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'Inarticulate cries': Arthur Symons and the Primitivist Modernity of Flamenco

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In his essay 'Moorish Secrets in Spain' (1899), the British poet and critic Arthur Symons (1865-1945) described Spanish flamenco music as the expression of primal creative forces, which were nonetheless connected to modernity: 'it is music before rhythm, music which comes down to us untouched by the invention of the modern scale, from an antiquity out of which plain-chant is a first step towards modern harmony.'[1] Symons revealed flamenco as an art form caught in transition, faltering between Romantic spirit, Orientalist eroticism, and an emerging Modernist primitivism.

Symons's hitherto unexplored reception of Spanish flamenco was central to his conception of the interconnectedness of all the arts, as well as to his formulation of vernacular and cosmopolitan culture. For Symons, flamenco was constituent part, on the one hand, of a Decadent discourse of sensuousness and pleasure, and, on the other, of a Symbolist and proto-Modernist discourse of primitivism. At the same time, flamenco was a contested locus for the prevailing Orientalist discourse of his time. The British writer often reinforced the stereotypical myth that the Spanish Gypsy 'native' was intrinsically enigmatic and impenetrable, and fetishized the 'primitive' nature of the flamenco art form. Yet, this article shows that these ideas also responded to a sincere and aesthetic effort to modernize and dignify flamenco and Gypsy culture.

As I argue here, Symons found in the, often exoticized, primitiveness of Spanish flamenco the quintessence of art, a paradigmatic representation of the symbolism and modernity in the arts that he was so intensely seeking in the 1890s. For Symons, the new expressive ideal he found in the language of music in this period, and especially of dance, was perfected in Spanish flamenco: '[Flamenco dancing] is the most elaborate dancing in the world and, like the music, it has an

abstract quality which saves it from ever, for a moment, becoming vulgar.'[2] Watching a Spanish Gypsy dancing, Symons recalled, he 'thought of the sacred dances which in most religions have given a perfectly solemn and collected symbolism to the creative forces of the world.'[3] The emphasis on flamenco as an elaborate art form and on the perfect symbolism that it reveals suggests a profound engagement with a culture that went deeper than the crude outlines of Orientalist caricature.

In order to explore Symons's multifaceted relationship to flamenco in the 1890s, I focus here on certain critical and poetic texts of the period. In particular, I examine the essays 'A Spanish Music-Hall' (1892; 1918), 'Moorish Secrets in Spain' (1899; 1918) and 'Seville' (1901; 1918), and a few of his multiple reviews of Spanish dancers for the popular evening newspaper *The Star* in the 1890s. I also analyse the poems 'To a Gitana Dancing' and 'Spain (To Josefa)', included in his volume of verse *Images of Good and Evil* (1899). Before further developing my argument, however, I first need to frame Symons's attraction to flamenco within the context of his artistic interests in the early 1890s.

Spanish Gypsies and Music-Halls

Symons's early interest in flamenco is rooted in the distinct features of this popular Spanish art form, which can be seen as a 'primeval' *Gesamtkunstwerk* [total work of art]. Flamenco involves several artistic expressions: *cante* [song], *baile* [dance], *toque* [guitar music], *jaleo* [vocalisations], *palmas* [handclapping], and *pitos* [finger snapping].[4] Despite the diverse conjectures concerning its origin, consensus situates the early history and development of flamenco in the Spanish southern region of Andalusia, where Gypsies began to settle in the latter half of the fifteenth century and with whom flamenco is most strongly associated.[5] Flamenco draws then from traditions several centuries old, but it was not until the first half of the nineteenth century that it emerged as a distinctive form of Andalusian art. As Peter Manuel notes, Andalusian music culture 'was itself an eclectic entity, syncretizing the legacy of the Arabs, Berbers, Jews, Christians' and Gypsies

who cohabited for several centuries.[6] As a public, performing art, flamenco developed in the second half of the nineteenth century, with the appearance of the *café cantantes* or music-halls. Symons found then in flamenco an art form with all the elements that occupied his mind in the early 1890s: music-halls, dance, music, and Gypsy culture.

Symons's interest in flamenco art was a component of his wider fascination with Gypsy culture. A member of the Gypsy Lore Society for most of his life, Symons perceived in the Gypsies the sense of freedom he sought in life and art, a mysterious and symbolic aspect of reality, and his own ambition to identify with both. Symons saw himself as a 'vagabond' from his childhood; he felt that he had been 'born […] cruel, nervous, excitable, passionate, restless, never quite human, never quite normal'.[7] His upbringing (his father's work as a Wesleyan preacher entailed moving to a new location every three years) led him to believe that he could never root himself in any place in the world, which, in exchange, had freed him 'from many prejudices' in giving him 'its own unresting kind of freedom'.[8] As a result, Symons travelled, or rather, wandered, extensively throughout his life. He spent long spells of time in France, Italy, and Spain, but he also visited Belgium, Germany, Russia, Poland, Hungary, Austria, Switzerland, Ireland, Turkey, and the Czech Republic. It was this fascination with wandering and restlessness that led Symons to the Romani people and culture of Ireland, Wales, England, Czech Republic, Slovakia, and Spain.

