finer critical flare, and we regret to have to confess that we have been cruelly—and, we might almost say scandalously—disappointed” (563). “The fact is that Mr. Symons has not really given us an account of the romantic at all, but has simply compiled a dictionary of poets who may be said to have been associated with that movement” (564).

AS “is essentially a temperamental critic … uninfluenced by tradition.” Although “he says: ‘I am gradually working my way towards the concrete expression of a theory, or system of aesthetics, of all the arts,’ … we see no definite system of aesthetics evolved, for the primary reason that no system of aesthetics can by any possibility be evolved by any individual who writes from a single point of view.” AS “has nothing of the detachment of the great critics” but he “always writes well, and with such conviction that one always reads him with pleasure.” He had “too intent an interest in art and too eclectical a survey of life. Yet we have read nothing better than Mr. Symons’ appreciation of Duse.”


AS’s play The Minister’s Call is based on a story by Frank Harris. “It tells of a young minister who has fallen in love with the wife of one of the deacons…. In the tale he stays, but we consider that the ending of the play is consistent with his character, and far more complete and dramatic. The work is rather too long, and suffers from being set in America without any effort being made to give local colour—the hero does not even ‘tell her good-bye.’ However, it has considerable power, and the characters of hero and heroine are developed with considerable skill” (2).


“The carrier-pigeon who transported the exciting message of decadence from Paris to London was Arthur Symons, who, in 1889, had visited the city with Havelock Ellis. When Mr. Sturgis looks at those in London who responded to this message, he is more interested in the people themselves, their backgrounds, proclivities and social lives, than in what they wrote, and in this way he does convey a strong sense of that literary circle.”


[Not seen.]


“The Idyll of the Seaside. I have neither fear nor shame in printing the following extract from a breezy article by the editor. Margate, 1895. By Simple Symons” (49). [A parody of AS and the Savoy follows. Other figures targeted are “Max Mereboom” (Max Beerbohm) and “Mr. Weirdsley” (Aubrey Beardsley).]


Against the wishes and instructions of T. Fisher Unwin, publisher, unauthorized additions to AS’s Dante Gabriel Rossetti were made—probably by the hand of a German editor during review.
Because of AS’s literary reputation, T. Fisher Unwin, publisher, did not feel that it was necessary to view proofs of *Dante Gabriel Rossetti*, and he could not have anticipated that additional matter would have been added to the volume by the German publishers. Unwin is returning the copies to the German publishers, asking that his name be removed, and that the “portion” of the work not authored by AS be clearly marked (although the imperfect acquaintance with English of the German ghost-writer should be obvious to readers familiar with AS’s writing).

AS’s métier is best described “as the abstraction of beauty from life.” “Amid all the variety of his appreciations there is a persistent monotony of realization.” This “reiterated undertone,” this sameness seems to be inherent in impressionism. “Abstraction, disengagement of beauty from life—such is Symons’s conscious goal. An obscure, though none less real, martyrdom of sense and sentiment is its recognized condition.” From the Impressionists, subtle distortion of reality into appearance, and from his deliberate frustration of the “metaphysical instinct,” comes inevitably, decadence—and a “perversion and sterilization of the emotions.” AS’s poetry always reflects a certain curious tone of “parasitic sublimity.” [Reviews the bulk of AS’s poetical and imaginative writing with an eye to extracting a philosophy of Impressionism. Interesting piece of criticism.] (Stern)

“Michael Field’s careful description of Symons’s Decadent library indicates that women were more central to fin-de-siècle literary culture than most traditional surveys of the era would suggest” (234). A. Mary F. Robinson, for example, “remained a vital part of Symons’s carefully assembled archive” (235). AS’s “groundbreaking discussion [“The Decadent Movement in Literature” (1893)] also took a leading step toward what would later become known as modernist thought” (245). “The notable transition between the 1893 and 1899 [The Symbolist Movement in Literature] versions of Symons’s essay can help us focus on how some key transformations in fin-de-siècle aesthetics illuminate a number of preoccupations in Robinson’s poetry” (246). AS thought Robinson’s *An Italian Garden* (1866) was her “greatest achievement” (251).

“Thus far, the discussion of decadence has been confined to its expression in the decadent movement proper of the 1880s and 90s. Several critics (Arthur Symons, Paul Bourget, Havelock Ellis), taking as their cue Gautier’s definition of the decadent style, defined this movement as a stylistic one. It is a supremely
aesthetic explanation of the literary preoccupation with decadence which, within a limited context, is a valid notion, but two problems appear: the stylistic disparities among writers classified as decadents are too great; and the idea of a decadent style precludes a broader view of decadence as a theme and a preoccupation” (14).

