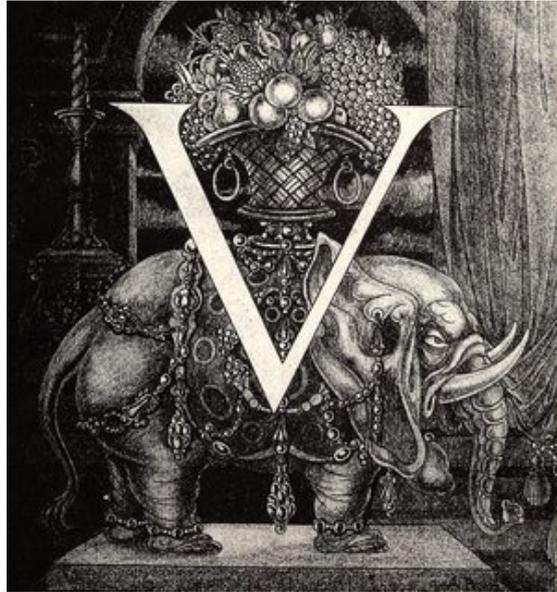


*volupté*

INTERDISCIPLINARY JOURNAL OF DECADENCE STUDIES

---



**Issue 1, June 2018**

Arthur Symons at the *Fin de Siècle*

---

**ISSN:** 2515-0073

**Date of Publication:** 21 June 2018

[volupte.gold.ac.uk](http://volupte.gold.ac.uk)

---



This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-ShareAlike 4.0 International License.

**Goldsmiths**  
UNIVERSITY OF LONDON

# *volupté*

Issue 1, June 2018

Arthur Symons at the *Fin de Siècle*

Voluptuous Interventionism: An Introductory Note from the Editor-in-Chief <b>Jane Desmarais</b>	i
‘Inarticulate cries’: Arthur Symons and the Primitivist Modernity of Flamenco <b>Leire Barrera-Medrano</b>	1
‘A capital fellow, full of vivacity & good talk’: Arthur Symons and Gabriel Sarrazin <b>Bénédicte Coste</b>	19
Hierophants of Decadence: Bliss Carman and Arthur Symons <b>Rita Dirks</b>	35
Arthur Symons, Laurence Binyon, and Paterian Aestheticism: Dancers and Dragons <b>William Parker</b>	56
Symons and Print Culture: Journalist, Critic, Book Maker <b>Laurel Brake</b>	74
‘The Universe’: An Unpublished Sonnet by Arthur Symons <b>Kostas Boyiopoulos</b>	89
Arthur Symons, ‘Aubrey Beardsley: A Memorial Poem’ <b>Simon Wilson</b>	95
A Note on Voluptuousness: A Personal Essay on Decadence and Pleasure <b>David Weir</b>	97
<b>REVIEWS</b>	
Joris-Karl Huysmans, <i>Drifting (À van-l'eau)</i> , trans. by Brendan King (Sawtry: Dedalus, 2017) <b>Tina Kover</b>	113
Michel Winock, <i>Décadence fin de siècle, L’Esprit de la cité</i> (Paris: Gallimard, 2017) <b>Fay Wanrug Suwanwattana</b>	116
<b>Notes on Contributors</b>	119

Voluptuous Interventionism:  
An Introductory Note from the Editor-in-Chief

Jane Desmarais

Goldsmiths, University of London

Decadence has come a long way. What was once a term of opprobrium used to dismiss the mannered confections of a ‘movement of elderly youths’, as Holbrook Jackson described them, now defines a field of study taught across the world and debated along multi-disciplinary and transnational lines by a growing community of students and researchers. The founding scholars of Decadence studies – Linda Dowling, Matei Calinescu, Barbara Spackman, Ian Fletcher, Regenia Gagnier, David Weir – broadened our engagement with Decadent literature and expanded its social, political, and cultural relevance to such an extent that it is impossible today to study the literature of Decadence without reaching back to fourth-century Rome or pondering the decay and decline, the beauty and rot, of our own times.

Scholarly interest in Decadence has been intensifying over the last five years. It has taken some new turns – cosmopolitan, sensory, and spatial – but the overriding concern continues to be with its relationship to modernity and to that complex aesthetic expression of modernity – Modernism. Numerous monographs and edited collections have appeared, including, to name but a few, Matthew Potolsky’s *The Decadent Republic of Letters: Taste, Politics, and Cosmopolitan Community from Baudelaire to Beardsley* (2013), *Decadent Poetics: Literature and Form at the British Fin de Siècle*, ed. by Jason David Hall and Alex Murray (2013), *Decadence and the Senses*, ed. by Jane Desmarais and Alice Condé (2014), Kostas Boyiopoulos’s *The Decadent Image: The Poetry of Wilde, Symons and Dowson* (2015), Vincent Sherry’s *Modernism and the Reinvention of Decadence* (2015), Alex Murray’s *Landscapes of Decadence: Literature and Place at the Fin de Siècle* (2017), and, most recently, Weir’s *Decadence: A Very Short Introduction* (2018).

The conference circuit has been lively too, with a large number of events – mainly in the UK – either exclusively or in part devoted to a Decadent theme. In April 2014, Goldsmiths,

University of London, hosted an international conference on *Decadence and the Senses*; this was followed a year later by two other London-based events: *Aestheticism and Decadence in the Age of Modernism: 1895 to 1945* at the Institute of English Studies, and *Fin de Siècle Echoes: Strange Friendships, Unseen Rivalries, and Lost Paths of Literary Influence, 1880-1910* at King's College London. In April 2016, Goldsmiths organized a one-day symposium on *Ernest Dowson (1867-1900): Poet, translator, novelist*, and in July of the same year Birkbeck, University of London, hosted *Forgotten Geographies in the Fin de Siècle, 1880-1920*. 2017 began with a two-day spring conference on *George Egerton* at Loughborough University, and ended with a winter symposium at Durham University on *Neo-Victorian Decadences*. We are currently only half way through 2018, but already it promises to be a bumper year, with two events Stateside in May—*Curiosity and Desire in Fin de Siècle Art and Literature* (University of California, Los Angeles) and a one-day symposium on *Transnational Poetics: Aestheticism and Decadence at the Fin de Siècle*, at New York University – and two upcoming conferences in July: [\*Women Writing Decadence: European Perspectives, 1880-1920\*](#) (Oxford University) and [\*Decadence, Magic\(k\), and the Occult\*](#) (Goldsmiths).

Despite the continuing broad interest in Decadence, there has been no interdisciplinary journal of Decadence that looks beyond the nineteenth century for its material or seeks to connect late nineteenth-century Decadent literature with its roots in Roman antiquity and its expression in modern and contemporary literature, art, and culture – until now. As is obvious from the titles of conferences and symposia listed above, Decadence has tended to be absorbed into the broader fields of Nineteenth-century Studies, Victorian literature, and Modernism, and is often viewed in relation to Aestheticism and *Fin de Siècle* Studies, but this does not do justice to the continuity, complexity, and polyvalence of Decadent literature. Neither does it reflect its intrinsic and fascinating unruliness, the way it calls into question traditional literary categories such as genre and periodization. It was in recognition of the peculiar dimensions and challenges of Decadence that the idea for a journal of Decadence studies was conceived. *Volupté* was born.

We derive the journal's title from Charles Baudelaire of course, and the recurring line 'Luxe, calme, et volupté' from the poem, 'L'Invitation au voyage', evoking Henri Matisse's 1904 painting of the same name, in the hope that the various associations of the word 'volupté' with fullness and sensuality and volume (in terms of both capacity and bibliophilia) will create the conditions for a rich reading of Decadence. Titles are sometimes difficult to pick but in this case the tribute to Baudelaire is entirely fitting, and we have adapted his own handwritten version of the word 'volupté' from the title page of *Les Fleurs du mal* as the journal's logo.

*Volupté* is part of a series of broader, interlocking research initiatives at Goldsmiths to develop and advance the field of Decadence studies. A subject of study at both undergraduate and postgraduate levels, Decadent literature of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries forms a distinctive and highly popular part of the curriculum and research environment of the Department of English and Comparative Literature (ECL). In 2017, a [Decadence Research Unit](#) (DRU) was established in ECL to lend a public-facing coherence to the ongoing research by academics and early-career researchers in the Department and to provide intellectual anchorage for aspiring postgraduates and early-career academics. In the same year, we also set up a [British Association of Decadence Studies](#) (BADs), the primary aim of which is to generate funding for Decadence events, essay prizes, and modest postgraduate bursaries. Its first annual event will be the conference *Decadence, Magic(k), and the Occult*, with a special issue of *Volupté* on the theme to be published later this year.

This inaugural issue of *Volupté* celebrates the subtle and diverse work of poet, translator, editor, and critic, Arthur Symons (1865-1945), of whom Jackson once said that 'No English writer has a better claim to recognition as an interpreter of the decadence'. Symons revised his ideas about Decadence over a period of fifteen years, attempting a first review of Decadent literature in an article for *Harper's New Magazine* in 1893, later revising it in *The Symbolist Movement in Literature* (1899). By 1908, the year he suffered a nervous breakdown, Symons was drawn to comment on

Decadence again, but by this time he was preoccupied with the notion of a social decadence and seriously disillusioned with a self-destructive materialistic world.

As the two recent conferences on Symons demonstrated (*Arthur Symons: Writing across Arts and Cultures* (Università Iuav di Venezia, 2015) and *Arthur Symons at the Fin de Siècle* (Goldsmiths, 2016)), Symons is a byword for transition. Living so long and writing so much, he brought his changing times to vivid life, championing a cosmopolitan outlook and engaging with urban modernity on Baudelairean terms. A lover of the interstitial, as Leire Barrera-Medrano attests in her article, “‘Inarticulate cries’: Arthur Symons and the Primitivist Modernity of Flamenco”, Symons was fascinated by the Spanish Gypsy, interpreting the flamenco dance as the perfect embodiment of a primitivist and modern aesthetic. Like the other contributors to this volume, Barrera-Medrano treats us to new material and new perspectives on Symons, providing a broader, detailed examination of his rapport with gypsy culture and his early passion for the interconnectedness of the arts.

Bénédicte Coste and Laurel Brake focus on Symons’s journalism, and give us a clear sense of his French connections and the extent to which journalism is at the heart of his writing career. His letters to distinguished French critics and men-of-letters, Coste argues in “‘A capital fellow, full of vivacity & good talk’: Arthur Symons and Gabriel Sarrazin”, show something of his ambition as well as his Gallic sympathies. Symons lived his life among various networks, moving between individuals, countries, and subjects with some acquired ease. In ‘Symons and Print Culture: Journalist, Critic, Book Maker’, Brake uses his article ‘The Painting of the Nineteenth Century’ and its different print incarnations over a four-year period to explore his complex relationship to print culture and the notion of professional ‘influence’. Will Parker’s article, ‘Arthur Symons, Laurence Binyon, and Paterian Aestheticism: Dancers and Dragons’, in contrast, brings an art-historical perspective to bear on a comparison between the Pater-inspired art writings of Binyon and Symons, illuminating not only the divergent directions of Paterian aestheticism in the

post-Victorian era, but the extent to which the writings of critics like Symons and Binyon reflect the tensions between impressionist and educative art writing at the turn of the century.

All the articles published in this issue chart new Decadent territory, either through the use of hitherto unpublished archival material or through new interpretations, new juxtapositions, and together they offer an impressive international perspective on Symons's work. Rita Dirks's piece, 'Hierophants of Decadents: Bliss Carman and Arthur Symons', however, is the starting-point for a bold, new direction in Decadence studies: Canadian Decadence. Using Carman's poem, 'The Eavesdropper' as her focus, she asks, to what extent was the relationship between Carman and Symons the building block of an Anglophone movement of Canadian Decadence? We wait and see. In the spirit of critical creativity and creative critique, David Weir offers a personal essay on 'Decadence and Pleasure', bringing our attention to the voluptuousness of the whole enterprise of *Volupté* and reminding us that excess and pleasure – key components of Decadence after all – are usefully, if not beautifully, at odds with one another. 'Perhaps it is truer to say', Weir states, 'that while the basis for judging pleasure as decadent may once have been *both* moral and aesthetic, more recently the basis is *either* moral or aesthetic'. *Volupté* is brought to a close with what will become a regular feature of the journal's pages: scholarly and entertaining reviews of books (both crepuscular and new), films, theatre, exhibitions, and the like.

Unlike the reviewer of *The Picture of Dorian Gray* in *Lippincott's Monthly Magazine*, who cautioned against 'The New Voluptuousness' as 'always lead[ing] to too much bloodshedding', we are confident that *Volupté* will stimulate new and exciting debates about Decadence. For those 'curious in research', as Symons put it, we hope that the journal will expand the historical and literary origins of the field to embrace the different disciplines and perspectives of critics and creatives of all stripes.

## Acknowledgements

To say that *Volupté* is a team effort is a magnificent understatement, because without the support and know-how of the Departments of ECL and IT, and the Library at Goldsmiths, there would be no journal. We are hugely grateful to our colleagues at Goldsmiths Library for their patience and their precise and expert technical support, particularly in helping us navigate the vagaries of the Open Journals System (OJS). Our thanks to James Bulley, Andrew Gray, Özden Sahin, and Jeremiah Spillane in the Library, and to George Thompson in IT for deftly connecting us to our SquareSpace site. To Lucia Boldrini, Chris Baldick, Michael Simpson, and all colleagues in ECL who championed and advised us along the way, thank you for keeping faith. We might not have progressed very far with our application to the Open Library of Humanities but we benefitted greatly from email exchanges with Martin Eve and Caroline Edwards at Birkbeck, who pointed us in the right direction and gave us the idea of using SquareSpace in conjunction with OJS as our web platform. Thank you. It worked out well. To the illustrious members of our Editorial Advisory Board we are indebted. Without them the journal would be a mere shadow of a white rose in a mirror of silver.