Critics have considered Symons's interest in Gypsies as a patronising idealisation of elements of Gypsy culture that reinforced or simply inverted earlier derogatory stereotypes. Indeed, Symons tends to repeat all of the nineteenth-century tropes of Orientalism and race, mysticism, and ahistoricity surrounding the Gypsies. Deborah Epstein Nord has gone as far as to qualify Symons's views on Gypsies as 'repugnant'.[9] Other critics, such as Janet Lyon, however, offer alternative political readings, and, most importantly, add an aesthetic strand that needs to be considered in order to historically understand *fin-de-siècle*, and Modernist, Gypsophilia. These

opposing understandings of Symons's relationship to Gypsy culture would be replicated in his reception of flamenco, as we shall see later on.

Lyon underlines how Symons's views on Gypsies, most famously gathered in his essay 'In Praise of Gypsies' (1908), albeit deficient as activist journalism, reflect 'an uncharacteristic awareness of the particularities of the Gypsy plight as a political event unfolding in a more general political plot'.[10] Symons wrote 'In Praise of Gypsies' amidst the impending passage of the Movable Dwellings Bill, which aimed to register, regulate, and provide for the sanitary inspection of the vans and tents of British Gypsies and Travellers, and to make the education of their children mandatory. Lyon argues that the shift in representations of Gypsies during this period from 'hazy and inscrutable natural subjects to objects' of a discourse of legislation, prosecution, and control had 'concretely reifying effects both for Gypsy populations and within British narrations of nationhood.'[11] Alongside this political reading, Lyon foregrounds an aesthetic component of *fin-de-siècle* and Modernist Gypsophilia: 'Gypsy culture, as construed and aesthetically reworked by Modernist *gadže* [non-Romani] like Arthur Symons […] forms an eccentric bulwark against rationalist modernity, especially in the matrix of London'.[12] In some sense the circulating image of the Romanies' communal strangeness becomes, in bohemian subculture, 'a projected form of a self-authenticating community within the structures of modern disenchantment.'[13] Symons's reception of Spanish Gypsy flamenco would prove to be equally complex: both politically conservative and reactionary, but primarily a site of aesthetic investigation.

Symons's interest in flamenco is also framed within his increasing fascination with music-halls, and popular dance and music. Symons's intellectual interest in the music-hall (he would be referred to as 'a scholar in music halls' by W. B. Yeats in 1892) has served to further the perception of Decadence as a high art movement nonetheless linked to and interested in popular culture.[14] As Linda Dowling observes, there was a 'genuine contribution of the music-hall cult to the emergent modernistic aesthetic' and, in this emergence, 'Symons's part was crucial, and he

fulfilled it largely because he found in the art of the music-hall a new model for poetic language, one that freed it from the paralyzing choice between Pater's Euphuism and shapeless colloquial speech.'[15] More crucially, Dowling suggests, 'Symons found a new expressive ideal in the music-hall's language of physical gesture, and specifically in the language of the dance.'[16] The pivotal contribution of Symons's fascination with music-halls and dance to the dawning Modernist aesthetic has been extensively studied. What is insufficiently acknowledged, however, is that the first extensive theoretical statement on music-halls that Symons wrote was the travelogue 'A Spanish Music-Hall', published in 1892, a few months after coming back from his first trip to Spain in 1891. In the essay, Symons describes his experience of a soirée in a Spanish music-hall, where he mainly witnessed flamenco acts. Symons foreshadows the cultural studies intellectual's concern with the popular in this essay, and he does it in Spain, and in Spanish. The music-hall intellectual is translated into a Spanish term; at the beginning of the piece Symons described himself as an '*aficionado*, as a Spaniard would say, of music-halls.'[17] Symons was certainly a devotee of music-halls before going to Spain, but he only became professionally and intellectually committed to them after being in Spain and, I argue, coming into contact with its popular culture. The dates here are crucial: nine months after coming back from Spain, in February 1892, Symons became the critic of music-hall and dance for the popular evening newspaper, *The Star*. He had first contributed to the newspaper in October 1891 with a short piece on music-halls, four months after coming back from his first trip to Spain.

The Spanish music-hall that Symons referred to in his 1892 article was the Alcázar Español, located in the *Barrio Chino* or red-light district of Barcelona, the first Spanish city that Symons visited in 1891. From the beginning of his essay, there is evidence for a reading of Symons as an Orientalist tourist. The British dandy, seeking 'the most characteristic place [he] could find', ended up at a place that ordinary Barcelonans perceived as extraneous to their own reality, a quarter that had become 'a sexual and folkloric theme park featuring a gypsy underworld of shady flamenco performers.'[18] And yet, the Decadent Symons was not seeking

ordinary life, but uniqueness, artifice and exaggeration. His choice of place in this instance had to do more with his idea of Decadent cosmopolitanism than with an Orientalist lens.