AS “is self-consciously treating the music hall as a vehicle for sexual self-discovery. Through his poetry and criticism, he not only transforms his individual impressions of the music hall into a new form of art, in line with Paterian aesthetics, but he also intellectualizes his own aesthetic and sexual experiences and attempts to place them in the context of the psycho-sexual landscape of humanity” (290). “The characteristics identified by Lombroso [Genio e Follia, 1864] as indicative of the degenerate genius read like a checklist of all that Symons presents us with in his memoirs: emaciated appearance, vagabondage, instinctiveness, hereditary madness, somnambulism, delayed development (for example, in Symons’ reading), hyperaesthesia, paraesthesia, hallucinations, moral insanity, criminal tendencies and cruelty, nightmares and dreams, egocentricity, obscenity in art, sexual abnormalities, religious zeal and isolation all have their counterpart in Symons’ detailed picture of himself” (292). AS, “the late-Victorian self-conscious genius[,] is frequently more valued for his observational skills than his poetry. However, as we have noted, he was as much inclined to observe himself observing as he was to observe other people, off and on stage” (294).

Beckson’s is “the most informative biography to date of a member of the Tragic Generation…. Symons emerges from the book as a significant and much appreciated poet and as the most influential critic of his generation, the architect of the bridge from Pater to Pound” (389).

“Joann Gardner acknowledges the importance of Arthur Symons’s key work, The Symbolist Movement in Literature, which, she observes, attracted ‘the attention of poets such as Eliot and Pound, who built new systems upon the notions it espoused.’ But she does not see Symons as the ‘major figure who helped stimulate the Modernist initiative’” (389). Gardner has little regard for AS’s poetry, and believes Yeats vastly overrated AS’s scholarship (Gardner attributes this to AS’s lack of a university education). Gardner does, however, “fully acknowledge Symons’s thematic and prosodic influence on Yeats” (390), and offers a fine “analysis of the dance and dancer in Symons and Yeats” (390). “Gardner makes no mention of Symons’s gospel of the little and intense and his cult of silence, which Yeats fully embraced,… nor does she point out how Symons, the psuedo-Celt, encouraged Yeats to stand up for his magical and Celtic convictions” (390).

AS “introduced into Anglo-American literature the Baudelairean image of the female dancer and also the Symbolist ideas on dance aesthetics” (135). In AS’s works “urban modernity is the frame that reveals the reified icon—the image of the dancer—as the commodity, whilst the variations in focal perspectives allow for the movements of the chorus—as the serial reproduction of reified icons—to be analogous to that of the urban crowd” (141). “Whilst Symons’s dancer poems may be formally identified as a product of the Symbolist aesthetic, it is in historical reference to the work of Rev. Stewart Headlam that the luster of their social commentary becomes apparent” (144). “The socio-historical pressures on Symons’s dancers are considerable; equally, the immediate material manifestations of those pressures would disappear by the 1910s. Electric lighting had replaced gas lighting, ballet had become an elite form of entertainment, and it had become acceptable, indeed fashionable, for women to go out in public spaces at night. The social space of the nocturnal metropolis had irrevocably changed” (153).


Wildi’s “writing about Symons is the first detailed substantial study of the most important critic in the 1890s” (300). Wildi shows that the influences on AS were many (Pater, Naturalism, Coventry Patmore, Yeats, Maeterlinck, and Wagner) and how he was still able to “ripen” into his own. Wildi appropriately dismisses Osbert Burdett’s “reproachful” statement that AS “discusses nothing in detail” (300) but unfortunately doesn’t include enough about the discussions with Moore and Yeats. “Chaotic” in parts, Wildi’s book is clever overall. [In Dutch]


When comparing the “pathological” or ‘antisocial’ versions of sexuality” characterized in the writings of French Decadents and English Aesthetes, Stephen Crane’s writings “often draw upon this interest in complex or dangerous versions of sexual experience” (142). AS’s poems about encounters with prostitutes are more “brooding” and “moralistic” than Crane’s of similar subject but suggest that “a man’s soul ‘will answer’ for sins” which Crane also believed and expressed (145). AS claimed that “the modern malady of love is nerves” (146) which expression is also found in Crane’s poetry, placing him in the category with AS and others who “moved beyond Victorian conventions about manly, empire-building men and demure, civilizing ladies” (142).