Jane Desmarais, Editor-in-chief

Alice Condé, Deputy editor

Jessica Gossling, Deputy editor

Robert Pruett, Reviews editor

# ‘Inarticulate cries’: Arthur Symons and the Primitivist Modernity of Flamenco

Leire Barrera-Medrano

Birkbeck College, University of London

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.’<sup>1</sup> 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.<sup>22</sup> 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.’<sup>23</sup> 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].<sup>4</sup> 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.<sup>5</sup> 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.<sup>6</sup> 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'.<sup>7</sup> 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'.<sup>8</sup> 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'.<sup>9</sup> 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'.<sup>10</sup> 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'.<sup>11</sup> 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 *gadžje* [non-Romani] like Arthur Symons [...] forms an eccentric bulwark against rationalist modernity, especially in the matrix of London'.<sup>12</sup> 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'.<sup>13</sup> 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.<sup>14</sup> 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.<sup>15</sup> 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.'<sup>16</sup> 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.'<sup>17</sup> 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.'<sup>18</sup> 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.<sup>19</sup> 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'.<sup>20</sup>

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.'<sup>21</sup> 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.'<sup>22</sup> As a result of their uniqueness, these quarters were for Symons 'typically Parisian'.<sup>23</sup> In contrast, the Champs Élysées and the Grand Boulevards, where the majority of English tourists congregated, were the 'least Parisian' areas of the city.<sup>24</sup> 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.<sup>25</sup>

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.<sup>26</sup> 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.<sup>27</sup> ‘The art of the music-hall is admittedly frivolous – the consecration of the frivolous’, admits Symons at the beginning of his essay.<sup>28</sup> Being ‘frivolous’, it becomes ‘culturally peripheral’.<sup>29</sup> 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.<sup>30</sup> His camp views, concludes Faulk, more likely ‘ironized the whole business of taste making’.<sup>31</sup>

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.’<sup>32</sup> 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.'<sup>33</sup> 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'.<sup>34</sup> 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.'<sup>35</sup> The audience in the hall, Symons writes, in a clearly facetious manner, 'was not a distinguished one'.<sup>36</sup> 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.<sup>37</sup>

As camp does, this passage both discloses innocence and corrupts it.<sup>38</sup> 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.'<sup>39</sup> 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'.<sup>40</sup> 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.<sup>41</sup>

In clear allusion to the contemporary ‘Spanish 1898 Disaster’, in this poem Symons portrays a campily pathetic Spain.<sup>42</sup> 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.’<sup>43</sup> 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.<sup>44</sup>

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.’<sup>45</sup> 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’.<sup>46</sup>

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.’<sup>47</sup> 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.’<sup>48</sup> ‘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’.<sup>49</sup> 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.<sup>50</sup> 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.<sup>51</sup>

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’.<sup>52</sup>

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.’<sup>53</sup> 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.’<sup>54</sup> 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.’<sup>55</sup> 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’.<sup>56</sup> 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.<sup>57</sup>

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’.<sup>58</sup> 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).<sup>59</sup> 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? [...]<sup>60</sup>

In the poem 'Spain', the artist Josefa also

[...] sing[s] of Spain, and all  
Clap hands for Spain and you, and for the  
song;<sup>61</sup>

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.'<sup>62</sup> 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'.<sup>63</sup> 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'.<sup>64</sup> The gestural language of the dance seemed 'wonderfully fresh, immediate, and uncompromised by "impurities"', as opposed to 'the Victorian tyranny of "abstraction" and "discursiveness"'.<sup>65</sup> Hence, Dowling concludes, Symons's characteristic portrayal of the dancer as at once 'innocent and yet almost narcissistically or onanistically self-sufficient'.<sup>66</sup> 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.<sup>67</sup>

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.<sup>68</sup>

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.<sup>69</sup>

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'.<sup>70</sup> 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.'<sup>71</sup>

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.’<sup>72</sup> 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.’<sup>73</sup> 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.’<sup>74</sup> 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.’<sup>75</sup>

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’.<sup>76</sup> 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’.<sup>77</sup> 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;<sup>78</sup>

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.'<sup>79</sup> 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',<sup>80</sup> 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.<sup>81</sup> 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.<sup>82</sup> 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.<sup>83</sup> 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.

---

<sup>1</sup> 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*.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 104.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 104-05.

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

<sup>5</sup> 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).

<sup>6</sup> 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.

<sup>7</sup> Arthur Symons, *Dramatis Personae* (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1923), p. 133.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*

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

<sup>10</sup> 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.

<sup>11</sup> Lyon, 'Gadže Modernism', p. 524.

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

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>14</sup> '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.

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

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>17</sup> 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*.

<sup>18</sup> *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.

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

- <sup>20</sup> Symons, 'A Spanish Music-Hall', pp. 147-50.
- <sup>21</sup> Alex Murray, *Landscapes of Decadence: Literature and Place at the Fin de Siècle* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), p. 74.
- <sup>22</sup> Arthur Symons, 'Montmartre and the Latin Quarter', *Colour Studies in Paris* (London: Chapman and Hall, 1918), p. 24.
- <sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 29.
- <sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 23.
- <sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 23-24.
- <sup>26</sup> 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).
- <sup>27</sup> Susan Sontag, 'Notes on "Camp"', in *Against Interpretation and Other Essays* (London: Penguin, 2009), p. 275.
- <sup>28</sup> Symons, 'A Spanish Music-Hall', p. 145.
- <sup>29</sup> Faulk, 'Camp Expertise', p. 53.
- <sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 53-54.
- <sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 54.
- <sup>32</sup> Dowling, *Language and Decadence in the Victorian Fin de Siècle*, p. x.
- <sup>33</sup> Symons, 'A Spanish Music-Hall', p. 148.
- <sup>34</sup> Sontag, 'Notes on "Camp"', pp. 286-89.
- <sup>35</sup> Faulk, 'Camp Expertise', p. 56; Symons, 'A Spanish Music-Hall', p. 146.
- <sup>36</sup> Symons, 'A Spanish Music-Hall', p. 147.
- <sup>37</sup> 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*.
- <sup>38</sup> Sontag, 'Notes on "Camp"', p. 283.
- <sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 283.
- <sup>40</sup> Symons, 'Seville', p. 18; Sontag, 'Notes on "Camp"', p. 288.
- <sup>41</sup> Arthur Symons, 'Spain (To Josefa)', in *Images of Good and Evil* (London: William Heinemann, 1899), pp. 151-52.
- <sup>42</sup> 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'.
- <sup>43</sup> Symons, 'Spain (To Josefa)', p. 152.
- <sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 151.
- <sup>46</sup> Sontag, 'Notes on "Camp"', p. 276.
- <sup>47</sup> Andrew Ross, *No Respect: Intellectuals and Popular Culture* (New York: Routledge, 1989), p. 137.
- <sup>48</sup> Faulk, 'Camp Expertise', p. 57.
- <sup>49</sup> Symons, 'A Spanish Music-Hall', pp. 151-52.
- <sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 145.
- <sup>51</sup> Havelock Ellis, *The Soul of Spain* (London: Constable, 1908), p. 180.
- <sup>52</sup> Faulk, 'Camp Expertise', p. 60.
- <sup>53</sup> Symons, 'A Spanish Music-Hall', p. 155.
- <sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 153.
- <sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 155.
- <sup>56</sup> Faulk, 'Camp Expertise', p. 59.
- <sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>58</sup> Symons, 'A Spanish Music-Hall', p. 156.
- <sup>59</sup> Arthur Symons, 'To a Gitana Dancing (Seville)', in *Images of Good and Evil* (London: William Heinemann, 1899), p. 107.
- <sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 108.
- <sup>61</sup> Symons, 'Spain (To Josefa)', p. 151.
- <sup>62</sup> Symons, 'Moorish Secrets in Spain', p. 103.
- <sup>63</sup> Dowling, *Language and Decadence in the Victorian Fin de Siècle*, p. 239.
- <sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 239-40.
- <sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 241.
- <sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>68</sup> Symons, 'Moorish Secrets in Spain', pp. 104-05.
- <sup>69</sup> Edith Ellis, 'Dolores', in *The Smart Set*, 24.4 (1909), 121-28 (pp. 125-26).
- <sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 126.
- <sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>72</sup> Symons, 'Moorish Secrets in Spain', pp. 104-05.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 103.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>75</sup> Symons, 'A Spanish Music-Hall', p. 154.

<sup>76</sup> Symons, 'The Decadent Movement in Literature', p. 862.

<sup>77</sup> Dowling, *Language and Decadence in the Victorian Fin de Siècle*, pp. 242-43.

<sup>78</sup> Symons, 'To a Gitana Dancing (Seville)', p. 108.

<sup>79</sup> Arthur Symons to Robert Cunninghame Graham, [November] 1898, National Library of Scotland, Cunninghame Graham Papers, Acc.11335, fol. 56.

<sup>80</sup> Symons, 'A Spanish Music-Hall', p. 152.

<sup>81</sup> 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.

<sup>82</sup> 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*.

<sup>83</sup> 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).

‘A capital fellow, full of vivacity & good talk’: Arthur Symons and Gabriel Sarrazin

Bénédicte Coste

University of Burgundy

Arthur Symons is currently regarded as a cultural mediator of the cosmopolitan *fin de siècle*. He stands at the crossroads of distinctive journalistic and literary networks, and of translations in different languages. In the mid-1880s Symons, who had just published *An Introduction to the Study of Browning*, was regarded as a budding critic with a strong interest in French poets and prose writers.<sup>1</sup> From the start of his journalistic career he had taken an interest in French regional<sup>2</sup> and avant-garde literature, praising them in British magazines, before translating poems in *Days and Nights* (1889).<sup>3</sup> Such an interest opened the door of French publications for him through the mediation of the French critic Gabriel Sarrazin (1853-1935), nowadays as neglected as Symons once was. In *La Renaissance de la poésie anglaise, 1798-1889: Shelley, Wordsworth, Coleridge, Tennyson, Robert Browning, Walt Whitman* (1890), Sarrazin favourably discussed *A Study of Browning* and was one of the first French *littérateurs* to consider Symons as a critic of British modern poetry, at the time translated and disseminated in France along with the works of Dante Gabriel Rossetti and A. C. Swinburne.<sup>4</sup>

Firstly, a critic of both literature and the visual arts, Sarrazin exemplifies the early reception of Symons’s criticism in France before he became regarded as a poet by Paul Verlaine and Remy de Gourmont, both of whom praised his third volume of poetry, *London Nights*, in 1895.<sup>5</sup> Verlaine and Gourmont were personally acquainted with Symons<sup>6</sup> and both represent a well-known albeit limited number of French poets and critics who primarily regarded him as a modern British poet. Symons’s transition from a perceived Browningite to an avant-garde poet was enacted when his acquaintanceship with Sarrazin led to his introduction to Gourmont and Verlaine, resulting in his mention of Verlaine and ‘*la Nuance* ... that last fine shade’ in his review of Browning’s *Asolando* in 1890.<sup>7</sup> More explicit references to the French poet and translations soon followed. ‘Clearly, Symons ha[d] shifted his interest from Browning to the French Symbolists’ in *Silhouettes* (1892) and *London*

*Nights* (1895), Karl Beckson and John M. Munro comment.<sup>8</sup> I suggest this shift stemmed from Symons's earlier French correspondence and acquaintanceship with Sarrazin in 1888-89. Symons was attracted to France from the start, but surprisingly his interest in Browning eventually provided him with an entry into French journalistic networks partly through the mediation of Sarrazin.<sup>9</sup>

### **A French Anglophile**

A noted Anglophile from a well-to-do family, Sarrazin was instrumental in introducing British Aestheticism to France and stands as another forgotten, passionate, mediator of modern literature in English.<sup>10</sup> As Lothar Hönninghausen notes, Sarrazin brought later Pre-Raphaelite art to the attention of the French by demonstrating parallels between Pre-Raphaelitism and early Symbolism after he had seen a solo exhibition of the late Rossetti at the Burlington Fine Arts Club in January 1883.<sup>11</sup> Best known today for his correspondence with Walt Whitman and his chapter on the American poet in *La Renaissance de la poésie anglaise*, Sarrazin was primarily a literary critic in a time when literary criticism stood at the crossroads between different new theoretical possibilities while numerous often short-lived little reviews competed with mainstream magazines ensuring a lively debate between proponents of realism, naturalism, and symbolism. France's late-1880s literary world existed along a lively background of continuous shifting literary allegiances, manifestoes, quarrels, and a myriad of new schools vying for recognition.

University-educated Sarrazin also belongs to a lineage of French Anglophile nineteenth-century writers including Joseph Milsand, Hippolyte Taine, Emile Blémont, Paul Bourget, Gabriel Mourey, and Edouard Rod, among others, who acted as cultural mediators of contemporary British writings. As early as 1881, Sarrazin devoted two articles on 'La Poésie anglaise contemporaine' to praise successively Dante Gabriel Rossetti and Algernon Charles Swinburne in the *Revue littéraire et artistique*.<sup>12</sup> The magazine had been created in 1879 and ran until 1882 under the editorship of drama critic Jean de la Leude, publishing fiction, sometimes poetry, articles on French literature, the visual arts, music, drama, and chronicles of European literature. 1881 was a pivotal year for the magazine

which grew in page number in July and began to defend realism and naturalism more forcefully through contributions by Zola, Céard, and Huysmans. At the time Sarrazin appears to have mainly been in charge of British literature with articles on Thomas Carlyle, Benjamin Disraeli, and Orientalism.<sup>13</sup>

His further contribution on 'L'École esthétique en Angleterre' appeared in the newly-established *Revue indépendante* (1884-1897) in November 1884.<sup>14</sup> The *Revue indépendante politique, littéraire et artistique* had recently been set up by Georges Chevrier under the editorship of Félix Fénéon and published poets, novelists, and critics such as Verlaine, Paul Bourget, Émile Hennequin, Laurent Tailhade, Charles Morice, Jean Lorrain, Stéphane Mallarmé, Edmond de Goncourt, Maurice Barrès, and Léo d'Orfer. Like other magazines, in its beginnings, it included sections on 'Science, philosophie, politique', literary and art criticism, published poetry, and chronicled French literary life including other magazines or publications it deemed interesting. From 1886 onwards, the *Revue indépendante* became one of the most important venues for Symbolist prose and poetry, publishing writings by Frenchmen Symons would later be writing on or be acquainted with. Sarrazin's 'L'École esthétique en Angleterre' was devoted to Rossetti and Swinburne: 'Deux d'entre les Esthétiques, tous deux reconnus hors de pair' [Two among the Aesthetics, both acknowledged exceeding comparison].<sup>15</sup> Sarrazin insisted on Rossetti's double craftsmanship and personality, and praised Swinburne's verse, 'de beaucoup la plus remarquable du temps présent' [by far the most remarkable of the present times], which he deemed 'plutôt double, déroutée par la fréquente irréductibilité de la Beauté Plastique à la Beauté morale' [rather double, derailed by the frequent irreducibility between Plastic and Moral Beauty].<sup>16</sup>

In 1885 Sarrazin included those articles in his first monograph, *Poètes modernes de l'Angleterre*, where he adopted a Tainian approach to distinguish Walter Savage Landor, Percy Bysshe Shelley, Elizabeth Browning, and Swinburne as modern British poets, from 'deux autres qui font contraste' [two others standing in contrast]: John Keats and Dante Gabriel Rossetti whose works 'dévie de la ligne anglophone' [deviate from the English-speaking lineage].<sup>17</sup> Their poems displayed some

‘infiltrations exotiques’ [exotic infiltrations] similar to France where

nombre de nos écrivains se composent un bouquet de toutes les conceptions humaines. A l’arôme vif et fin d’idées et de fantasies rapides, perçantes, ironiques, en un mot françaises, ils entremêlent le parfum lourd, morbide, de théories et d’imagination capiteuses transplantées d’autres pays.