Symons's cosmopolitan Decadence was connected to the Decadent quest for '*la vérité vraie*, the very essence of truth' that he described in 'The Decadent Movement in Literature' (1893); 'the truth of appearance to the senses, of the visible world to the eyes that see it; and the truth of spiritual things to the spiritual vision', which he could only find in his own idea of what 'true' Spanishness meant.[19] Hence the constant allusions to the 'Spanish' character of things: he noted that 'the overture sounded very Spanish' and praised the 'typically Spanish way of walking' of a dancer, while lamenting that another dance 'was not so typically Spanish as I had expected'.[20]

Symons's experience of Spain replicates what he underwent in Paris, which, as Alex Murray argues, transforms 'the model of representation into one that disrupts the confluence between place and identity.'[21] In his essay 'Montmartre and the Latin Quarter' (written in 1904, but first published in 1918), Symons described these areas as 'the two parts of Paris which are unique, the equivalent of which you will search for in vain elsewhere.'[22] As a result of their uniqueness, these quarters were for Symons 'typically Parisian'.[23] In contrast, the Champs Élysées and the Grand Boulevards, where the majority of English tourists congregated, were the 'least Parisian' areas of the city.[24] For Symons,

> the Grands Boulevards, which are always, certainly, attractive to any genuine lover of cities, to any real amateur of crowds, they are, after all, not Parisian, but cosmopolitan. They are simply the French equivalent of that great, complex, inextricable concourse of people which we find instinctively crowding, in London, along Piccadilly; in Berlin, down the Unter den Linden; in Madrid, over the Prado; in Venice, about the Piazza: a crowding of people who have come together from all the ends of the earth, who have, if tourist likes to meet tourist, mutual attraction enough; who have, undoubtedly, the curiosity of an exhibition or an ethnological museum; but from whom you will never learn the characteristics of the country in which you find them. What is really of interest in a city or in a nation is not that which it has, however differentiated, in common with other nations and cities, but that which is unique in it, the equivalent of which you will search for in vain elsewhere.[25]

Here Symons is outlining his own definition of cosmopolitan Decadence, a kind of cosmopolitanism that differs from that exercised by middle-class tourists. This is why Symons's

search for the soul of Paris leads him to Montmartre and why, later on in Barcelona, Sevilla, and Málaga, he would go to the cafes where Gypsies sing and dance.

Decadent Artifice, Irony and Camp

The 'true', unique Spanish characteristics that Symons often highlights in his writing constitute stereotypes of extreme seriousness or extreme caricature, which can be interpreted as the adoption of an Orientalist and patronising stance. Such an interpretation, however, may be too simplistic, in which case Barry J. Faulk's discussion of Symons's distinct expertise in popular culture in relation to 'camp' and modernity proves especially useful.[26] Camp offers a much needed complementary, and alternative, explanation for Symons's Orientalist approach to Spanish popular culture, and enriches and complicates a post-colonial critique of his writing.

If the essence of camp is 'its love of the unnatural: of artifice and exaggeration', as Susan Sontag asserts, 'A Spanish Music-Hall' serves as a primer on camp pleasures.[27] 'The art of the music-hall is admittedly frivolous – the consecration of the frivolous', admits Symons at the beginning of his essay.[28] Being 'frivolous', it becomes 'culturally peripheral'.[29] For Faulk, 'the oxymoron – "the consecration of the frivolous" – remains suggestive: it suggests that frivolity contains enough charisma to reorganize a life', which in exchange makes it 'reductive' to read Symons's appreciations of the music-hall, and of Spanish popular culture, as simply 'iterating his critical' and colonialist authority.[30] His camp views, concludes Faulk, more likely 'ironized the whole business of taste making'.[31]

This notion is equally connected to the Decadent cult of artifice, which Linda Dowling has described as a 'counterpoetics of disruption and parody and stylistic derangement, a critique not so much of Wordsworthian nature as of the metaphysics involved in any sentimental notion of a simple world of grass and trees and flowers.'[32] The apparent Decadent frivolity, the parody, the irony, alongside the very serious quest for a new aesthetics are thus all essential components of Symons's approach to and engagement with Spanish popular culture.

One of the first spectacles Symons alludes to in 'A Spanish Music-Hall' is the *zarzuela*, a traditional Spanish operetta. For Symons, the zarzuela 'was amusing in its wildly farcical way – a farce of grotesque action, of incredible exaggeration.'[33] The interest of this art form is rooted then in its vulgarity, in its hyperbolic character. Symons distances himself from the old-style dandy who hates vulgarity and becomes a modern dandy, 'a connoisseur of Camp' in the age of mass culture, who turns his back on the 'good-bad axis of ordinary aesthetic judgement'.[34] He is seeking Spanishness, which he translates as excess, extreme states of feelings. It is the excess that Symons finds in Spanish popular culture that enables him to articulate his Decadent campiness.