“Provides an interview with film director Arnaud Desplechin, discussing his film ‘Esther Kahn,’ an adaptation of the novella [short story] by Arthur Symons. Notes that with this film, Desplechin made a radical change by using the English language. Talks about some of the characters in the film, focusing on the charac-
teristics of Esther Kahn. Discusses some of Desplechin’s inspirations and techniques.” [In French. Abstract from International Index to Performing Arts. See comments under Desplechin, Arnaud.]


“From the first he [T. S. Eliot] depicted the city as an environment physically defiled and spiritually stifling” (172). AS’s “Silhouettes may have provided the model for some of the urban situation poems (such as ‘Portrait of a Lady’)” (172–73). [Brief mention of AS.]

1227. Deleted.


Olive Schreiner’s 1883 preface to The Story of an African Farm should be read along side of AS’s “The Decadent Movement in Literature” (1893), another crucial manifesto of the fin-de-siècle avant-garde.” AS “defines ‘decadence’ as a generational movement which, in spite of its declared belatedness, is marked by a strong anti-traditional, and anti-organicist, bent.” Both Schreiner and AS “reveal a militant generational awareness whose main object is the breaking up of hegemonic forms” (367). AS “does not simply underscore the collapse of hegemonic stylistic totalities with the concomitant opening up of avant-garde experimentalism in an unlimited variety of ways. What he does is signal the presence of a central aporia, a puzzling divergence between, on the one hand, the Impressionist ‘branch’ of decadence … and on the other hand, its Symbolist ‘branch’” (369).


Allan Wade in his work Bibliography of the Writing of W. B. Yeats does not include in his list of “Contributions to Periodicals” lines from Yeats found in Marinetti’s Poesia early in 1907. It is almost certain that Yeats, like many other artists, including AS, was invited by Marinetti to submit some unpublished work. AS, in fact, attended a poetry reading in Rome by Marinetti in 1903, received two volumes of Marinetti’s work, and at Marinetti’s request, AS submitted to Marinetti the poem “Isotta to the Rose” (329).


The letters date the history of Yeats’s friendship with AS. The two men met early in 1891; shared quarters in Fountain Court from August 1895 to March 1896; engaged in common literary activities and in travels intermittently from 1896–1904. Yeats writes of AS’s opinions of AS’s The Earth Breath. He comments anecdotally on AS’s infatuation with a serpent-charmer; he recounts his travels with AS in Ireland and abroad. Of The Symbolist Movement in Literature, Yeats writes: “I have found it curiously vague in its philosophy. He had not really thought about it and contradicts himself sometimes in the same sentence, but there is a great deal of really very fine criticism.” To Moore, Yeats suggests that AS be the arbiter of their literary quarrels. He answers AS’s article, “Speaking to the Psaltery”; he praises AS’s piece on Wagner, and he introduces Joyce to AS in the hope that the latter can give him an entré into the publishing world. In 1909 Yeats writes with pain of AS’s mental breakdown. [Wade’s commentary puts into order much of the chronology of the AS–Yeats relationship, and he does it with a greater accuracy than Lhombreaud and many other critics. An article by Karl Beckson, “New Dates for the Rhymers’ Club,” English Literature in Transition 13:1 (1970): 37–38, however, argues for an earlier date to the Rhymers’ Club than Wade suggests. Wade dates the club to early 1891; Beckson convincingly argues from Rhys’s letters that the Club was founded in January of 1890, or possibly earlier.] (Stern)


Do not listen to AS’s counsels on the respective merits of either my verse or my drawings. [Charts alternately Beardsley’s concern for and irritation with AS. Often annoyed with AS’s harsh judgments on his literary works; occasionally inclined to mock AS’s “Symonsy mood.”] (Stern)


“In 1886, having learned that Ernest Rhys was editor-in-charge of the Camelot Series of classics, published by the Walter Scott Company, 21-year-old Arthur Symons inveigled a commission to provide an introduction and notes to the essays of Leigh Hunt. To his former schoolteacher Symons confessed: ‘Entre nous, I have never read a page of Leigh Hunt in my life! Do you know any of his work?’ The practice of the great academic presses was not always different. The pool of qualified scholars was limited” (169). [Brief references to AS’s relationships with several figures from 1870–1918.]