[a number of our writers are composing a medley of all the human conceptions. To the piquant and subtle aroma of ideas and of swift, piercing and ironical fantasies, they mingle the heavy, morbid perfume of strong theories and imaginations transplanted from other countries.]<sup>18</sup>

Sarrazin was alert to nascent *fin-de-siècle* cosmopolitanism<sup>19</sup> and set himself the task of providing its French branch with ‘fragments de traductions’ [fragments of translation] to help the scholars realize how limitless and grandiose the English poetical imagination was.<sup>20</sup>

In his chapter on Rossetti Sarrazin depicted the ‘peintre-poète’ [painter-poet] as a ‘âme malade’ [sick soul] full of ‘visions, demi-poétiques et demi-picturales’ [half poetic, half painterly visions] who had sometimes mistaken painting for poetry in his ballads.<sup>21</sup> An heir to Dante, Rossetti had presented remarkable feminine figures including that of the ‘Blessed Damozel’ which Sarrazin quoted in his own translation.<sup>22</sup> That translation, which was to prove important for Symons’s journalistic career, was a modified version of a former translation of ‘La damoiselle élue’ which had first appeared in a complete version in *La revue contemporaine* in 1885.<sup>23</sup>

### **Defending Sarrazin**

The acquaintanceship between Sarrazin and Symons cannot be precisely dated but may have originated when Symons came to the defence of Sarrazin’s translation of Rossetti in a letter to the editor of the *Whitehall Review*. On 12 January 1888, the weekly magazine reviewed several works on Rossetti by British and by French critics.<sup>24</sup> Noting the current craze for Rossetti’s poetry, it especially paid attention to Clémence Couve’s translation into French of ‘The Blessed Damozel’.<sup>25</sup> Couve proposed in fact two versions of Rossetti’s poem, one ‘literal’, keeping the sonnet form, and the other ‘literary’, reading like a prose poem. The reviewer found it ‘an odd experience’ to read Rossetti’s ‘fine gold of perfected verse transmuted to the baser metal of foreign prose’.<sup>26</sup> As Couve

had not kept Rossetti's sonnet form in her 'literary' version, her translation suggested 'some precious and priceless wine drunk from a tin cannikin.'<sup>27</sup> Such was also the opinion of another French critic, Theodor de Wyzewa (1862-1917), presented as the critic from the *Revue indépendante*, itself 'the organ of today's Jeunes-France', who thought Rossetti's verse tainted with 'vain dexterities' and Joséphin Péladan's lengthy preface to Couve unlikely to make him change his view.<sup>28</sup> The replacement of Fénéon by Wyzewa as editor for the new series the *Revue indépendante* in November 1886 had resulted in a different stance, although the *Revue* claimed to be neutral and promote no specific literary school.

The *Whitehall Review* also mentioned 'a little book of essays on English poetry published in France some time ago' which had devoted 'several pages to an estimate of Rossetti's genius' but the author of which escaped memory. Rejoicing however that 'French authors and critics should quarrel over Rossetti at all', the anonymous reviewer concluded by a stern dismissal: 'we can leave Clemence Couve and Josephin Peladan and Theodor de Wyzewa to fight out their quarrel'.<sup>29</sup>

Symons remembered the name of Sarrazin whom he defended in the next issue of the *Whitehall Review* (19 January 1888) as a 'judicious, thoughtful, conscientious' critic.<sup>30</sup> Even though he rated Sarrazin's 1885 essay on Rossetti 'the poorest of the collection', he mentioned *Poètes modernes de l'Angleterre* whose essays on Landor, Mrs Browning, and Swinburne's earlier works were 'full of excellent things' although they were devoid of novelty to a British critic.<sup>31</sup> Symons praised Sarrazin for 'knowing the English language perfectly [...]. His translations, of which he is rightly liberal, are as close as translations can well be.'<sup>32</sup> Symons also noted that Sarrazin was at work on 'a second volume of English studies' on Browning, Alfred Tennyson, and Walt Whitman. Due to appear in *La nouvelle revue*, Sarrazin's essay on Whitman left Symons dubious as to the French reception of Whitman: 'One would scarcely suppose that the "Leaves of Grass," however carefully transplanted, are ever likely to flourish very vigorously on French soil.'<sup>33</sup>

At the time a promising literary journalist signing his letter to the editor from Nuneaton, Symons however displays a fair knowledge of the French literary scene and French *littérateurs*. It is

unclear when he started to correspond with Sarrazin – Samuel Taylor Coleridge’s biographer James Dykes Campbell may have been instrumental in introducing the critics – and exchanged books but Symons’s January letter to the editor of the *Whitehall Review* shows that he had heard about Sarrazin and possibly read him before 1888, and that he partly relied on him for his education in contemporary French literature. In a letter dated 2 February 1888, Symons refuted a Tennysonian lineage for his poetry, mentioning Sarrazin as a stronger influence.

In a letter dated 10 April 1888, Sarrazin informed Symons of his intention to travel to London in May or June, and Symons wrote to Dykes Campbell:

[Sarrazin] seems quite excited at the idea (‘cette idée-là me fait battre le cœur à l’avance’), and most anxious to see me, & ‘causer longuement’ (I don’t know in what language, but I sincerely hope his English is better than my French!) It will be very pleasant to meet him; we have corresponded for some time & exchanged books & articles.<sup>34</sup>

Symons also mentions *Poètes Modernes de l’Angleterre* which he had read by this time: ‘Do you know his “Poètes Modernes de l’Angleterre”?’ It is a good book, about which I wrote a letter to the Whitehall Review a month or two ago. I shall probably come to London for a few days, & see as much of him as I can.’<sup>35</sup> Sarrazin’s trip was however delayed<sup>36</sup> and he sent Symons, still at Nuneaton, a postcard on 3 May 1888 to announce his next trip to Britain and thank him:

J’aurais déjà dû depuis longtemps, mon cher ami, vous remercier pour mes feuillets, je le fais un peu tard, parce que je veux faire le plus de travail possible avant de partir pour l’Angleterre, et je remets ce départ à deux ou trois mois; j’ai encore tout à faire. Ce qui n’empêche pas que je suis décidé plus que jamais à aller là-bas cet été. C’est en effet mon livre qu’avait dû recevoir Mr. Dykes Campbell que je vous prie de saluer de ma part.

[I should have thanked you, my good friend, a long while ago, for my sheets; I am doing it a little late because I want to do as much work as possible before leaving for England and because I am delaying my departure by two or three months as I have so much to do. Which does not prevent me from having the staunchest intention of travelling there this summer. Indeed, it is my book that Mr. Dykes Campbell should have received.]<sup>37</sup>

We do not know what ‘feuillets’ Sarrazin refers to: are they proofs or manuscripts that Symons may have read and possibly corrected? In the same letter, Sarrazin announced the publication of his study on Whitman in *La nouvelle revue*.<sup>38</sup> ‘Mon étude sur Whitman a paru avant hier dans la Nouvelle Revue. Malheureusement on ne m’en donne pas de numéro; je vous enverrai des feuilles

d'épreuves que j'ai'. [My study on Whitman was published yesterday in la Nouvelle Revue. Unfortunately, no one has given me a copy: I shall send you some proofs that I have.]<sup>39</sup> The mention of his study on Whitman<sup>40</sup> and his intention of sending Symons some proofs indicate Sarrazin's willingness to engage in collaborative work with a younger lesser-known critic. Ironically Whitman was later to prove a matter of controversy between Sarrazin and Vielé-Griffin, both of whom Symons read carefully.

Sarrazin later spent two days with Symons who commented in a letter to Dykes (10 September 1888): 'He is a capital fellow, full of vivacity & good talk – and singularly genial and kind-hearted. He has given me all kinds of French literary information.'<sup>41</sup> At the time, Sarrazin seems to have been the main conduit of French literature for Symons then engaged in an essay on Villiers with the objective of introducing him to the British.<sup>42</sup> Likewise Sarrazin may have benefitted from Symons's knowledge of Browning, and English.

Both men continued to correspond with each other. Still working on his articles on Villiers de l'Isle-Adam<sup>43</sup> and Henrik Ibsen,<sup>44</sup> Symons soon completed an ambitious reading programme including François Villon, Molière, Charles Baudelaire, Théodore de Banville, Pierre Loti, Bourget, and Stendhal's *Le Rouge et le noir* (1830).<sup>45</sup> He was also planning the launch of his *Days and Nights*, copies of which he wanted to send to Leconte de Lisle, Richard Garnett, Bourget, James Darmesteter, and Sarrazin. On 27 July 1889, Symons mentioned his intention of concentrating on his poetry, putting aside French projects. He writes of his intention 'to get all the weed out of my Fleurs du Mal'.<sup>46</sup>

Symons's and Sarrazin's conversations in September 1888 may have led Symons to introduce Sarrazin to Harry Quilter who promised to publish his essay on Browning in the short-lived *Universal Review* (1888-90).<sup>47</sup> The choice of the newly-established illustrated magazine was appropriate as the *Universal Review* featured the same sections and catered for a similar readership as that of the French magazines Sarrazin published in. Acting as a mediator of French criticism into Britain, Symons also inched his way into recognition as Sarrazin's article quoted *A Study of*

*Robert Browning*. Symons may have further surmised that Harry Quilter would ask the Frenchman for a translation of his essays on the English poets to be published simultaneously with the French version. On 6 August 1889, Symons mentions Sarrazin's article on Browning, fearing the quality of the translation of his own words under Sarrazin's pen. Another long letter shows him relieved to discover that Sarrazin's article appeared in French but quoted directly from *A Study of Browning*.<sup>48</sup> The same March issue also included Symons's 'Henrik Ibsen'.<sup>49</sup> In 1890 Quilter also reprinted Sarrazin's 'Walt Whitman' as it had appeared in *La nouvelle revue* in May 1888.<sup>50</sup> Unfortunately the magazine did not provide Sarrazin with another opportunity to make his ideas known in Britain as it folded.

In his early correspondence with Sarrazin in January 1888, Symons had mentioned the twin projects of translating Villiers de l'Isle-Adam's *Contes cruels* and publishing an article in *The Woman's World*.<sup>51</sup> His article in Wilde's magazine included a portrait with which Symons thought the Frenchman would be 'fort content'.<sup>52</sup> Even if he held the writings of Honoré de Balzac, Théophile Gautier, and Prosper Mérimée in dear esteem and mentioned his project of an introduction to Daudet's *Contes* in translation to compete with Andrew Lang's tales, Symons still wanted to be the champion of Villiers in Britain. And it was possibly in aid of Symons that Gourmont met an ailing Villiers in 1888. On 22 February 1889, Symons mentions Gourmont, 'a friend of Villiers', in his letter to Dykes Campbell.<sup>53</sup> Symons had previously written to Gourmont on 18 January 1889 to ask him about a translation of *Contes cruels* that he would like to 'revise ... if any suitable translator and publisher could be found'.<sup>54</sup> Symons also mentions his forthcoming volume of poetry and refers to Sarrazin who obviously put him into contact with Gourmont. This was the beginning of a long-lasting friendship between Symons and Gourmont, at the time a rising critic and writer who would soon translate 'A Litany of Lethe' and review Symons's *Days and Nights* in the newly-established *Mercure de France*.<sup>55</sup>

Sarrazin and Symons continued to correspond and see each other, for instance when Sarrazin came to Britain in June 1889 with drama critic Antonin Bunand<sup>56</sup> 'who—alas for me !—doesn't

know a word of English', Symons deplored.<sup>57</sup> The three of them went to see a performance of Ibsen's *A Doll's House*.<sup>58</sup> When Symons went for a six-day trip in Paris with Havelock Ellis in September 1889 for the Universal Exhibition he called at Sarrazin's.<sup>59</sup>

Not only did Sarrazin mentor Symons in French literature, he also tutored him in French critical writings and should be credited for having introduced Symons to the works of Émile Hennequin (1859-1888). Mentioning the untimely death of the critic on 12 July to Dykes Campbell, Symons calls him '[Sarrazin's] intimate friend, a young critic of remarkable talent who had just sent me his new book, *La critique scientifique*, which seemed to me of the most remarkable attempts at erecting a science that had ever been taken in hand'.<sup>60</sup> Symons's first idea on reading Hennequin was to have his critical writings translated into English and published in Britain.<sup>61</sup> Hennequin's death put a stop to his project; another element contributing to its definitive end was the acceptance of Symons's first volume of poetry by Macmillan, 'the publisher par excellence'.<sup>62</sup> Symons was not to become Hennequin's mediator in Britain but arguably, Hennequin's ambitious project of 'esthopsychologie', a 'science des œuvres d'art considérées comme signes' [science of works of art understood as signs], may have exerted some influence on the later Symons.<sup>63</sup>

Hennequin's death left Sarrazin with the task of following in his footsteps in a time when literature stood at a fascinating crossroads which would branch out into the multifaceted currents of the 1890s, including Symbolism and the psychological novel. While he was befriending Symons, Sarrazin published 'La littérature psychologique actuelle' in *La Nouvelle Revue* (March 1889) to describe the 'principal des courants qui arrivent' [main currents that are coming] namely the 'mouvement de haute analyse qui gagne peu à peu toutes les branches des lettres' [movement of higher analysis which progressively wins over all areas of letters], and which must be related to 'l'évolution scientifique générale' [the general scientific evolution].<sup>64</sup> Sarrazin acknowledged that naturalism's excessive insistence on physiology had led to a quandary contemporary French writers could escape only by embracing psychological analysis. Citing Loti and Édouard Rod's *Le Sens de la vie* as instances of that development, Sarrazin appeared quite conversant with the psychological

studies of Alexander Bain, Émil du Bois-Reymond, and Hermann von Helmholtz in order to vindicate the psychological turn of the French novel.<sup>65</sup> That new current belonged to 'l'école d'analyse française' [the school of French analysis], both contemporaneous with the recent discovery of the Russian novel and opposed to a 'mouvement parallèle, tout d'imagination pure, celui-là, et s'en allant vers le rêve' [parallel movement, all of pure imagination, going towards the dream].<sup>66</sup> Along with the late Émile Hennequin, Sarrazin contended, Bourget was to be seen as the 'l'initiateur critique' [critical initiator] of that movement.<sup>67</sup> It comes therefore as no surprise that Sarrazin should dedicate the second volume of his critical essays upon 'les grands classiques de la poésie anglaise de ce siècle' [the great classics of English poetry of this century] to Bourget whose conservative *Le Disciple* (1889) had taken the French literary world by surprise. In 1890, *La Renaissance de la poésie anglaise* also cited Symons's *A Study of Browning* favourably.