The article 'A Spanish Music-Hall' is indeed packed with playful comments and observations. The irony marking Symons's description of the Alcazar, notes Faulk, 'signals both his distance from and his extreme empathic proximity to what he surveys': 'The entrance was not imposing, but it was covered with placards which had their interest.'[35] The audience in the hall, Symons writes, in a clearly facetious manner, 'was not a distinguished one'.[36] We find the same camp, ironic attitudes in Symons's later texts on Spanish popular culture. In 'Seville' (written in 1898, but first published in 1901), for example, Symons writes:

> All Spanish dancing, and especially the dancing of the gipsies, in which it is seen in its most characteristic development, has a sexual origin, and expresses, as Eastern dancing does, but less crudely, the pantomime of physical love. In the typical gipsy dance, as I saw it danced by a beautiful Gitana at Seville, there is something of mere gaminerie and something of the devil; the automatic tramp-tramp of the children and the lascivious pantomime of a very learned art of love.[37]

As camp does, this passage both discloses innocence and corrupts it.[38] For Symons, flamenco dancing is Decadent, camp, and modern, because it offers 'the proper mixture of the exaggerated, the fantastic, the passionate, and the naïve.'[39] When Symons writes that flamenco dancing is 'full of humour, fuller of humour than of passion', he is epitomising Decadent parody and advancing Sontag's notion of camp as 'a comic vision of the world'.[40] Symons's camp and proto-Modernist sensibility towards flamenco is even more dramatically displayed in the poem

'Spain (To Josefa)' (1899), in which Symons blends the figure of a flamenco singer named Josefa with Spain itself:

> You sing of Spain, and all
> Clap hands for Spain and you, and for the
> song;
> […]
>
> Spain, brilliantly arrayed,
> Decked for disaster, on disaster hurled,
> Here, as in masquerade,
> Mimes, to amuse the world,
> Her ruin, a dancer rouged and draped and
> curled.[41]

In clear allusion to the contemporary 'Spanish 1898 Disaster', in this poem Symons portrays a campily pathetic Spain.[42] Symons displays the pathos that comes out of seriousness and belittles the dramatic situation of the country: 'She', writes Symons in allusion to Spain, 'who once found, has lost | A world beyond the waters.'[43] This loss is nonetheless unimportant because

> […] she stands
> Paying the priceless cost,
> Lightly, with lives for lands,
> Flowers in her hair, castanets in her hands.[44]

In parallel, when the Spanish singer Josefa sings, 'with clapping hands, the sorrows of | your Spain', Symons thinks 'how all the sorrows were in vain.'[45] The whole point of camp is to dethrone the serious. Camp is playful, anti-serious. More precisely, camp involves a new, more complex relation to 'the serious', as 'a sensibility that, among other things, converts the serious into the frivolous'.[46]

And yet, as some of the extracts above show, camp and Decadent irony can have problematic effects. The agents of cultural redefinition are often of upper- or middle-class standing who could, as Andrew Ross notes, 'afford, literally, to redefine the life of consumerism and material affluence as a life of spiritual poverty.'[47] A camp approach may thus perpetuate certain prejudices by veiling them as irony. Indeed, this camp proto-Modernist reading of Symons's reception of flamenco is not to argue there is no evidence for a reading of Symons as

Orientalist tourist. After all, Symons insisted on his descriptions of the 'native' dance, which, as Faulk observes, 'appears to provide the English spectator definitive proof in an uncertain space of his own aplomb, status, and essential remove.'[48] 'Spanish dances have a certain resemblance with the dances of the East', wrote Symons, and flamenco 'no doubt derives its Eastern colour from the Moors'.[49] His writing repeatedly bestowed animal, savage-like and uncivilized characteristics (which he undoubtedly considered unproblematic) on to flamenco artists. In other words, although Symons believed he was celebrating and defending flamenco, he also participated in the outlook of his time and nationality to a greater extent than he realized. In the guise of celebrating them, he objectified the Spanish Gypsy artists all over again.

Agency and Inarticulate Art

Camp and Decadent parody permits Symons to sustain certain prejudices by thinly disguising them as irony, and to legitimize himself, but it also endows others with agency. The question of artistic agency here is crucial. In 'A Spanish Music-Hall', for instance, Symons clearly establishes that 'in a music-hall the audience is a part of the performance', wielding almost equal levels of authority to the British tourist, the local audience, and the flamenco artists.[50] In a similar vein, Havelock Ellis, with whom Symons often travelled in Spain, also wrote in *The Soul of Spain* (1908) that

> In flamenco dancing, among an audience of the people, every one takes a part, by rhythmic clapping and stamping, and by the occasional prolonged 'oles' and other cries by which the dancer is encouraged or applauded. Thus the dance is not a spectacle for the amusement of a languid and passive public, as with us. It is rather the visible embodiment of an emotion in which every spectator himself takes an active and helpful part; it is, as it were, a vision evoked by the spectators themselves and up-borne on the continuous waves of rhythmical sound which they generate.[51]