AS “was Carman’s most faithful British follower” and “played a key role in the growth of Carman’s reputation.” “Symons published Carman in *The Savoy*; meanwhile Carman published two poems of Symons’ in the *Independent*” (100). “Symons followed Carman’s early career with interest and increasing ambivalence,… [giving] measured praise of *Low Tide on Grand Pré,*” and “[a]voiding the extremes of uncritical admiration and harsh censure that mar some early reviews of Carman” (100). “Because Symons tries to combine his sincere approval with a suggestion for improvement, this is one of the most thoughtful reviews that Carman ever received” (101).


“The letters, both from 1890, show Symons in an attractive light: both letters urbanely accompanied submissions of poems for Carman’s consideration as editor of the *Independent,* and both combine encouragement with ironic self-deprecation” (42). “Because a poem by Symons appeared in the *Independent* shortly after each letter and at no other time during Carman’s tenure there, we can be reasonably certain of the identity of the poems he enclosed (now lost)” (42). “Symons’ letters show that Carman’s reputation extended to England, and they imply that the British and North American literary worlds were closer than is sometimes allowed” (43).


[Two-volume work, no index in either volume. Passing references to AS in volume 1, “Ruskin to Swinburne.”] Yeats and AS, like Pater and Ruskin before them in England, and Gautier and Baudelaire in France, “located … [the] source of … spiritual value[s] in the creative arts” (2). AS developed along similar lines as George Moore and Walter Pater, and “achieved a more scholarly knowledge of … French literature than either of them” (3), educating himself in Paris, and interpreting ideas received from the French Symbolists (Gautier, Baudelaire, and their successors). Even more than *The Symbolist Movement in Literature,* AS’s greatest contribution to poetry was to introduce Symbolism to William Butler Yeats. “Symons’s influence does not end here; it forms one of the principal links between nineteenth-century poetics and the poetics of Modernism. His introduction of the French Symbolists to England gave a powerful impulse to the innovations of Eliot and Pound” (3). [Chapter on AS in volume 2, “Pater to Arthur Symons,” 210–72.] AS “is the final link in the chain connecting nineteenth-century aesthetic ideas with those of the moderns” (3). AS “has long been one of the ghosts of literary history,” (210) influencing Yeats, Eliot, and Pound; and championing Joyce, Conrad, and Hardy, and yet virtually disappearing from sight. One reason is that “Symons’s creative achievement is much inferior to his criticism” (210). “Symons had the makings of a first-rate art critic,” and “it is startling to realize how close Symons comes to suggesting a complete emancipation from natural form, thus pointing to the beginnings of what we now recognize as modern art” (211–12). “It is true that his criticism suffers from haste and imprecision, from energy untempered by sufficient deliberation. It is also true …
that Symons at his best possesses a remarkable sensitivity and penetration, and that he has a secure place in literary history as the man who helped bring the modern aesthetic into being” (215).


[This dissertation is a literary approach to the study of masculinity which uses feminist readings of late nineteenth-century fiction to provide a critique of the English Victorian gentleman. This study sees the construct of the gentleman as a key to understanding the dynamics of patriarchy; the last third of the nineteenth century, an era in which traditional notions of gender are breaking down, is fertile ground for studying the instability of gender…. Chapter V addresses the fiction by three writers of the Decadent movement—Aubrey Beardsley, Arthur Symons, and Ernest Dowson—in order to study their literary attempts to contain women through aestheticism. This misogynistic enterprise has been aided by the complicity of nineteenth- and twentieth-century male literary critics who support the Decadent agenda by ignoring material reality in their fiction.] [Annotation edited from DAI 54 (1993): 1813A.]


Roger Lhombraud is “the definitive and sympathetic biographer,” retracing in “painfully absorbing detail … the event of the deranged poet’s confinement in the old castle at Ferrara, the journey home, the prolonged treatment as a GPI case; and then looking at the whole matter from the standpoint of what has come to be understood about the manic-depressive condition” (61B).


“Yeats was clearly uneasy in the nineties with what he saw as the subjection of Symons and Johnson to the impressionism that Pater had recommended. In his diary for 1909 he writes: ‘Surely the ideal of culture expressed by Pater can only create feminine souls’” (51). “Lionel Johnson, with Ernest Dowson and Arthur Symons, were the members of the Rhymers’ Club who mattered most to Yeats’s imagination and memory”(57).