Arguing that the 'renaissance de la poésie anglaise' [renaissance of English poetry] had begun in 1798 with the Romantics, Sarrazin still used a Tainian approach (but argued that Shelley's universalism transcended Taine's race and milieu) and sought to study 'la spontanéité de la vie intérieure' [the spontaneity of inner life].<sup>68</sup> British poets had developed a sustained 'vie de l'âme' [life of the soul] that Sarrazin had spent some ten anxiety-laden years studying with the certainty that he would come out fortified in his faith in 'le sublime, le culte des héros, l'admiration pour le caractère' [the sublime, the worship of the heroes, the admiration for the character].<sup>69</sup> Along with Russian novelists and 'voyants français' [French seers], British poets heralded the future of 'l'humanité démocratique et scientifique' [democratic and scientific humanity].<sup>70</sup> Mary Robinson, Mathilde Blind, and that 'petit groupe de jeunes écrivains français d'avant-garde épris de la Psyché moderne' [little group of young avant-garde French writers enamoured with the modern Psyche] heralded some 'évolution nouvelle' [novel evolution] that Sarrazin's critical writings aimed at ushering.<sup>71</sup>

Sarrazin's chapter on Browning's 'œuvre typiquement anglaise, œuvre de l'esprit d'un peuple' [typically English oeuvre, a work of the spirit of one people] depicted the poet as the poet of

individuality and individuals, displaying a complete ‘Théâtre de l’Âme’ [Theatre of the Soul] with the aim of promoting the great moral force men had to find within themselves.<sup>72</sup> Sarrazin knew that he was following in the footsteps of Milsand’s 1851 article in the *Revue des Deux Mondes*, to which he refers, but he also mentions a ‘jeune poète anglais’ [young English poet] and commandeered Symons’s recent *A Study of Browning* by quoting from it.<sup>73</sup> Sarrazin concluded that ‘le théâtre de Robert Browning est, en dernière analyse, l’apothéose de la lutte, de la tentation, de l’épreuve morale’ [Robert Browning’s drama is ultimately the apotheosis of struggle, of temptation, and of moral trial].<sup>74</sup>

Published at the distinguished Perrin publishing house, *La Renaissance de la poésie anglaise* was awarded the Prix Bordin. Shortly afterwards, Sarrazin was sent as a magistrate to New Caledonia, thereby closing the chapter of his friendship with Symons.<sup>75</sup> A dedicated traveller, he turned to autobiographical prose from 1892 and limited his literary activity.<sup>76</sup>

### **(Mis)Translating Whitman**

When Symons returned to Paris from mid-March to June 1890, staying at the Hôtel Corneille on the Left Bank with Havelock Ellis, his place within a network of writers, poets, and journalists as a Browningite and a poet was already carved. Thanks partly to Sarrazin, Symons was conversant with many of the journalistic networks and magazines, including *les petites revues* of the 1880s which increasingly functioned as alternatives to the dailies and mainstream periodicals.<sup>77</sup> Most of those were short-lived, versatile in their staff and ideals, becoming overnight the opposite of their former selves through the arrival of a new editor bringing his own network of contributors. Such a situation paralleled the situation Symons encountered in Britain as he was attempting to gain recognition both as a critic and as a poet. Sarrazin had smoothed the path to his nascent recognition in France.

One of the magazines Symons might have later read in France was *Entretiens politiques et littéraires* (1890-1893) established in 1890 by Francis Vielé-Griffin, Paul Adam, and Henri de Régner to counter naturalism. Under the editorship of Bernard Lazare, known for his anarchist

leanings, the monthly included contributions by Gourmont, Henri de Régnier, Stuart Merrill, and Vielé-Griffin who subsidized the journal.<sup>78</sup> Strongly political, the magazine engaged in polemical language to defend anarchism and modern art.

The April 1892 issue included ‘Autobiographie de Walt Whitman’ by Vielé-Griffin, one of the first promoters of the *vers libre* in French in *Joies* (1889).<sup>79</sup> American-born but educated in France, Vielé-Griffin presented the recently deceased poet. In another unsigned snippet, Vielé-Griffin sent a Parthian arrow:

Nous avons démontré que M. Gabriel Sarrazin (au moment précis de son existence où il ‘traduisait’ Whitman et Coleridge) ignorait *littéralement* la langue anglaise; de là à nier qu’il soit ‘le frère des Shelley, des Browning et des Tennyson’ comme le veut M. Béranger, il y a loin. Toutefois, ce dernier en use librement avec les génies anglo-saxons, à notre avis, et semble en s’assimilant aux meilleurs d’entre eux, trop oublier le chantre de Lisette, qu’il ne faut pas mépriser.

[We have demonstrated that Mr. Gabriel Sarrazin, at the moment he was ‘translating’ Whitman and Coleridge, was literally ignorant of the English tongue. To deny he is ‘the brother of the likes of Shelley, Browning and Tennyson’, as Mr. Béranger has, seems stretching the point a little bit. Still, we are of the opinion that the former freely uses Anglo-Saxon geniuses and, by over-assimilating himself to the best of them, seems to over-forget the latter’s rights one should not despise.]<sup>80</sup>

For Vielé-Griffin, Sarrazin’s criticism was founded upon a faulty understanding of English, something that Symons had hinted at when wondering in which language his conversation with Sarrazin would take place. Symons had commanded Sarrazin’s translations of Rossetti in 1888 but his fluency in French then may have been debatable. More interestingly Vielé-Griffin mentions Laforgue’s translation of Whitman (1886) in the avant-garde magazine *La Vogue*.<sup>81</sup> He continues: ‘J’ai offert *pour rien* une traduction de Whitman à l’éditeur Savine, il me fut gracieusement répondu que l’auteur de *Brins d’Herbe* était “trop peu connu” [I offered *for nothing* a translation of Whitman to Savine, the publisher. I was graciously answered that the author of *Leaves of Grass* was “too little known”].<sup>82</sup> Savine may or may not have read Sarrazin’s 1888 article and his 1890 collection following in the footsteps of Blémont, the first French critic to publish a favourable article on Whitman in the *Renaissance littéraire et artistique* on 8 June 1872.<sup>83</sup> Vielé-Griffin was claiming the recognition he felt both Jules Laforgue and himself had been denied by older *littérateurs* with a

firmer publishing network. Translation accuracy was the point where younger avant-garde poets asserted their legitimacy by contesting more established critics. In Britain Symons would be faced with a similar challenge which he attempted to solve by contributing to a diversity of periodicals ranging from the most established (the *Athenaeum*) to the most avant-garde (*The Savoy*) in the 1890s. He would also assess and contest the quality of translations.

Symons was careful to dissociate his criticism from his poetry and his early recognition by different critics with different literary proclivities, who contributed to various magazines and engaged in apparently watertight networks, enables us to assess how he could fare as a critic and as a poet on both shores of the Channel. The permanent apparition, transformation, and disappearance of avant-garde magazines competing with more established mainstream periodicals, the shifting poetic allegiances, the overlapping networks of editors, contributors, the literary strategic friendships or sudden skirmishes composed a French literary field which Symons learnt to navigate at least in two countries. In the 'Preface' to *Plays, Acting and Music: A Book of Theory* (1903), Symons claimed to be 'gradually working my way towards the complete expression of a theory or system of Aesthetics, of all the arts', his latest collection of essays being only a step towards it along with *The Symbolist Movement in Literature*, the forthcoming *Studies in the Seven Arts, Cities, Spiritual Adventures* and poetry.<sup>84</sup> If he no longer quoted Sarrazin after 1889, he kept Hennequin's intellectual wide-ranging ambition in his own ambition to master 'the universal science of beauty'.<sup>85</sup> This time Symons was attempting to embrace life and the arts but his project departed from Hennequin's project of writing 'l'histoire tout entière doit être écrite' [the history of the intellectual development of humanity] by being scattered over several volumes.<sup>86</sup> The nineteenth-century's attempt at finding some unified all-embracing system collated in one definitive volume was no more.

---

<sup>1</sup> Arthur Symons, *An Introduction to the Study of Browning* (London: Cassell, 1886).

- <sup>2</sup> Arthur Symons, 'Frédéric Mistral', *National Review*, 36 (December 1886), 659-700. His article was signalled as 'un article très enthousiaste de M. A. Symons' in the anonymous section of 'Publications' of the *Revue contemporaine* in February 1886, 144.
- <sup>3</sup> Symons translated Villiers de l'Isle-Adam's 'L'aveu' along with poems by Leconte de Lisle, Gautier, Joachim du Bellay, and Heinrich Heine. See Arthur Symons, *Selected Early Poems*, ed. by Jane Desmarais and Chris Baldick (London: MHRA, 2017), p. 8.
- <sup>4</sup> Gabriel Sarrazin, *La Renaissance de la poésie anglaise, 1798-1889: Shelley, Wordsworth, Coleridge, Tennyson, Robert Browning, Walt Whitman* (Paris: Perrin, 1890).
- <sup>5</sup> Paul Verlaine, 'Deux poètes anglais', *Revue encyclopédique* (July 1895), 325-26; reprinted in 'Deux Poètes anglais Arthur Symons L. Cranmer Byng', *Œuvres en prose complètes*, texte établi, présenté et annoté par Jacques Borel (Paris: Gallimard, Bibliothèque de la Pléiade, 2002), pp. 954-61.
- See also Remy de Gourmont's 'Livres', in *Le Mercure de France* (August 1895), 243. Launched anew in 1890 by Alfred Valette with the help of Gourmont, the *Mercure* was committed to literary cosmopolitanism, and from June 1890 onwards, Gourmont's short pieces in the 'Revue des revues' and 'Littérature anglaise' sections of the *Mercure* made Symons familiar to French readers both as a poet and as a translator as he reviewed nearly all publications by Symons.
- <sup>6</sup> Symons met Verlaine on 29 April 1890.
- <sup>7</sup> Arthur Symons, 'Browning's Last Poems', *The Academy* (11 January 1890), 19.
- <sup>8</sup> Beckson and Munro note that 'Both collections [*Silhouettes* and *London Nights*] suggest tone and texture of particular moments'. Karl Beckson and John M. Munro, 'Symons, Browning, and the Development of the Modern Aesthetic', *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900*, 10 (1970), 687-99 (p. 96).
- <sup>9</sup> Arthur Symons, 'A Fancy of Ferishtah', *The Academy* (13 December 1884), 393.
- <sup>10</sup> In a letter to Dykes Campbell (25 June 1888), Symons noted that '[Sarrazin] seems to have been well-received in London & had dined with Henry James, Alfred Austin [...] & has been a good deal I think to the Rossetti's and Madox Brownes's.' His letter of 10 September 1888 also confirms Sarrazin's interest for the modern visual and literary art as he intended to stay in London until 27 September to meet Oscar Wilde. Arthur Symons, Dykes Campbell. London, British Library, Dykes Campbell Papers, vol. 1, MS 49522, folio 218-9 and 248-51.
- <sup>11</sup> Lothar Hönnighausen, *The Symbolist Tradition in English Literature: A Study of Pre-Raphaelitism and Fin de Siècle*, trans. by Gisela Hönnighausen (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), p. 2.
- No less than 153 works by Rossetti were exhibited. See Dante Gabriel Rossetti, *Pictures, Drawings, designs and studies by the late Gabriel Dante Rossetti, with a Biographical Sketch by H. V. Tebbs* (London: Printed for the Burlington Fine Arts Club, 1883).
- <sup>12</sup> Gabriel Sarrazin, 'La poésie anglaise contemporaine. Dante Gabriel Rossetti', *La Revue littéraire et artistique*, 13 (1 July 1881), 298-304, and 'La poésie anglaise contemporaine: Algernon Charles Swinburne', *La Revue littéraire et artistique*, 22 (15 November 1881), 592-97.
- <sup>13</sup> Gabriel Sarrazin, 'Benjamin Disraeli', *La Revue littéraire et artistique*, 10 (15 May 1881), 224-27; Gabriel Sarrazin, 'Les Progrès de l'orientalisme', *La Revue littéraire et artistique*, 9 (1 May 1881), 209-10.
- <sup>14</sup> Gabriel Sarrazin, 'L'École esthétique en Angleterre', *La Revue indépendante* (November 1884), 29-31, 164-68.
- La Revue indépendante*, founded by Georges Chevrier, was a monthly magazine that ran between May 1884 and April 1885, with a bi-monthly in May 1885. It stopped between June and November 1886, to start anew as a monthly from November 1886. Between 1884 and the first months of 1885 the magazine was edited by Félix Fénéon, later replaced by Theodor de Wyzewa and Edouard Dujardin.
- <sup>15</sup> Sarrazin, 'L'École esthétique en Angleterre', p. 164. All translations in this article are my own.
- <sup>16</sup> Sarrazin, 'L'École esthétique en Angleterre', p. 168.
- <sup>17</sup> Gabriel Sarrazin, *Poètes modernes de l'Angleterre* (Paris: Paul Ollendorf, 1885), p. ii.
- <sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. iii & iv-v.
- <sup>19</sup> In *Poètes modernes de l'Angleterre*, Sarrazin also argued that the German Romantics had influenced the French language and turned it into 'une langue métaphorique et picturale' (p. 6).
- <sup>20</sup> Sarrazin, *Poètes modernes de l'Angleterre*, pp. v & vii.
- <sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 252, 234, 247.
- <sup>22</sup> Sarrazin, 'Dante Gabriel Rossetti', in *Les Poètes modernes de l'Angleterre*, pp. 263-69.
- <sup>23</sup> Gabriel Sarrazin, 'La damoiselle élue', *La revue contemporaine* (1885), 373-78.
- <sup>24</sup> [Unsigned], 'Rossetti in French and English', *Whitehall Review*, 609 (12 January 1888).
- The review discussed *The Collected Works of Dante Gabriel Rossetti* (London: Ellis and Elvey, 1887); *The Life of Dante Gabriel Rossetti*, ed. by Joseph Knight (London: Walter Scott, 1887); *La Revue indépendante* (Paris, August 1887); *La Maison de vie. Sonnets de Dante Gabriel Rossetti*, traduit par Clémence Couve (Paris: Lemerre, 1887).
- <sup>25</sup> Dante Gabriel Rossetti, *La Maison de vie. Sonnets de Dante Gabriel Rossetti traduits littéralement et littérairement par Clémence Couve* (Paris: Lemerre, 1887).
- <sup>26</sup> [Unsigned], 'Rossetti in French and English', 609.
- <sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*