Ellis clearly established that in flamenco there were blurred boundaries between observer and observed, complicating the traditional power relations between 'native' and 'colonizer'. Throughout 'A Spanish Music-Hall', Symons also pays attention to how the artists utilize space. In this context, Faulk underscores how it is particularly important to note the special care that

Symons takes to situate flamenco artists 'back in the everyday once their performance is finished'.[52]

The close of the performance by the flamenco singer Villaclara, for example, underscores the performer's control and agency: 'When the applause was over she returned the hat, came back to the table at which she had been sitting, dismally enough, and yawned more desperately than ever.'[53] Similarly, the flamenco dance of Isabel Santos and her daughter is the most erotic event Symons witnessed at the Alcazar: 'The dance grew more exciting, with a sort of lascivious suggestiveness, a morbid, perverse charm, as the women writhed to and fro, now languishingly, now furiously, together and apart.'[54] However, after 'two encores and two more dances', Symons adds, 'the women went tranquilly back to the corner where they had been drinking with their friends.'[55] Symons is here fracturing the setting that surrounds the artwork as commodity and, as a result, showing both the aesthetic context and the social context which it is contingent upon. These dancers and singers alternate effortlessly from performers to mundane people. This could be interpreted as a reinforcement of the clichés about Spanish daily life, as it depicts a world ruled by, as Faulk points out, 'high passion, fierce desire, and violent turmoil'.[56] And yet the return to passivity suggests 'quite the opposite' as the performers calmly 'negotiate different spaces, in control of their performance', able to turn their charisma off and on.[57]

In fact, Symons gestures towards the vernacular expertise of the local flamenco artists throughout the essay 'A Spanish Music-Hall'. At the end of the piece, Symons suggests a sort of mutual recognition when he describes the flamenco dancer Isabel Santos as a 'great artist', who had 'a profound artistic seriousness'.[58] Likewise, in Symons's poems on flamenco, the 'native' dancer or singer appears to have agency and be in control of both Symons and the audience. 'Therefore you hold me, body and soul, in your | hold', writes Symons in 'To a Gitana Dancing' (1899).[59] Whatever the dancer does, Symons 'follows' and he only awakens when she pauses:

> It brightens, I follow; it fades, and I see it afar;
> You pause: I awake; have I dreamt? […][60]

In the poem 'Spain', the artist Josefa also

> […] sing[s] of Spain, and all
> Clap hands for Spain and you, and for the
> song;[61]

These lines suggest that Josefa's artistic power is recognized – her voice is heard: she sings and all clap hands – uniting the British tourist once more with the local audience and the flamenco artist. The moment that Symons, as audience, becomes 'part of the performance', and, as artist, acknowledges flamenco artists as 'professional', one could argue that he is no longer seeing them as 'other'. Symons crucially described the Spanish flamenco *cante*, or singing, as 'the crying of a wild beast in suffering, and it thrills one precisely because it seems to be so far from humanity, so inexplicable, so deeply rooted in the animal of which we are but one species.'[62] The pronoun 'we' becomes crucial here, as Symons aligns himself with the observed Other.

At the same time, to say that Symons's writing solely orientalizes Spanish flamenco is to neglect to consider a crucial artistic angle. Linda Dowling has foregrounded how Symons's understanding and inclusion of the dance in his poetic work caused him 'to shift aesthetic authority from the intellectual *to* the sensuous' and highlights the 'importance of visceral perception in understanding artistic performances'.[63] Symons's iterated insistence upon the 'visceral, animal knowledge of the blood, upon "dance as life, animal life, having its own way passionately" […] specifically challenges verbal language […] rather than the possibility of expressive language in general'.[64] The gestural language of the dance seemed 'wonderfully fresh, immediate, and uncompromised by "impurities"', as opposed to 'the Victorian tyranny of "abstraction" and "discursiveness"'.[65] Hence, Dowling concludes, Symons's characteristic portrayal of the dancer as at once 'innocent and yet almost narcissistically or onanistically self-sufficient.'[66] For this reason,

> To say that the narrators of Symons's poems find this self-sufficiency erotic is merely to insist upon the sensual, visceral basis of the gestural language. Yet clearly to celebrate gesture in this way was to prefer a language even more 'primitive' than the lower-class vernaculars, for it was assumed that the more physically overt the linguistic sign, the cruder the mental capacity of the sign-maker.[67]

The primitiveness and vernacular condition of Spanish flamenco becomes instrumental to Symons's understanding of artistic language. Of all the dances, flamenco for Symons is revealed as the purest, the most authentic, the most perfect. Dancing, as the emblem of the ideal work of art:

> in the [Spanish] dancing, inherited from the Moors, which the gipsies have perfected in Spain, there is far more subtlety, delicacy, and real art than in the franker posturing of Egypt and Arabia. It is the most elaborate dancing in the world, and, like the music, it has an abstract quality which saves it from ever, for a moment, becoming vulgar. As I have watched a Gitana dancing in Seville, I have thought of the sacred dances which in most religions have given a perfectly solemn and collected symbolism to the creative forces of the world.[68]