Moore’s novel, Evelyn Innes, dedicated to Yeats and AS, owes much to the Dolmetsches. In 1894 Horne introduced the Dolmetsches to AS’s circle. AS and Moore frequented his concerts. [Intelligent article that draws heavily on the text and biography to prove its case.] (Stern)


Verlaine’s recent visit to London attracted scant publicity in the press, but received the warmest welcome from true literary friends, AS and Edmund Gosse. Verlaine was escorted into the lecture hall on the arm of AS, “his most active supporter in this country.” (Stern)

The Savoy will not be “decadent” or “revolutionary” but “will knock the reputation out of The Yellow Book.” [Waugh forecasts in 1895 the periodical that would come out of the next year and be edited by AS.]


Gosse suggested to Heinemann that AS write the careful, well-documented “Life on Tennyson,” but Heinemann thought AS too modern to write the whole-hearted appreciation. [The task fell on Waugh.] (Stern)


AS is a well-balanced and receptive critic who takes “sincerity” as his watchword. His essay on Donne is excellent. [Review of Figures of Several Centuries.] (Stern)


The younger generation of writers discounts AS as out-of-date, but they would do well to look to his tragedies and practice their virtues, strengths, and simplicity. “The Harvesters” is his masterpiece. [Review of Tragedies. Cliché-ridden and colored by the writer’s nostalgia and discomfort with a new Age.] (Stern)


AS was one of a handful of literary figures who influenced Alvin Langdon Coburn. “Symons and [Edward] Carpenter in particular considered the art of life more important even than the life of art, and they must have done much to help an immature Coburn in search of a father” (23). Coburn’s concept of recognition involved capturing “an idea that is struggling for expression within us...” (24).

“Recognition was the discovery of a visual image of something already embedded in the mind. Coburn learned this view from Carpenter and shared it with Arthur Symons and Henry James. It was the cornerstone of the third order of consciousness, which was also the symbolist stage” (24–28).


When AS met Beardsley, his “first impressions were negative ones, but he had no idea of Beardsley’s innocence in bohemian society, for the artist had only weeks before signed the Salomé contract, and was still relatively unknown” (86–8). Having AS as the editor of the Savoy and Beardsley as the art editor, “was peculiarly attractive to Smithers, for he had very likely sought Symons out on the strength of such of his writings as ‘Stella Maris,’ a poem about a London streetwalker which did as much as any literary contribution to make the early numbers of The Yellow Book notorious. Beardsley, if he were available, would confirm the tone of
the new venture” (140). [Portions of the material on the Savoy and the Yellow Book appeared earlier in Weintraub’s The Savoy: Nineties Experiment (1966).]


AS is a “literary jack-of-all-trades.” For AS “fin de siècle decadence was intellectual, rather than emotional, something his career as a critic would continue to demonstrate.” Relationship between AS and Beardsley is a strained one: an ambitious AS is upstaged by a similarly ambitious Beardsley who is not content to rest on his laurels as an artist, but encroaches on AS’s province when he tries his hand at writing. Beardsley’s withdrawal from the Savoy made its end imminent. “The public might have bought a Beardsley, but lost interest in a Savoy with an ever-thinning Beardsley facade. He was the base of popular appeal as the magnet which drew many of its top contributors.” As Hesketh Pearson so neatly put it, the Savoy “‘might just as well have been called the Beardsley, for he was, if not the life and soul, at least the body and death of it.’” [One of the best accounts of the history of the Savoy and the personal relationships between its contributors to 1967. On AS there are several inaccuracies: Johnson and Davidson were not the close literary friends that Weintraub suggests; AS had established himself as a literary critic, not just a critic of music and art, prior to 1895 and the birth of the Savoy.] (Stern)


[Passing reference to AS, who “considered Wagner’s music dramas passionately as ‘elemental’” (311).]


“Much of Gray’s life as an aesthete is related through palpably absurd invention, in which dialogue, sans quotation marks, is used to ‘colorize’ his life in the manner in which old black-and-white television films have been tarted up, and to introduce 1890s verse which in no way could have [been] uttered as speech.… Ha, says [Arthur] Symons, slamming down his absinthe and throwing back his head, he begins to recite: My life is as a music hall. [...] Where, in the impotence of rage … [...]After twenty lines of this, ‘Symons’ hot breath … has by now enough alcohol in it to ignite by spontaneous combustion.’ (This is intended as uproarious wit)” (355–56).