- <sup>30</sup> Arthur Symons, 'Rossetti's "House of Life"', *Whitehall Review*, 610 (19 January 1888), 13.
- <sup>31</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>32</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>33</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>34</sup> Symons, letter to Dykes Campbell (10 April 1888), Dykes Campbell MS 49522, folio 202.
- <sup>35</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>36</sup> On 14 May, Symons mentions the book sent by Sarrazin through Dykes Campbell and comments: 'It is in some ways a pity his visit will be delayed'. Dykes Campbell MS 49522, folio 211.
- <sup>37</sup> Symons, letter to Dykes Campbell (3 May 1888), Dykes Campbell MS 49522, folio 213.
- <sup>38</sup> *La nouvelle revue* published serialized fiction and articles on literature and politics.
- <sup>39</sup> Symons, letter to Dykes Campbell (3 May 1888), Dykes Campbell MS 49522, folio 213.
- <sup>40</sup> Gabriel Sarrazin, 'Walt Whitman', *La nouvelle revue*, 55 (May-June 1888), 162-84. Sarrazin's essay discusses Pantheism, The New World, and *Leaves of Grass*. He also links the poet to Oriental mysticism and compares him to ancient prophets. The article was favourably received and Sarrazin sent it to Whitman in 1889. Whitman was impressed and began to correspond with Sarrazin.
- <sup>41</sup> Symons, letter to Dykes Campbell (10 September 1888), Dykes Campbell MS 49522, folio 218-9.
- <sup>42</sup> See Symons, letter to Dykes Campbell (21 September 1888), Dykes Campbell MS 49522, folio 281.
- <sup>43</sup> See Arthur Symons, 'Letter to the Editor: Villiers de l'Isle-Adam', *Athenaeum* (14 September 1889), 354, and 'Villiers de l'Isle-Adam', *The Woman's World*, 2 (October 1889), 657-60.
- <sup>44</sup> See Arthur Symons, 'Henrik Ibsen', *Universal Review*, 3 (15 April 1889), 567-74.
- <sup>45</sup> See Symons's letter of 19-21 October 1888, written while he was still in Buckingham. Dykes Campbell MS 49522, folio 258-64.
- <sup>46</sup> Symons, letter to Dykes (27 July 1888), Dykes Campbell MS 49522, folio 233.
- <sup>47</sup> See Symons, letter to Dykes Campbell (11 December 1888), Dykes Campbell MS 49522, folio 280-82.
- <sup>48</sup> Gabriel Sarrazin, 'Robert Browning', *Universal Review*, 10 (1889), 230-46.
- <sup>49</sup> Arthur Symons, 'Henrik Ibsen', *Universal Review*, 3.12 (1889), 567-74.
- <sup>50</sup> Gabriel Sarrazin, 'Walt Whitman', *Universal Review*, 6 (1890), 247-69.
- <sup>51</sup> In a letter to Dykes Campbell (2-3 January 1888), Symons writes: 'Now that so much French rubbish is being translated I should like to see those Contes cruels taken in hand for a change.' Dykes Campbell MS 49522, folio 177-81.
- <sup>52</sup> Symons, letter to Dykes Campbell (17 July 1888), Dykes Campbell Add MS 49523, folio 10.
- <sup>53</sup> Arthur Symons, letter to Dykes Campbell (22 February 1889), in *Selected Letters*, ed. by Karl Beckson and John M. Munro (Houndsmills: Macmillan, 1989), p. 45.
- <sup>54</sup> See Arthur Symons, letter to Remy de Gourmont (16 January 1889), in *Correspondance. Vol 1. 1867-1899*, collected, prefaced and annotated by Vincent Gogibu (Paris: Éditions du Sandre, 2010), p. 173.
- <sup>55</sup> See also Remy de Gourmont, 'Littérature anglaise', *Le Mercure de France*, 6 (June 1890), 219-20.
- <sup>56</sup> See Antonin Bunand, *Les Petits Lundis. Notes de critiques* (Paris: Librairie académique Didier, Perrin et Cie, 1890).
- <sup>57</sup> Arthur Symons, 'Letter to James Dykes Campbell', 15 June 1889, reprinted in *Selected Letters*, p. 49.
- <sup>58</sup> At the time Sarrazin and Bunand stayed at the Madox Browns'.
- <sup>59</sup> Symons, letter to James Dykes Campbell [6 October 1889], *Selected Letters*, p. 52.
- <sup>60</sup> Symons, letter to Dykes Campbell (18 July 1888), Dykes Campbell MS 49522, folio 227.
- <sup>61</sup> In the same letter, Symons writes that: 'Someone to whom I lent the [Hennequin] book suggested the feasibility of having it translated into English, I had thought how pleasant it would be to write to the author & make him the proposal.' (Ibid.)
- <sup>62</sup> Symons, letter to Dykes Campbell (25 June 1888), Dykes Campbell MS 49522, folio 216.
- <sup>63</sup> Emile Hennequin, *La Critique scientifique* (Paris: Perrin, 1888).
- <sup>64</sup> Gabriel Sarrazin, 'La Littérature psychologique actuelle', *La Nouvelle Revue* (March 1889), 299-310 (p. 299).  
*La Nouvelle Revue* (1879-1940), edited by Jean de la Leude, published Zola, Coppée, Céard, Huysmans, and Édouard Rod among others.
- <sup>65</sup> In 'La Littérature psychologique actuelle', Sarrazin writes that 'l'homme va se retirer dans son âme comme dans son dernier asile' (p. 310).
- <sup>66</sup> Sarrazin, 'La Littérature psychologique actuelle', pp. 304 & 299.
- <sup>67</sup> Ibid., p. 305.
- <sup>68</sup> Sarrazin, *La Renaissance de la poésie anglaise*, pp. v & viii.
- <sup>69</sup> Ibid., pp. ix & xi-xii.
- <sup>70</sup> Ibid., p. xii.
- <sup>71</sup> Ibid., p. xiii.
- Eager to assert his credentials, Sarrazin also mentioned William Sharp's collection of *Sonnets anglais* (p. x) and many other, now minor, poets.
- <sup>72</sup> Ibid., p. 231.
- <sup>73</sup> Ibid., pp. 205-07.
- <sup>74</sup> Ibid., p. 231.

<sup>75</sup> Another motif of estrangement may have been Verlaine whose 'Poetic Ideal', Sarrazin had confessed not to share in the 'Poésie' section of the *Revue contemporaine* in 1885 (p. 151).

<sup>76</sup> See Gabriel Sarrazin, *Mémoires d'un centaure* (Paris: Perrin, 1894). Later Sarrazin published *In Memoriam Uxoris Dilectissima* (Paris: Imprimerie de F. Carbonnel, 1923), and *Éloge de la poésie, Discours prononcé à Avignon le 2 août 1929 au banquet du 5<sup>e</sup> congrès des écrivains de France* (Bordeaux: Editions de la Renaissance provinciale, 1929).

<sup>77</sup> Remy de Gourmont was one of the first to take an interest in little *fin de siècle* magazines. See *Les Petites revues: essai de bibliographie* (Paris: Librairie du Mercure de France, 1900).

<sup>78</sup> See Henri de Paysac, *Francis Vielé-Griffin: Poète symboliste et citoyen américain* (Paris: A.-G. Nizet, 1976).

<sup>79</sup> Francis Vielé-Griffin, 'Autobiographie de Walt Whitman', *Entretiens politiques et littéraires* (April 1892), 166-69.

<sup>80</sup> [Unsigned], 'Notes et notules', *Entretiens politiques et littéraires*, 25.4 (April 1892), 188.

<sup>81</sup> 'Poets to Come' was among the first of Whitman's poems translated in 1886 by Jules Laforgue for the new and short-lived avant-garde periodical, *La Vogue*. It appeared with other poems from the 'Inscriptions' cluster in the 28 June 1886 issue and was followed by two further instalments in the 5 July and 2 August issues. *La Vogue* started on 11 April 1886 under the editorship of Léo d'Orfer with the help of Gustave Kahn as *secrétaire de rédaction*. Along with Laforgue's translation of Whitman, *La Vogue* published Symbolist prose and poetry including Kahn's *vers libres* from 1886 when Kahn replaced d'Orfer as editor with the help of Félix Fénéon.

<sup>82</sup> [Francis Vielé-Griffin], *Entretiens politiques et littéraires*, 25.4 (April 1892), 169.

<sup>83</sup> Emile Blémont, 'Walt Whitman', *La renaissance littéraire et artistique*, 7 (8 June 1872), 53-55.

<sup>84</sup> Arthur Symons, 'Preface', in *Plays, Acting and Music: A Book of Theory* (London: Duckworth, 1903), p. vii.

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*, p. ix.

<sup>86</sup> Hennequin, *Critique scientifique*, p. 164.

## Hierophants of Decadence: Bliss Carman and Arthur Symons

Rita Dirks

Ambrose University

Canada has never produced a major man of letters whose work gave a violent shock to the sensibilities of Puritans. There was some worry about Carman, who had certain qualities of the *fin de siècle* poet, but how mildly he expressed his queer longings!

(E. K. Brown)

Decadence came to Canada softly, almost imperceptibly, in the 1880s, when the Confederation poet Bliss Carman published his first poems and met the English chronicler and leading poet of Decadence, Arthur Symons. The event of Decadence has gone largely unnoticed in Canada; there is no equivalent to David Weir's *Decadent Culture in the United States: Art and Literature Against the American Grain* (2008), as perhaps has been the fate of Decadence elsewhere. As a literary movement it has been, until a recent slew of publications on British Decadence, relegated to a transitional or threshold period. As Jason David Hall and Alex Murray write: 'It is common practice to read [...] decadence as an interstitial moment in literary history, the initial "falling away" from high Victorian literary values and forms before the *bona fide* novelty of modernism asserted itself.'<sup>1</sup> This article is, in part, an attempt to bring Canadian Decadence into focus out of its liminal state/space, and to establish Bliss Carman as the representative Canadian Decadent. To begin with, I situate the *fin de siècle* in Canada and examine the fruitful literary connection between Carman and Symons; then I read Carman's poem 'The Eavesdropper' through a Decadent lens and continue toward an articulation of a distinctly Canadian Decadence. For the major part, I desire nothing less than to secure a foothold for Carman as the Father of Canadian Decadence.

## Oh Decadent Canada: The Confederation Poets and the Fin de Siècle in Canada

The event of Decadence is underexplored in Canada; much of literary criticism on the *fin de siècle* in Canada tends to focus primarily on the emergence of a national literature during the Confederation period. There is no book-length study bearing the title Canadian Decadence; Brian Trehearne's *Aestheticism and the Canadian Modernists: Aspects of A Poetic Influence* (1989) is a notable exception, yet Trehearne does not discuss Carman. Before I continue, I must clarify that the purpose of my study here is Canadian literature written in English. Francophone literature, situated mostly in Quebec, has its own history of literary developments, and, in 1895, formed its *École littéraire de Montréal* that followed French Parnassian and Decadent models, with Émile Nelligan, perhaps the *École's* best representative, who shows his indebtedness to Charles Baudelaire and Paul Verlaine.<sup>2</sup> Predominantly for historical reasons, and especially before the *fin de siècle*, there was little if any conversation between English Canadian and French Canadian writers. Bentley's literary history of the last twenty years of the nineteenth century in Canada, *The Confederation Group of Canadian Poets, 1880-1897* (2004), offers a contextualized study of the six English Canadian poets: Charles G. D. Roberts (1860-1943), Archibald Lampman (1861-1899), Bliss Carman (1861-1929), William Wilfred Campbell (1860-1918), Duncan Campbell Scott (1862-1947), and Frederick George Scott (1861-1944). They were the 'The Confederation Group of Canadian Poets' or Confederation poets, so named because these poets were born in the 1860s, in the decade when Canada became a nation (1867). But only three of them, Roberts, Carman, and Campbell Scott, 'show[ed] evidence of contact with [...] [European] avatars of the *symboliste* aesthetic' in the 1890s.<sup>3</sup> Bentley continues,

Lampman, Campbell, and Frederick George Scott held themselves aloof from the aesthetic-decadent movement that hosted *symbolisme* before it entered the literary mainstream en route to becoming a major component of Modernism, but the other three members of the group all drank deep of the *symboliste* spring and thus also of the esoteric or occult beliefs with which it was associated.<sup>4</sup>

Here I focus on one of the three members who did not hold himself 'aloof' from Decadence/Symbolism but rather 'drank deep[ly]' from it, namely, Bliss Carman. In 1882, before Carman and Symons met in London in 1896, Wilde toured America to lecture on aesthetic taste and

visited Canada, briefly meeting up with Carman at Roberts's house. Wilde must have at least provided some curiosity, if not inspiration, for the twenty-one-year-old Carman. Aside from that brief acquaintance, in October, Wilde also lectured at the City Hall in Fredericton, the capital of New Brunswick (eastern Canada, where most Confederation poets lived). Wilde's influence notwithstanding, Terry Whalen describes 'a "strange aesthetic ferment" in the last two decades of the nineteenth century', in line with Decadent, Symbolist, and Aesthetic stirrings in France and England.<sup>5</sup> Those Confederation poets 'who drank deep of the *symboliste* spring' follow similar developments as their European counterparts, yet with some of their own unique ways. It is my heuristic argument that at least some of the Confederation poets could be classified as Decadents, keeping in mind, as Murray observes, that '[i]dentifying practitioners [of Decadence] is notoriously difficult; it is near impossible to find a self-described Decadent writer'.<sup>6</sup> Certainly, Carman did not bear the label, as did many a Decadent or Symbolist writer; I hope to establish that Carman is such a one, not the least through his association with Symons.

### **Symons and Carman: Friendship and First Contact via Letters**

Although Carman initially encountered Wilde in 1882, eighteen years later a much closer connection developed between Carman and Arthur Symons, more so than between any other Canadian and British Decadents. The friendship between Carman, the Canadian poet who lived and worked in New York and Boston for most of his adult life, and Symons, who was four years younger and had just moved to London, began when Symons sent two letters, one posted 4 July 1890, and the next, 5 December 1890, with two of his early poems, requesting that Carman, who was editor between 1890-92 of the New York weekly the *Independent*, publish them. At that time the *Independent* 'had a large general readership and a history of literary publication, especially poetry [E. B. Browning, Thomas Hardy, A. C. Swinburne, and W. B. Yeats, among others]'.<sup>7</sup> It was nearly impossible for Carman and other Canadian poets of new verse to get published at home at the end of the nineteenth century; for the most part, between 1820-80, 'Canadian publishers of imaginative literature were

content to keep the lucrative field of reprinting well-known British and American authors'.<sup>8</sup> Not so in New York and the United States in general, with its larger reading public and demand for 'new writing'. James Doyle avers that, in the 1890s, American 'monthly periodicals' 'flourish[ed]', while in Canada 'the publishing industry struggled'.<sup>9</sup> Possibly, Symons also took advantage of the 'American periodical boom of the 1880s and 1890s' as an opportunity to publish some of his early poems and his own 'The Decadent Movement in Literature' in *Harper's New Monthly Magazine* in 1893, with the very real purpose of disseminating Decadence across the Atlantic.<sup>10</sup>

Tragically, the poems that Symons sent to Carman in 1890 have been lost, and those issues of the *Independent* have not been preserved; the digitized version of the paper shows a gap between July-December 1890 to December 1895, just the years that would interest us the most here. However, we may surmise. In the letter posted on 4 July 1890, Symons refers to '[s]ome verses (written at Dieppe on my way back' from France, so we can probably guess that this might be a poem or all poems from his 'At Dieppe' sextuple ('After Sunset', 'On the Beach', 'Rain on the Down', 'Before the Squall', 'Under the Cliffs', and 'Requies'), first published in his upcoming *Silhouettes* collection in 1892, after Symons returned from his trip to Paris with Havelock Ellis in June 1890. Tracy Ware writes: '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)'.<sup>11</sup> According to Ware, Symons's letter dated 5 December 1890 includes 'probably "Love in Dreams", which appeared in the *Independent*, XLII, No. 2207 (March 19, 1891)'.<sup>12</sup> In his first letter, with the request to publish his own poems, Symons praises Carman's early work: 'I so much admire what I have seen of your own poems. [...] There is something delightfully fresh in them – a lyric April. I hope you will soon collect them into a book'.<sup>13</sup> Carman did publish Symons's poems and followed up with a few collections of his own poetry. It seems the two young poets found much in common; as Ware states, 'the letters reveal an affinity between two young men'.<sup>14</sup> This affinity created enough interest for the two to meet in person.