These remarks recall those in the short story 'Dolores' by Edith Ellis, with whom Symons also spent some time in Málaga in 1898. Written in 1899, but published in April 1909 in *The Smart Set*, the story was based on her only visit to the country in 1898 with her husband, Havelock Ellis, and Symons. It is the story of a young British wife who accompanies her journalist husband and his friend to witness flamenco in a southern Spanish music-hall. In the piece, the British woman, Ju, undergoes a moment of revelation when she watches Dolores, a Spanish Gypsy woman, dancing:

> Ju felt she needed a hundred eyes; she had rarely been so alive. The magnetic power of all those happy people on and off the stage entered her veins like strong wine. […] Ju could scarcely breathe. […] All the mad, wild beauty of the world seemed singing in her head as her eyes followed the retreating figure of the woman who had danced life into her tired brain. Never, even in church, she thought, had she felt so rested, so uplifted as now; rarely had she been so absurdly happy. Her child's fingers against her breast, a lark singing in the early spring, the first primrose gathered for the year, all the simple, delicate joys of life had not given her the exquisite sense of rest that the vigorous movements of this dancing girl had done.[69]

Ju had never felt 'so rested' and yet 'so uplifted', pointing towards the revelatory cultural and experiential moment she encountered in Spain. Perhaps Ju had never felt such zeal because, as she declared, she had 'never seen real dancing before'.[70] It was in this Spanish music-hall where 'for the first time in her life she saw passion, grace, joy and vigor combined in the movements of a beautiful woman, who was as free from vulgarity and self-consciousness as a flower.'[71]

These claims imitate those noted by Symons in his essay 'Moorish Secrets in Spain' (written in 1899, but first published in 1918) about flamenco dancing being 'the most elaborate dancing in the world', and, having, like the music, 'an abstract quality which saves it from ever […] becoming vulgar.'[72] Both Symons and Edith Ellis perceived a core of intensity and artistry in flamenco that was attached to an internal, elemental, and primitive nature.

Symons described Spanish flamenco music as 'no other passion' mainly because it 'is inarticulate, and so it brings a wild relief which no articulate music could ever bring.'[73] This music, he added, is 'the voice of uncivilised people who have the desires and sorrows common to every living being, and an unconsciousness of their meaning which is, after all, what we come back to after having searched through many meanings.'[74] Symons inverts here the hierarchy of 'savage' and civilized, showing a clear preference for this 'savage', 'inarticulate' form of language to the civilized verbal, articulate language: 'A few words seemed to be repeated over and over again, with tremulous, inarticulate cries that wavered in time to a regularly beating rhythm. The sound was like nothing I have ever heard. It pierced the brain, it tortured one with a sort of delicious spasm.'[75]

Symons equates what he calls the 'inarticulacy' of flamenco art and its lack of articulation with the ideal of Decadence: 'to be a disembodied voice, and yet the voice of a human soul'.[76] Flamenco art is divested of articulated language, of 'joints', in the same way that Decadence is divested of 'a body'. Flamenco is revealed as a perverse pleasure which, being primitive and eternal, seems unprecedented. Tantalized by its immateriality and inarticulacy, Symons would try to replicate the primitiveness of Spanish flamenco in his own syntax. As Dowling notes, 'in his brief poems of "primitive" syntax [Symons] sought to embody […] truth in language', creating a 'concerted effort at verbal gesture, at reincarnating the disembodied voice'.[77] In the aforementioned poem 'To a Gitana Dancing', for instance, Symons combines descriptions that allude to the ancient, primitive condition of flamenco: 'And the maze you tread is as old as the

world is old', with a simple, almost primitive syntax that lacks adverbs and gives prominence to the verb, that one element capable of indicating an action, like dancing:

> You laugh, and I know the despair, and you
> smile, and I know
>
> […]
> It brightens, I follow; it fades, and I see it afar;[78]

Symons openly declared his preoccupation with replicating the inarticulate and rhythmic character of flamenco. In an 1898 letter from Seville to the Scottish politician and writer Robert Cunninghame Graham (1852-1936) in which Symons enclosed the poem 'To a Gitana Dancing', he explained that the piece was done 'with a most elaborate attempt to express the thing by the coiling of the rhythm, repetition of words and inner rhymes, and unusual pauses. To get exactly the rhythmical effect I have intended, read aloud and read for the sense, allowing the voice to pause where it naturally would.'[79] By asking Cunninghame Graham to read the poem aloud and allow the voice to pause, Symons emphasized the rhythmic inarticulacy of flamenco, its unvoiced condition. Flamenco art enabled Symons to express in writing an 'inner', 'disembodied' rhythm.

As I hope to have shown, Symons's reception of and engagement with flamenco remain dialectical and complex. When Symons writes that flamenco 'no doubt derives in Eastern colours from the Moors',[80] and that flamenco dancers are 'primitive and elemental [with] the slumbering inner glow of the sombre passion of their race, and have the alertness of a young and wild animal', it is difficult to avoid a reading of Symons as an Orientalist tourist and writer.[81] While partly accurate, I have argued throughout that such a reading is reductive. Rather than focusing on Symons's Orientalist and primitivist discourse regarding flamenco, I have been primarily concerned with interrogating how the relationship between the 'describer' British intellectual and the 'described' Spanish 'native' voices could be understood as further enriching and complicating cross-cultural exchange.