The Yellow Book acts as a bridge between the late Victorians and the twentieth century, and embodies the spirit of the ’90s. Members of the Rhymers’ Club dominated first the Yellow Book, and later the short-lived Savoy. [Several passing references to AS.] (Stern)

Without Beardsley the Savoy would not have happened. Until AS was tapped for the editorship of the magazine, his claim to a literary reputation lay in his book, *The Symbolist Movement in Literature* (1889) which made the term “symbolist” fashionable in literary circles in England. [Fashionable itself and often misleading. Too glib in its description of AS’s role of editor, too willing to accept Hesketh Pearson’s renaming of the journal, and too quick to ignore the collaboration between Yeats and AS that went so far to shape the journal. Anachronistic. *Symbolist Movement in Literature* was published in 1899, not 1889 as Weintraub asserts.] (Stern)


AS, Wilde, and Moore diluted Pater’s original aestheticism with their importation of French Symbolism. Thus, discussing the implications of aestheticism as Pater intended in the development of modernism is a difficult task. To trace modernism’s roots to aestheticism, then, requires scholars to create two categories: first, “Pater’s influence on the writers of the English decadence,” such as AS, and second, Pater’s “influence on modernists who followed them” (60). Joyce, for example, looked past Wilde and Moore to Pater’s original ideas. Also important to note in positioning Pater’s influence on modernism in relationship to Decadence and aestheticism in both French and English circles is the implication of AS’s introduction of French Symbolism to England. While AS’s work on Symbolism profoundly changed English Literature, Symbolism was already holding power in England. Hence the great diversity of themes and writers usually considered “aesthetic” renders the term suspect.


“It is likely that similar to Symons, Blanche was also perceiving material reality through art works” (100). [Focuses on technique and details of AS’s portrait, not on AS himself.]


Critics are wrong to associate AS with Decadence and the 1890s: his career began earlier and dated long after that brief era. He stood aloof. Some poems in *Silhouettes* and *London Nights* bear the dust of decadence, others, impressionistic sketches, date as Whistler and Degas do, but a few, the love lyrics, are timeless and in no way derivative. His plays and criticism also demonstrate the range of the man’s talents. [A descriptive, highly impressionistic survey of the poetry, plays, and criticism of AS by a man who is more friend than critic to AS. It is one of the earliest attempts to look at the canon of AS’s writings, but the book is too general in nature and too amiable in its treatment to be of much value. Bibliography of AS’s writings is partial and often inexact. Reviewed in *Saturday Review of Literature* (New York) 2 (20 February 1926): 574; Alyse Gregory in *Dial* 81 (July 1926): 66–68. The latter review also reviews AS’s *Studies in Seven Arts.*] (Stern)

An Annotated Bibliography

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“In its early quarterly form, The Dome presented a considerable contrast to the exuberant covers of The Yellow Book: its boardcover of grey or brown was soberly lettered in gilt; and above its dust-jacket, with red lettering on cream paper, there was nothing garish” (160). “Noteworthy among books published in ordinary and unlimited editions” was AS’s Aubrey Beardsley (1898) (163). “Arthur Symons first contributed to The Dome in May 1897, the year in which he published Amoris Victima and Studies in Two Literatures. Three of the four poems which he published in The Dome reappeared in 1899 in Images of Good and Evil; and of his three essays, two were reprinted” (164).


The literary coteries of the nineties have been credited with an originality they never possessed. Their only decadence lay not in their subject, nor their attitude toward it, but in their motives which they only partially understood. While they cultivated an elitism which asked that art and life and art and philistinism be separated, and that art be the end, they, in fact, subverted that end to a means which they then celebrated for its own sake. “That was the real decadence for which the decade seems original.” AS’s credo represents the contradictions inherent in the doctrines adopted by the 1890 aesthetes. (Stern)


“The conviction that there is more to life than science can explain survived the late nineteenth-century demise of faith” (165). Matthew Arnold proposed a partnership between poetry and science, and “by the turn of the century, Arthur Symons viewed literature as the opponent rather than the partner of science” (165).


AS is a better critic than poet. [Reviews AS’s volumes of poetry and his plays. No mention is made of his book on Symbolism. Little discussion of the Yeats–AS relationship. Minimizes AS’s role in his decade.] (Stern)


“Symons flirted with decadence for a while in the 1890s…. Later Symons turned his back on decadence,” which had become for him only “a new and beautiful and interesting disease” (17).


“Father Sewell richly describes the number and variety of Gray’s contacts and activities of these years, Beardsley, Beerbohm, Arthur Symons, Verlaine, Mal-