## 1896: Carman's Visit to London, and Symons Reviews Carman

Carman must have read at least some of Symons's early poems to garner enough interest to visit Symons in London in 1896. After their initial epistolary acquaintance, the two poets met in person in London in 1896, where discussions about directions of modern poetry also included Yeats. In a letter to his friend Louise Imogen Guiney, who was in Nova Scotia at the time, Carman wrote on 2 September of the same year: 'O I had a gay time in your London. [...] Arthur Symons, whom I ran to earth in Fountain Court, Temple, took me to Yeats' new abode'.<sup>15</sup> In 1893, before Carman and Symons actually met, Symons reviewed Carman's first volume of poetry *Low Tide on Grand Pré: A Book of Lyrics* (1893), and subsequently the Canadian poet's three following books: *Songs from Vagabondia* (1894, with the American poet Richard Hovey), *Behind the Arras: A Book of the Unseen* (1895), and *More Songs from Vagabondia* (1896, with Hovey). In 1896 Symons also published Carman's poem 'In Scituate' in *The Savoy*. Symons 'played a key role in the growth of Carman's reputation'.<sup>16</sup> In the 1890s, both vagabonds, Canadian and British, were keen on publishing and promoting each other's work and the work of other Decadents. Certainly, Carman's movements between Eastern Canada and New York partly reflect his desire to introduce and publish Canadian writers in the United States. In a similar way, Symons not only brought French Symbolist or Decadent writers to the English reading public by way of his publications, but also established connections with Carman.

After his sojourn in London in 1896, Carman travelled to Paris where he landed 'in the heart of the *Symboliste* movement'.<sup>17</sup> To be sure, Carman shared some of Symons's enthusiasm regarding Paris and the French Symbolists: 'Since Carman's return from abroad, there had been several articles connecting him with the French *Symbolistes* and the British Aesthetes'.<sup>18</sup> Furthermore, in the 1890s, 'Carman was dubbed the "American High Priest of Symbolism" by a New York newspaper [*The New World*].<sup>19</sup> Carman's poetry espouses the influence of both English and French nineteenth-century Decadents. Before he travelled to meet Symons in London, the Canadian poet had spent a year at Oxford and the University of Edinburgh (1882-83) and then a year at Harvard (1885). In his early years, he was influenced by D. G. Rossetti and Swinburne, and, with the encouragement of

Hovey, read and translated Paul Verlaine. As with Symons, some of the French Symbolist influence is evident in Carman's poetry. I am inspired by all of Carman's connections to British, French, and American nineteenth-century authors; these are but little-examined and happily require the space of at least one future book. I must quench my zeal, for now, with establishing Carman as a progenitor of Canadian Decadence, and this article must not exceed the boundary of a prolegomenon.

### **Carman's Poetry as Canadian Decadence**

More than one critic in Canada has declared the strangeness of Carman's poetry, both in the damning and praiseworthy sense. Odell Shepard, the American poet and writer, published the first significant book on Carman's work: *Bliss Carman: A Study of His Poetry* (1923). Shepard praises Carman for his 'mastery of verse technic', his "'tone color'", and 'pure unimpeded' musical quality.<sup>20</sup> Shepard insists that Carman's poems 'must be read slowly, as an epicure savours an ancient wine, with a special lingering upon the clear vowel sounds'.<sup>21</sup> At the same time, the American critic writes that Carman was 'save[d] from the poisonous heresy of "art for art's sake"'.<sup>22</sup> Seemingly, as an admirer and editor of Henry David Thoreau and Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, Shepard could not endure the literature of the *fin de siècle*; however, we would not be wrong to associate Carman with the American Transcendentalists, especially Ralph Waldo Emerson.

In the late 1950s, when Carl F. Klinck began to compile the first *Literary History of Canada: Canadian Literature in English* (1965), some of his contributors did not know what to do with Carman. For example, Roy Daniells, while writing his entry on 'Confederation to the First World War', laments in a letter to Klinck in 1961, 'I find that both Roberts and Carman distressing people to deal with, [...] they evoke either pity or anger and not much else'.<sup>23</sup> Reginald Watters, who with Klinck, undertook to publish a Canadian anthology in the 1950s, also wrote to ask his co-author, 'How fond are you of Carman and Roberts? [...] Both leave me pretty unmoved. [...] I found it difficult to discover more than 400 lines by each that I would want'.<sup>24</sup> Lorne Pearce, editor of Ryerson Press in the 1920s, and Carman's literary executor, told Klinck that he was 'greatly worried

about [publishing] Carman's unconventional love letters, of which he had trunks full'.<sup>25</sup> Carman never married, was quite attractive, witty and intelligent, with celebrated beautiful locks of hair, and 'seems to have sought safety in numbers' in his relationships with women; unusual for his milieu, he led the lifestyle of a vagabond poet.<sup>26</sup> In 1990, a much-awaited collection of essays on Carman appeared, edited by Gerald Lynch. Appropriately subtitled *A Reappraisal*, it restored Carman, somewhat, to worthy literary status within the shrine of Canadian literature; *Bliss Carman: A Reappraisal* was published with a suitably yellow cover. Feasibly, one needs to read Carman through a Decadent lens.

'The Eavesdropper' (reproduced in its entirety at the end of this article) from his first collection, *Low Tide on Grand Pré: A Book of Lyrics* (1893), a volume that Symons also reviewed, will serve us well here as an instance of Canadian Decadent poetry. Carman's poem of nine quatrains and written in iambic dimeter, is one of suggestion and impression rather than thought. It is a poem that ushers the reader into a subjective world of immediate experience, yet, at the same time, offers nothing definitive. It begins in the realm of decline, in the autumn of the year, with 'the paling autumn-tide'. As Brian Trehearne finds, if a Decadent poet writes 'poems of nature', and nature is strongly present, even personified in Carman's poem, 'Autumn, the "failure" of the year, emerges as a typical Decadent setting'.<sup>27</sup> However, this change in seasons is more than a setting; just as Symons's city in his London poems is not just a 'background' to the 'clandestine' and 'shadowy' spaces, neither is the outside world in 'The Eavesdropper'.<sup>28</sup> We learn next to nothing about the lovers in the poem who lie in repose, inside 'a still room', 'side by side', 'all the swarthy afternoon'. But nature teems with colours and sounds and movements: 'The livelong day the elvish leaves | Danced with their shadows on the floor' and 'The great deliberate sun | Walk[ed] through the crimson hazy world, | Counting his hilltops one by one'; then, 'purple twilight came | And touched the vines along our eaves', while the lovers, inside the room, 'heard', 'watched', and 'saw'. Nature, albeit with its summer's strength waning, is the actor still, even with its fallen leaves that are 'The lost children of the wind | went straying by our door'; by contrast, human energies are spent, after

the lush months of spring and summer are behind them. The lovers observe, almost passively, as the yellow and/or fallen leaves ‘stir’, make a ‘tiny multitudinous sound’, ‘rustle’, ‘dance[d]’, ‘stray[ing]’, and behave like ‘elvish’ children. Maurice Maeterlinck’s influence upon Carman, through Hovey, is perhaps evident here. In ‘The Decadent Movement in Literature’, when Symons speaks of the ‘symbolistic and impressionistic’ dramas of Maeterlinck, notably *L’Intruse*, *L’Aveugles*, and *Les Sept Princesses*, he remarks that in the former two plays ‘the scene is stationary, the action but reflected upon the stage, as if from another plane’, and, in the latter, ‘the action, such as it is, [...] is literally, in great part, seen through a window’.<sup>29</sup> The motionless couple in ‘The Eavesdropper’ watch the goings-on outside, as if in a (dare I say) languid state, through ‘the open door’.

Instead of revealing situational details about the two lovers, Carman foregrounds colours, shades, and edges, outside of the ‘still room’: ‘the yellow maple tree’, ‘the silvery blue’, ‘crimsoned hazy world’, ‘gray wind’, and ‘black’, forming an impressionistic palette. Interpolated with colours, Carman’s poem also abounds in edges, liminal spaces, and boundaries, some metaphoric: ‘our door’, ‘the eaves’, ‘my Love’s lips’, ‘[t]he maze of dream’, and ‘the verge of western sky’. The voluminous colours speak for the abundance and activity of nature; the borders signify limitations and transgressions, mirroring the lovers’ plight. For instance, the dual agency of the ‘purple twilight’, registering the in-between stage after day ends and before nightfall, touching ‘the vines along our eaves’, and the eaves, the perimeter that overhangs the walls of a house, providing an extended edge to the roof, forges a space where nature again takes the active role while allowing Carman to continue to not to name, but hint at, the outlines, the peripheral and the hidden. D. G. Jones writes that Carman ‘is not concerned to articulate things [...] The typical event is transitional, like a change in the weather or the season, or it is a brief epiphany’.<sup>30</sup> Kostas Boyiopoulos similarly observes that in Symons’s London poems ‘the city’s disjoined settings mirror the fragmented subjective states of mind in Symons’s poetic speakers’.<sup>31</sup> In Carman’s poetry, and specifically in ‘The Eavesdropper’, we might observe such a correspondence between stirrings in nature and the subjective states of the lovers as well.

Some of the words and sentiments in 'The Eavesdropper' will sound familiar to a Decadent ear. The fixation on the woman's hair, for example, reveals, albeit vaguely and indirectly, more about the situation of the lovers than the rest of the poem. The use of transferred epithet, 'memories of reluctant night | Lurked in the blue dusk of her hair', adds to the sense of the imprecise. It is not clear if it is the night that is reluctant to leave because the 'hush of dawn' has arrived or if the woman is reluctant to face the day, or if she has regrets about the days and night(s) she spent, albeit reluctantly, with her lover (but, one thing is clear – if I were to choose the decidedly beautiful quintessential Decadent line or two from Carman's poetry, these would be the ones). Through another fixation on the woman's eyes, namely, the repetition of the Lover's 'earth-brow eyes' and then 'her great brown eyes', Carman conveys the abrupt change in mood, from 'glad' to then 'veiled and sad'. In 'The Eavesdropper', the 'blue dusk of her hair' and the arrival of the 'Shadow' are pivotal epiphanic moments. The arrival of another 'One' from elsewhere signals the decided change in the lover's mood from within, pointing to the protective isolating edge around the female Love, and threatening the cozy, albeit troubled, hermetic seclusion of the couple.

The 'Another Shadow' from 'without', the 'One' (who?) that is not part of nature, but 'gloom[s]' and 'loom[s] over' the other 'shadows on the floor', is an unnatural, menacing shadow, a shattering, foreboding presence. This stranger 'gloomed the dancing of the leaves', and, once the speaker 'hurr[ied] to the open door',

[...] saw retreating on the hills,  
Looming and sinister and black,  
The stealthy figure swift and huge  
Of one who strode and looked not back.

Because secrecy abounds in this mysterious poem, once more, it is not clear who the Shadow or the One is: the speaker's Lover's husband, her guilty conscience, death, a foreboding, a malevolent force; the identity of the eavesdropper remains unknown. Once again, even these last lines are remarkably reminiscent of Maeterlinck's *L'Intruse*, where Death, or an intruder, initially unseen or invisible, comes unobserved through an open door.<sup>32</sup> The Shadow or the One or the eavesdropper

brings about the grandiose, lethal change in the fate of the lovers, although, even before he appears, an overall sense of something lost, imperceptibly yet progressively, prevails in this poem of failure. “The “Shadow” is but the inexplicable presence that reminds the lovers of something they already knew to be true within themselves; as Trehearne reminds us of Decadent writing, an awareness of the ‘transience of beauty’, ‘love’, and ‘inescapable decay’ is imminent.<sup>33</sup> In this regard, I also cannot help but think of Symons’s first lines from his ‘Prologue: Before the Curtain’ (1895): ‘We are puppets of a shadow play’, that also ring true in this Canadian Decadent poem.

How did Symons react to Carman’s poetry? To my mind, it is evident from this poem alone why Symons encouraged Carman to write more, to publish a collection of poetry. In ‘The Decadent Movement in Literature’ Symons praises Verlaine’s ability to express ‘exquisite troubled beauty’ of verse, and, ‘to express the inexpressible[,] he [Verlaine] speaks of beautiful eyes behind a veil’.<sup>34</sup> Carman had certainly read Verlaine, but it is as if he had read Symons’s essay as well (both *Low Tide on Grand Pré* and ‘The Decadent Movement in Literature’ were published in 1893, which makes it impossible to say). Carman’s ‘earth-brown eyes’ and ‘great brown eyes’ that ‘were veiled’ speak of the unspeakable, the secret, the insight, the epiphany, the truth. The resemblance between Symons’s praise of Verlaine’s verse for the French poet’s renderings of ‘the palpitating sunlight of noon’ and ‘a cool autumn sky’ again uncannily resonates with Carman’s ‘deliberate sun’ and ‘silvery blue’ and ‘paling autumn-tide’. In the comparison between Verlaine’s poetry from *Romances sans Paroles*, which Symons calls ‘The poetry of sensation, of evocation; poetry which paints as well as sings, and which paints as Whistler paints, seeming to think the colours and outlines upon the canvas’, we are reminded once more of the subtle unspoken painterly impressionistic descriptions of Carman, full of colours and hues and shadows and edges in ‘The Eavesdropper’, as analyzed above.<sup>35</sup>

According to Tracy Ware, Symons, in his review in the *Athenæum* (14 April 1894), provides ‘measured praise’ for *Low Tide on Grand Pré* and ‘tries to combine his sincere approval with a suggestion for improvement’.<sup>36</sup> Symons comments: “The whole book is an expression of passionate delight in the beauty of the outward world. [...] [I]t deals with certain vague ardours, vivid longings

after the indefinite in nature'.<sup>37</sup> Symons commends Carman for his expressions of 'a delicate consciousness of mystery which lies about the deeper reaches [...] [and] is the very key-note of Mr. Carman's work' in his review of *Grand Pré*.<sup>38</sup> But, at times, according to Symons, Carman's expression is too vague:

Mr. Carman is, in general, subtle in the expression of fine shades, though his phraseology—rich, coloured, suggestive at its best, and with an elusive touch of natural magic—does sometimes become a mere coloured mist. He can express fine shades, but it is doubtful if can express anything else. [...] The only question is whether he does not sometimes allow himself to use words too loosely, for the sake of their suggestive quality, which, after all, is not always a matter to be relied upon.<sup>39</sup>

It seems a little ironic that the promulgator of Decadence would criticize Carman for his vagueness and suggestive expression of fine shades. I am inclined to think that Symons did not read all the poems in Carman's first volume, due in part to his innumerable writerly responsibilities in the early 1890s. Certainly, he makes no mention of 'The Eavesdropper' in his review, although he does praise 'Afoot' for its remarkable rendering of vagabond sensations. Also, perhaps by 1894 Symons had outgrown the style 'in the direction of simplicity' of his own poetry in *Silhouettes* (1892) or indeed the poetry he had submitted to the *Independent*, most likely in 'At Dieppe', in 1890.<sup>40</sup> What I find remarkable is the rendering of colours and sensations in Symons's 'At Dieppe' sextuple, using the same evocative vocabulary as Carman in his representative poem. For example, in 'On the Beach' Symons employs 'grey sky', 'tide', 'stealthy night'; in 'Rain on the Down', 'veil', and 'her hair'; and, perhaps the most telling similarities between Carman's and his language occurs in 'Under the Cliffs', where we find 'the white sun walk across the sea, | This pallid afternoon' and 'I see | The footsteps of another voyager', along with the word 'shadows' repeated twice.<sup>41</sup> The similarity between the 'speaking voice' in Symons's second volume of poetry and that of Carman's in *Low Tide on Grand Pré*, with 'The Eavesdropper' as an effective example, is striking, for, as Jane Desmarais and Chris Baldick have noted, the voice 'is often located in a scene, but otherwise carries no burdens of circumstance, history, or "character"' and 'speaks for a painterly "eye"'.<sup>42</sup> The similarities do not end here; if we were to compare colours and outlines and otherworldly beings, we would have multiple

parallel passages. For now, I must leave the comparative study between Symons's and Carman's early poetry for another day. Instead, I will refer again to Symons's later critical writings on Verlaine as a guide to his evaluation of Decadent verse.