Flamenco was taken seriously by Symons, as an object of scholarship and as an intellectual and physical art form. He attempted to replicate the essence of flamenco in his 1890s poetry, and

he wrote articles and reviews on flamenco art throughout his life.[82] Flamenco was crucial for the development of his ideas on the symbolic power of the dance and of music. For Symons, the primitiveness of flamenco became paradigmatic of the essence of art. In flamenco, Symons recognized an elemental and inarticulate condition that he linked to the Decadent and the Symbolist movements, and which anticipated the Spanish Modernist Federico García Lorca's (1898-1936) notion of *Duende,* or the spirit of evocation.[83] Symons acknowledged the same mysterious power and spontaneous creativity that motivates flamenco art, which he interpreted as the body and musical language of Spanish modernity. The primal, elemental nature of flamenco unveiled for Symons both a corporeal and intangible sense of artistic modernity.

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[1] Arthur Symons, 'Moorish Secrets in Spain', in *Cities and Sea-Coasts and Islands* (London: W. Collins, 1918), p. 102. This essay was first published on 12 August 1899 in the *Saturday Review*, and then reprinted in *Cities and Sea-Coasts and Islands*.

[2] Ibid., p. 104.

[3] Ibid., pp. 104-05.

[4] Israel J. Katz, 'Flamenco', *Grove Music Online* (2001) <https://doi.org/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.article.09780>.

[5] For more information on the origins, history and style of flamenco see, for example, Ángel Álvarez Caballero, *Historia del cante flamenco* (Madrid: Alianza Editorial, 1981); Manuel García Matos, *Sobre el Flamenco: Estudios y Notas* (Madrid: Cinterco, 1987); and Michelle Heffner Hayes, *Flamenco: Conflicting Histories of the Dance* (Jefferson: McFarland, 2009).

[6] Peter Manuel, 'Flamenco in Focus: An Analysis of a Performance of Soleares', in *Analytical Studies in World Music*, ed. by Michael Tenzer (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), pp. 92-93.

[7] Arthur Symons, *Dramatis Personae* (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1923), p. 133.

[8] Ibid.

[9] Deborah Epstein Nord, *Gypsies and the British Imagination, 1807-1930* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006), p. 137.

[10] Janet Lyon, 'Gadže Modernism', *Modernism/Modernity*, 11 (2004), 517-38 (p. 524).

Karl Beckson also notes that in the months before his breakdown, Symons wrote two pieces which are unique in his oeuvre, precisely for their engagement with social issues: the essay 'In Praise of Gypsies' and the play *The Superwomen: A Farce*, a satire of suffrage activism. Beckson, *Arthur Symons: A Life* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1987), pp. 250-51.

[11] Lyon, 'Gadže Modernism', p. 524.

[12] Janet Lyon, 'Sociability in the Metropole: Modernism's Bohemian Salons', *ELH*, 76 (2009), 687-711 (p. 704).

[13] Ibid.

[14] 'Arthur Symons is a scholar in music halls as another man might be a Greek scholar or an authority on the age of Chaucer.' W. B. Yeats, 'The Rhymers' Club' [23 April 1892], in *Letters to the New Island*, ed. by Horace Reynolds (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1934), p. 144.

[15] Linda Dowling, *Language and Decadence in the Victorian Fin de Siècle* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1986), p. 238.

[16] Ibid.

[17] Arthur Symons, 'A Spanish Music-Hall', in *Cities and Sea-Coasts and Islands*, p. 145.

This essay was first published in May 1892 in the *Fortnightly Review*, and then reprinted in *Cities and Sea-Coasts and Islands*.

[18] Ibid., p. 146; Joan Ramon Resina, *Barcelona's Vocation of Modernity: Rise and Decline of an Urban Image* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2008), p. 100.

[19] Arthur Symons, 'The Decadent Movement in Literature', *Harper's New Monthly Magazine*, 87 (November 1893), 858-67 (p. 859).

[20] Symons, 'A Spanish Music-Hall', pp. 147-50.
[21] Alex Murray, *Landscapes of Decadence: Literature and Place at the Fin de Siècle* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), p. 74.
[22] Arthur Symons, 'Montmartre and the Latin Quarter', *Colour Studies in Paris* (London: Chapman and Hall, 1918), p. 24.
[23] Ibid., p. 29.
[24] Ibid., p. 23.
[25] Ibid., pp. 23-24.
[26] Barry J. Faulk, 'Camp Expertise: Arthur Symons, Music Hall, and the Defense of Theory', in *Music Hall and Modernity: The Late-Victorian Discovery of Popular Culture* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2004).
[27] Susan Sontag, 'Notes on "Camp"', in *Against Interpretation and Other Essays* (London: Penguin, 2009), p. 275.
[28] Symons, 'A Spanish Music-Hall', p. 145.
[29] Faulk, 'Camp Expertise', p. 53.
[30] Ibid., pp. 53-54.
[31] Ibid., p. 54.
[32] Dowling, *Language and Decadence in the Victorian Fin de Siècle,* p. x.
[33] Symons, 'A Spanish Music-Hall', p. 148.
[34] Sontag, 'Notes on "Camp"', pp. 286-89.
[35] Faulk, 'Camp Expertise', p. 56; Symons, 'A Spanish Music-Hall', p. 146.
[36] Symons, 'A Spanish Music-Hall', p. 147.
[37] Arthur Symons, 'Seville', in *Cities and Sea-Coasts and Islands* (London: W. Collins, 1918), p. 18. This essay was written in 1898, but first published in March 1901 in *Harper's Monthly Magazine,* and then reprinted in *Cities and Sea-Coasts and Islands*.
[38] Sontag, 'Notes on "Camp"', p. 283.
[39] Ibid., p. 283.
[40] Symons, 'Seville', p. 18; Sontag, 'Notes on "Camp"', p. 288.
[41] Arthur Symons, 'Spain (To Josefa)', in *Images of Good and Evil* (London: William Heinemann, 1899), pp. 151-52.
[42] An allusion to the Spanish–American War fought between the United States and Spain in 1898. The defeat and loss of the last remnants of the Spanish Empire was a profound shock to Spain's national psyche and came to be known as the 'disaster'.
[43] Symons, 'Spain (To Josefa)', p. 152.
[44] Ibid.
[45] Ibid., p. 151.
[46] Sontag, 'Notes on "Camp"', p. 276.
[47] Andrew Ross, *No Respect: Intellectuals and Popular Culture* (New York: Routledge, 1989), p. 137.
[48] Faulk, 'Camp Expertise', p. 57.
[49] Symons, 'A Spanish Music-Hall', pp. 151-52.
[50] Ibid., p. 145.
[51] Havelock Ellis, *The Soul of Spain* (London: Constable, 1908), p. 180.
[52] Faulk, 'Camp Expertise', p. 60.
[53] Symons, 'A Spanish Music-Hall', p. 155.
[54] Ibid., p. 153.
[55] Ibid., p. 155.
[56] Faulk, 'Camp Expertise', p. 59.
[57] Ibid.
[58] Symons, 'A Spanish Music-Hall', p. 156.
[59] Arthur Symons, 'To a Gitana Dancing (Seville)', in *Images of Good and Evil* (London: William Heinemann, 1899), p. 107.
[60] Ibid, p. 108.
[61] Symons, 'Spain (To Josefa)', p. 151.
[62] Symons, 'Moorish Secrets in Spain', p. 103.
[63] Dowling, *Language and Decadence in the Victorian Fin de Siècle,* p. 239.
[64] Ibid., pp. 239-40.
[65] Ibid., p. 241.
[66] Ibid.
[67] Ibid.
[68] Symons, 'Moorish Secrets in Spain', pp. 104-05.
[69] Edith Ellis, 'Dolores', in *The Smart Set*, 24.4 (1909), 121-28 (pp. 125-26).
[70] Ibid., p. 126.
[71] Ibid.

[72] Symons, 'Moorish Secrets in Spain', pp. 104-05.
[73] Ibid., p. 103.
[74] Ibid.
[75] Symons, 'A Spanish Music-Hall', p. 154.
[76] Symons, 'The Decadent Movement in Literature', p. 862.
[77] Dowling, *Language and Decadence in the Victorian Fin de Siècle,* pp. 242-43.
[78] Symons, 'To a Gitana Dancing (Seville)', p. 108.
[79] Arthur Symons to Robert Cunninghame Graham, [November] 1898, National Library of Scotland, Cunninghame Graham Papers, Acc.11335, fol. 56.
[80] Symons, 'A Spanish Music-Hall', p. 152.
[81] Arthur Symons, 'Amalia Molina', in *Notes on Spanish Dancers and Spanish Gypsies*, 22 May 1920, Box 13 Folder 18, Arthur Symons Papers, Department of Rare Books and Special Collections, Princeton University Library, Princeton New Jersey, USA.
[82] As well as his essays, articles, and reviews of the 1890s, Symons penned several unpublished articles and reviews on Spanish flamenco dancing in 1920 and 1921. Arthur Symons, *Notes on Spanish Dancers and Spanish Gypsies*.
[83] Lorca first developed the aesthetics of *Duende* in a lecture he gave in Buenos Aires in 1933, entitled 'Juego y teoría del duende' ['Play and Theory of the Duende']. Four elements can be isolated in Lorca's vision of duende: irrationality, earthiness, a heightened awareness of death, and a dash of the diabolical. For more on Lorca and the notion of *duende* see, for example, Federico García Lorca, *In Search of Duende,* ed. and trans. by Christopher Maurer (New York: New Directions, 1998).