In *Colour Studies in Paris* (1918), Symons consistently praises Verlaine's artistic virtues: the French poet's 'is a twilight art, full of reticence, or perfumed shadows, of hushed melodies. It suggests, gives impressions, with a subtle avoidance of anything definite'.<sup>43</sup> According to Symons, Verlaine's 'Art poétique' 'express[es] the inexpressible[;] he speaks of beautiful eyes behind a veil, of the full palpitating sunlight at noon, of the blue swarm of clear stars in a cool autumn sky'.<sup>44</sup> Verlaine's language in 'Art poétique' neatly aligns with Carman's; for example, the lines 'des beaux yeux derrière des voiles' [beautiful eyes behind veils] and 'un ciel d'automne attiédi' [a tepid autumn sky] recall Carman's '[h]er great brown eyes were veiled' and 'paling autumn-tide' in 'the silvery blue', albeit without the effulgent sun.<sup>45</sup> Earlier, in his high praise for Verlaine, Symons, in *The Symbolist Movement in Literature* (1899), observes that 'only with Verlaine, the thing itself, the affection or regret, is everything; there is no room for meditation over destiny, or search for a problematical consolation'.<sup>46</sup> We have observed the same in Carman. In "The Eavesdropper" the moments of reluctance or regret overshadow any details about the lovers' lives, personality, thoughts, or a resolution. Carman's poem is one of suggestion and impression, rather than thought, a poem of some shades of colour and outlines. In a conclusive way, I must maintain, inasmuch as one cannot speak of the totalizing classification of Decadent poetry that would amount to the relegation of all Decadents' styles to a few, that Carman's poetry meets the standards of Decadence set out by Symons himself.

### **The Distinct Nature of Canadian Decadence**

What is Canadian Decadence? At the risk of defining or naming and possibly destroying all enjoyment, I will venture to say that this article contains but preliminary work towards identifying the event in Canada. Because of its distinct literary history alone, factors and conditions contributing

to the rise and development of Decadence in Canada will not be the same as in French or British or American Decadence. Weir argues (and Symons would agree) that one needed a literary tradition or a civilization to rebel against, or at least to realize that one's civilization has come to end, in order to devolve into Decadence. For example, Weir writes that '[in] America, the cultural conditions that produced the possibility of decadence in Europe simply did not exist'.<sup>47</sup> Notable exceptions were New York and Boston; otherwise, as he proclaims, 'there was no local grain to go against'.<sup>48</sup> At the end of the nineteenth century, (English and French) Canada was just beginning to behave as a nation. In Canada, there is, as Symons writes in 'The Decadent Movement in Literature', no equivalent to a 'disease of form' arising from 'a civilization grown over-luxurious, over-inquiring, too languid for the relief of action'.<sup>49</sup> Canadian settlers were just beginning to shape a new civilization (in their own eyes, First Nations culture notwithstanding) and, frankly, as Virginia Durksen comments, 'the energy and focus of the largely rural population may well have been spent on practical considerations of survival'.<sup>50</sup>

English Canada, just to limit this discussion to the nineteenth century, had perceived itself without its own civilization and with an imported Victorian literature. However, it developed its own settler literature alongside it, albeit one that attempted, initially, to write back to its parent country. Victorian novels served as models for at least some of nineteenth-century English Canadian literature, like Catharine Parr Trail's *The Backwoods in Canada* (1836) and Susanna Moodie's *Roughing It in the Bush* (1852). These were written with a British audience in mind; both sister-writers were born in England and were sending notes home, as it were. The novels of Parr Traill and Moodie, along with other 'canonical narratives of settlement', were meant to 'entice emigrants from the British Isles to the New World'.<sup>51</sup> For the most part, an imported Victorianism, or a second-to-Victorianism sentiment reigned in Canada between 1820-80.

Yet, English Canada, with its imported, inherited British literature, was also beginning to sprout some locally inspired seedlings of its own. Towards Confederation, literature was beginning to seek its own national identity, and, with the Confederation poets, a distinctly Canadian literature

began; writing about Canadian landscapes and experiences, they were no longer writing back to England. D. G. Jones, writing about Carman's poetry, says that '[u]nlike events of a pioneer narrative, [...] it settles nothing, establishes no stable centre'.<sup>52</sup> Roberts, in his essay 'A Note on Modernism' (1931), states that the Confederation poets 'had already initiated a departure, a partial departure, from the Victorian tradition of poetry, years before the movement [Modernism] began in England', arguing for Canada's own domestic early Decadence-into-Modernism movement.<sup>53</sup>

It is perhaps ironic that, for Carman and other Confederation poets, the beginnings of a national Canadian literature, in published form, appeared in the United States. For reasons already stated above, Carman and his associates had a hard time getting published in their native land. While at the *Independent*, in his role of assistant editor, Carman not only saw that 'various young American' poets got into print, but also 'promot[ed] the work of Canadian friends, including Archibald Lampman, Duncan Campbell Scott, Charles G. D. Roberts, Wilfred Campbell, and Gilbert Parker'.<sup>54</sup> The rich literary milieu of Boston offered some degenerative growth, even producing some Decadent short-lived journals: *The Knight Errant* (1892-94) and *The Mahogany Tree* (1892), which survived for only six months, sadly, for it was 'one of the first forums for decadent-aesthetic ideas in the United States'.<sup>55</sup> In the first volume of the *Knight Errant*, Carman is published alongside Hovey and Louise Imogen Guiney, all included among others whose 'names [...] come up again and again in the context of medievalism, decadentism, and aestheticism'.<sup>56</sup> Although not listed as its editor, the *Independent* named Carman as associate editor of the *Knight Errant*, with Ralph Adams Cram as its chief editor.<sup>57</sup> Of the *Knight Errant*, a New York magazine, *Current Literature: A Magazine of Record and Review* (1888-1925), writes in 1892:

*The Knight Errant*, a new quarterly, has [...] at length appeared. It is devoted to art in wherever its many phases, dealing in its first number with its own peculiar aims—which are to make war against naturalism wherever it shows its head.<sup>58</sup>

Cram and Carman, as stated in the 'Apology' of the first issue of the *Knight Errant*, waged a 'war against [...] realism in art', as represented by the likes of the American Realist novelist William Dean Howells (1837-1920), and sought to restore 'the inner world of the imagination as the proper focus

of art'.<sup>59</sup> In 1894, Carman also became editor of the first four issues of *Chap-Book* (1894-98), a magazine which Doyle compares with *The Yellow Book* which appeared but a month earlier in 1894.<sup>60</sup> Both magazines were inspired by 'the periodicals of France devoted to the new symbolist poetry'.<sup>61</sup> Again, Carman made sure his fellow Confederation poets were published in the *Chap-Book*: Roberts, Lampman, and others appeared on its pages along with Beerbohm and Yeats.<sup>62</sup> In a way, Symons's efforts in publishing French poets in English journals, and his promotion of Decadence/Symbolism, correspond to Carman's determination to publish the work of international, and especially Canadian, poets. Both were active promoters of Decadence, on both sides of the Atlantic.

Carman dipped into some of the Decadent stirrings in New York and Boston but not at the expense of writing his own brand of vagabond and mystical poetry. As Doyle states, Carman, and other

young Canadian writers hoped to participate in what they perceived as the new international wave of modernism which they felt would yield new opportunities for unique self-expression and experimentation. The kind of writing they envisaged included a substantial degree of nationalistic self-awareness, just as American writing did, and focused on the descriptive details of the northern landscape.<sup>63</sup>

Carman's poetry, especially his early poetry, remained deeply connected to the maritime landscape, the place of his birth. The Confederation poets, on the whole, wrote specifically about the Canadian landscape and wilderness experiences. Something that does set Canadian Decadence apart from English, French, and American Decadences is its attitude towards nature, already begun with the settler narratives. Carman's life as a vagabond, an explorer of nature, sets him, and in turn Canadian Decadence, apart from his European and American counterparts. As we have observed in 'The Eavesdropper', nature takes an active role in Carman's poem. Canadian Decadence does not share the *à rebours*, or against nature, characteristic with its European counterparts. What I have in mind here is Huysmans's designation of nature as tedious in 'the *summa* of decadence', as Matei Calinescu refers to *À rebours*.<sup>64</sup> According to Des Esseintes, through whom Huysmans is speaking, in part against Naturalism but also referring to trees and mountains, '[n]ature [...] has had her day'; the Duc

speaks of ‘the revolting uniformity of her landscapes and skylines’, with ‘a monotonous store of meadows and trees’.<sup>65</sup> In Huysmans’s novel, artifice is the ultimate goal in all aesthetic endeavours; Des Esseintes ‘wanted some natural flowers that looked like fakes’ and cultivates bizarre specimens of ‘*fleurs du mal*’, thus paying homage to Baudelaire who also pronounced nature and the natural world as ugly in his ‘Salon of 1859’. With Baudelaire, Huysmans recoils against Naturalism in France, ‘a time when verse no longer served any purpose except to depict the external appearance of things’, yet Baudelaire, ‘had succeeded in expressing the inexpressible’.<sup>66</sup> Wilde, in ‘The Decay of Lying’ also decries Naturalism and Zola’s work, specifically his *L’Assommoir*, as ‘unimaginative realism’.<sup>67</sup>

In Canada, nature is not tiresome but new. It is, even in the twenty-first century, much untouched, grandiose, but little explored, mysterious, and magical. By comparison, nature in the Britain, for example, is comparably familiar and limited in space; Northrop Frye believes that European poets ‘see nature in terms of a settled order which the mind can interpret’.<sup>68</sup> A Canadian poet cannot avoid nature, nor rebel against it, nor grow tired of it because much of it is still unfamiliar. In Canada, nature has not become tiresome; presently, due to a harsh climate, in part, and its vast geography, man/woman still has not set foot on many a terrain. In works of fiction, such as Michael Ondaatje’s *In the Skin of a Lion* (1987), it was still possible, in the early twentieth century in Canada, to be ‘born into a region which did not appear on a map until 1910’, and ‘the place’ still appeared ‘[i]n the school atlas’ as ‘pale green and nameless’.<sup>69</sup> Obviously, the spaces which we occupy have not necessarily become places with names, and that relationship to the land will affect our perceptions of self and production of writing. Carman may have been influenced by Romantic, Victorian, and Transcendentalist poets, but it is the Canadian landscape that formed the primary consciousness, as he woke up to it every morning and wandered through it as an adult.

In Carman’s writings on nature, as in his collection of essays, *The Kinship of Nature* (1903), nature is not familiar to the point of contempt as in Huysmans, but more like a ‘friend’ before whom ‘you will stand astonished’: ‘You have been surprised again by nature’, he writes.<sup>70</sup> There is no reason to go against nature; if anything, Canadian Decadent poets went into nature as an act of rebellion,

and some, like Carman, became nature's best vagabonds. In Canada, nature is venerated as a container of strange sensations, a compendium to be explored, feared, and revered. There is just so much literature, as evinced by Carman's 'The Eavesdropper', wherein it takes centre stage. One simply does not act out against nature; the absolute size of it is outrageous. For example, when the Imagist T. E. Hulme worked and studied in Canada in 1906 for a few months, it 'appears that the sheer size of the Canadian prairies challenged Hulme's previously confident belief that the world could be explained in terms of mathematical principles'.<sup>71</sup> Oliver Tearle writes that 'once again, the vastness of nature resists any easy categorization or ordering on the part of humanity'; after his visit to Canada, Hulme wrote in his 'Cinders', a posthumously published collection of observation and notes about art, that '[t]he flats of Canada are incomprehensible to any single theory'.<sup>72</sup> And, to revert to the Confederation poets again, Roberts, in 'A Note on Modernism', also points to a distinctly Canadian Decadence, 'more immediately in contact with nature'.<sup>73</sup> In Canada, Decadence is not so much a falling away from high Victorian values, or civilization, but a falling into nature, with Carman as its best representative.

### **Towards a Conclusion (but, really, this is just the beginning)**

As a relatively unnoticed phenomenon, Canadian Decadence demands much more exploration, but, here, Carman gets the last word; Canadian Decadence must begin with Carman. I have introduced the only slightly documented, literary friendship between Carman and Symons with the purpose of establishing Carman as Canada's quintessential Decadent. Both Symons and Carman, as poets, essayists, and editors, embarked on a comparable mission: they published each other's poetry and reviews, made personal connections with each other in their travels, and also with other Decadents, Aesthetes, and *Symbolistes*. They promoted and published Decadent poetry. Carman's 'The Eavesdropper' is one such poem. To be sure, Canadian Decadence is more than its inherited legacy via France and England; Carman promoted a distinctly Canadian Decadence, with its borrowed models, without upholding artifice against nature. In this preliminary sketch I have demonstrated

that Carman is the best representative of Decadence in Canada, and hopefully I have laid some groundwork as the beginning of a larger work on Canadian Decadence.

\* \* \*

### **The Eavesdropper**

In a still room at hush of dawn,  
My Love and I lay side by side  
And heard the roaming forest wind  
Stir in the paling autumn tide.

I watched her earth-brown eyes grow glad  
Because the round day was so fair;  
While memories of reluctant night  
Lurked in the blue dusk of her hair.

Outside, a yellow maple tree,  
Shifting upon the silvery blue  
With tiny multitudinous sound,  
Rustled to let the sunlight through.

The livelong day the elvish leaves  
Danced with their shadows on the floor;  
And the lost children of the wind  
Went straying homeward by our door.

And all the swarthy afternoon  
We watched the great deliberate sun  
Walk through the crimsoned hazy world,  
Counting the hilltops one by one.

Then as the purple twilight came  
And touched the vines along the eaves,  
Another Shadow stood without  
And gloomed the dancing of the leaves.

The silence fell on my Love's lips;  
Her great brown eyes were veiled and sad  
With pondering some maze of dream,  
Though all the splendid year was glad.

Restless and vague as a gray wind  
Her heart had grown, she knew not why.  
But hurrying to the open door,  
Against the verge of western sky

I saw retreating on the hills,  
Looming and sinister and black,  
The stealthy figure swift and huge  
Of One who strode and looked not back.

---

<sup>1</sup> Jason David Hall and Alex Murray, 'Introduction: Decadent Poetics', in *Decadent Poetics: Literature and Form at the British Fin de Siècle*, ed. by Jason David Hall and Alex Murray (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), pp. 1-25 (p. 5).

See, for example, *Decadence: An Annotated Anthology*, ed. by Jane Desmarais and Chris Baldick (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2012); *Decadent Poetics: Literature and Form at the British Fin de Siècle*, ed. by Jason David Hall and Alex Murray; Kostas Boyiopoulos, *The Decadent Image: The Poetry of Wilde, Symons and Dowson* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2015); and Alex Murray, *Landscapes of Decadence: Literature and Place at the Fin de Siècle* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016).

<sup>2</sup> E. D. Blodgett, 'Francophone Writing', in *The Cambridge Companion to Canadian Literature*, ed. by Eva-Marie Kröller (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), pp. 49-69 (p. 56).

In his earlier work, *Configuration: Essays in Canadian Literature* (Downsview: ECW Press, 1982), Blodgett makes an even stronger point: 'Canada is not a unified country in either a political or cultural sense, and therefore to seek some common thread in its literatures is a vain enterprise indeed' (p. 8).

<sup>3</sup> D. M. R. Bentley, *The Confederation Group of Canadian Poets, 1880-1897* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2004), p. 22.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>5</sup> Terry Whalen, 'Charles G. D. Roberts (1869-1943)', in *Canadian Writers and Their Works*, ed. by Robert Lecker, Jack David, and Ellen Quigley, 2 vols (Toronto: ECW Press, 1989), II, pp. 159-214 (p. 160).

<sup>6</sup> Murray, *Landscapes of Decadence*, p. 5.

<sup>7</sup> Nick Mount, *When Canadian Literature Moved to New York* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2005), p. 70.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 22.

<sup>9</sup> James Doyle, *The Fin de Siècle Spirit: Walter Blackburn Harte and the American/Canadian Literary Milieu of the 1890s* (Toronto: ECW Press, 1995), p. 9.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 40.

<sup>11</sup> Tracy Ware, 'Two Unpublished Letters from Arthur Symons to Bliss Carman', *English Language Notes*, 28 (March 1991), 42-46 (p. 42).

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 46, n. 12.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 43.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 42.

<sup>15</sup> Bliss Carman, letter to Louise Imogen Guiney (2 September 1896), in *Letters of Bliss Carman*, ed. by H. Pearson Gundy (Kingston & Montreal: McGill Queen's University Press, 1981), p. 109.

Gundy examines the relationship between Carman and Guiney more closely in his 'Flourishes and Cadences: Letters of Bliss Carman and Louise Imogen Guiney', *Dalhousie Review*, 55 (1975), 205-26. For a discussion on Guiney as representative of the *fin de siècle*, see also Alex Murray, *Landscapes of Decadence*. Born in the same year, Carman and Guiney both lived and moved between Britain, Canada, and America.

<sup>16</sup> Arthur Symons, 'Arthur Symons' Reviews of Bliss Carman', *Poetry Criticism*, ed. by Elisabeth Gellert, 34 (Detroit: Gale, 2002), <<http://link.galegroup.com/apps/doc/H1420036373/LitRC?u=ucalgary&sid=LitRC&xid=bc4c27a8>> [accessed 9 May 2018]. Originally published in *Canadian Poetry*, 3 (Winter 1995), 100-13.

<sup>17</sup> Muriel Miller, *Bliss Carman: Quest and Revolt* (St. John's: Jespersen Press, 1985), p. 151.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 154.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>20</sup> Odell Shepard, *Bliss Carman: A Study of His Poetry* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart Publishers, 1923), p. 95.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 117. Interestingly, Donna Bennett does not hold Shepard's book in high esteem: She considers it 'neither a cultural biography nor a detailed analysis of Carman's life and work', but rather 'impressionistic' and an exemplar of 'the hostility towards modernism [...] prevalent in Canadian criticism at the time' ('Criticism in English' in *The Oxford Companion to Canadian Literature*, Second Edition, edited by Eugene Benson & William Toye (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1997), pp. 242-67, p. 243).

<sup>23</sup> Karl F. Klinck, *Giving Canada a Literary History: A Memoir*, ed. and intro. by Sandra Djwa (Ottawa: Carleton University Press, 1991), p. 123.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 29.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 38.

<sup>26</sup> Gundy, 'Flourishes and Cadences', p. 220.

- <sup>27</sup> Brian Trehearne, *Aestheticism and the Canadian Modernists: Aspects of A Poetic Influence* (Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1989), p. 15.
- <sup>28</sup> Boyiopoulos, *The Decadent Image*, p. 80.
- <sup>29</sup> Arthur Symons, 'The Decadent Movement in Literature', in *Aesthetes and Decadents of the 1890s: An Anthology of British Poetry and Prose*, ed. and intro. by Karl Beckson, rev. edn (Chicago: Academy Chicago Publishers, 1993) pp. 134-51 (p. 145). Originally published in *Harper's New Monthly Magazine*, 87 (November 1893) 858-67.
- <sup>30</sup> D. G. Jones, 'Carman: *Animula vagula blandula*', in *Bliss Carman: A Reappraisal*, ed. by Gerald Lynch (Ottawa: University of Ottawa Press, 1990), pp. 33-42 (p. 34).
- <sup>31</sup> Boyiopoulos, *The Decadent Image*, p. 84.
- <sup>32</sup> Symons, 'The Decadent Movement', p. 145.
- <sup>33</sup> Trehearne, *Aestheticism and the Canadian Modernists*, p. 15.
- <sup>34</sup> Symons, 'The Decadent Movement', p. 139.
- <sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 140.
- <sup>36</sup> Tracy Ware, 'An Introduction to "Arthur Symon" Reviews of Bliss Carman"', *Poetry Criticism*, ed. by Elisabeth Gellert, 34 (Gale, 2002), Literature Resource Center, <<http://link.galegroup.com/apps/doc/H1420036379/LitRC?u=ucalgary&sid=LitRC&xid=8fddd4f>> [accessed 9 May 2018]. Originally published in *Canadian Poetry*, 37 (Winter 1995), 100-102.
- <sup>37</sup> Symons, 'Arthur Symons' Reviews of Bliss Carman', no pagination.
- <sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>40</sup> Jane Desmarais and Chris Baldick, 'Introduction', in *Arthur Symons: Selected Early Poems*, ed. by Jane Desmarais and Chris Baldick (Cambridge: Modern Humanities Research Association, 2017), p. 8.
- <sup>41</sup> Arthur Symons, 'On the Beach', 'Rain on the Down', and 'Under the Cliffs', in *Silhouettes*, Second Edition (London: Leonard Smithers, 1896), pp. 4, 5, 7.
- <sup>42</sup> Desmarais and Baldick, *Arthur Symons: Selected Early Poems*, p. 8.
- <sup>43</sup> Arthur Symons, *Colour Studies in Paris* (New York: E. P. Dutton & Company, 1918), p. 200.
- <sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 207.
- <sup>45</sup> Paul Verlaine, 'Art poétique', in *Jadis et Naguère* (Paris: Léon Vanier, 1884), pp. 23-25 (p. 23).
- <sup>46</sup> Arthur Symons, *The Symbolist Movement in Literature* (London: William Heinemann, 1899), p. 96.
- <sup>47</sup> David Weir, *Decadent Culture in the United States: Art and Literature against the American Grain, 1890-1926* (New York: State University of New York Press, 2008), p. 1.
- <sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 50.
- <sup>49</sup> Symons, 'The Decadent Movement', p. 136.
- <sup>50</sup> Virginia Durksen, 'The Literary Garland: Preliminary Research'. An unpublished paper submitted to E. D. Blodgett for the Canadian Literature Workshop Project, 1988, annotated and revised in 2018, 16 pp. Permission from author granted; p. 3.
- <sup>51</sup> Carole Gerson, 'Literature of Settlement' in *The Cambridge History of Canadian Literature*, ed. by Coral Ann Howells and Eva-Marie Kröller (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), pp. 87-103 (p. 87).
- <sup>52</sup> Jones, 'Carman: *Animula vagula blandula*', p. 34.
- <sup>53</sup> Sir Charles G. D. Roberts, 'A Note on Modernism' (1931), in *An English Canadian Poetic: Vol 1. The Confederation Poets*, ed. by Robert Hogg (Vancouver: Talonbooks, 2009), pp. 139-42 (p. 141).
- <sup>54</sup> Doyle, *The Fin de Siècle Spirit*, p. 38.
- <sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 52.
- <sup>56</sup> Weir, *Decadent Culture in the United States*, p. 52.
- <sup>57</sup> Doyle, *The Fin de Siècle Spirit*, p. 41.
- <sup>58</sup> *Current Literature: A Magazine of Record and Review*, X (May-August, 1892), p. 275.
- <sup>59</sup> Doyle, *The Fin de Siècle Spirit*, pp. 43, 44.
- <sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 83.
- <sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 84, 85.
- <sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 39.
- <sup>64</sup> Matei Calinescu, *Five Faces of Modernity: Modernism, Avant-Garde, Decadence, Kitsch, Postmodernism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1987), p. 172.
- <sup>65</sup> J.-K. Huysmans, *Against Nature*, trans. by Robert Baldick (London: Penguin, 1959), p. 36.
- <sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 148.
- <sup>67</sup> Oscar Wilde, 'The Decay of Lying' in *Intentions* (Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books, 2004), pp. 1-55 (p. 17).
- <sup>68</sup> Northrop Frye, 'The Narrative Tradition in English Canadian Poetry' (Winter 1946), in *Northrop Frye in Canada*, ed. by Jean O'Grady and David Staines, XII (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2003), pp. 55-63 (p. 56).
- <sup>69</sup> Michael Ondaatje, *In the Skin of a Lion* (1987; Toronto: Penguin Books, 1988), pp. 10-11.
- <sup>70</sup> Bliss Carman, *The Kinship of Nature* (Boston: L. C. Page & Company, 1903), p. 195.
- <sup>71</sup> Rebecca Beasley, quoted in Oliver Tearle, *T. E. Hulme and Modernism* (London: Bloomsbury, 2013), pp. 34-35.

<sup>72</sup> Tearle, *T. E. Hulme and Modernism*, p. 35; Hulme quoted in Tearle, p. 35.

<sup>73</sup> Roberts, 'A Note on Modernism', p. 141.

# Arthur Symons, Laurence Binyon, and Paterian Aestheticism: Dancers and Dragons

William Parker

Courtauld Institute of Art, University of London

The aesthetic criticism of Oxford-based essayist Walter Pater (1839-1894) was interpreted in a variety of ways in *fin-de-siècle* and Edwardian Britain. Perhaps most famously, Pater's example was used to justify the sensualist interpretation of Aestheticism in the work of Oscar Wilde (1854-1900).<sup>1</sup> By contrast, the more subdued influence of Pater's writings could also be felt in the *Addresses* delivered by the painter and sculptor Frederic Leighton (1830-1896) in his eminently respectable capacity as President of the Royal Academy, to which he was appointed in 1878.<sup>2</sup> By the 1910s, the latent modernism of Pater's essay 'The School of Giorgione' had been seized on by Ezra Pound in the first issue of the abrasive avant-garde journal *Blast*.<sup>3</sup> Yet there was also an intermediary Edwardian context for the literary reception of Pater's work that was neither Wildean nor iconoclastic – occupying instead the conceptual space in between these more extreme interpretations – and this will be the focus of the current article. The critic and poet Arthur Symons (1865-1945) and the art writer, poet, and British Museum curator Laurence Binyon (1869-1943) are the two key figures in this regard, occupying the same milieu and yet elaborating subtly contrasting understandings of Pater's ideas.

Binyon drew on his role at the British Museum to emphasize the previously overlooked public-facing aspects of Pater's aesthetics and their potential relevance to the British reception of East Asian art; Symons emphasized instead the more personal and impressionistic undertones of Pater's writings. Despite these differences, Binyon's and Symons's ideas overlap at revealing junctures, especially in relation to their shared emphasis on the essay as an open-ended literary form and their shared interest in the theme of dancing, which was central to both their aesthetics. While the inheritance of Aestheticism in Binyon's work has been neglected, Pater's influence on Symons is now well documented in the secondary literature.<sup>4</sup> However, these

revealing points of similarity and contrast between the two writers' interpretations of Pater have not previously been explored. Considered intertextually, they provide significant insight into the status of aesthetic criticism in the *fin-de-siècle* and Edwardian periods by showing how Pater's influence could meaningfully be interpreted in two discrete yet complementary settings.

In contrast to the other examples I have mentioned, Symons's interpretation of Pater is notable for emphasising the subtly contradictory qualities of the latter's writings. In his essays on the elder writer, Symons emphasized the more sensual and empirical qualities of Pater's work, but nevertheless also stressed the equally prominent strand of asceticism by which this sensuousness was always accompanied and complicated.<sup>5</sup> Jane Desmarais and Chris Baldick have recently observed how, by 1885 'Symons had identified Pater as the critic he most wanted to emulate', and that Symons's criticism more generally is characterized to a significant extent by Pater's influence.<sup>6</sup> These observations are borne out in the primary evidence, as Symons wrote several insightful essays in which he describes both the aesthetic nature of Pater's writings and his own conversations with the older writer, whom he got to know relatively well in the latter's final years.<sup>7</sup> Symons's own essays, especially the 1907 collection, *Studies in Seven Arts*, also clearly demonstrate Pater's influence on a stylistic level. Symons implicitly admits this in the preface to the same volume, as here he quotes in full 'the first two sentences' of Pater's 'School of Giorgione', which he claims are intended as the 'motto' of the book.<sup>8</sup>

Like Symons, Binyon was distinctive in emphasising the nuanced middle-ground between the empirical and the spiritual in his interpretation of Pater, but his role as Assistant Keeper of Prints and Drawings at the British Museum gave his writings an educational emphasis that was clearly distinct from Symons's concerns. One of the main reasons why the more educational tenor of Pater's influence is often overlooked in this *fin-de-siècle* and Edwardian context is that Symons and Binyon occupied much the same central-London artistic-literary milieu in the 1890s, making it easy to overlook the sense in which Binyon may have developed an understanding of Pater's work that was subtly distinct from that of his contemporaries Symons and W. B. Yeats.<sup>9</sup>

This is further complicated by Binyon's acquaintanceship with Pound in the early 1900s. Binyon's subsequent influence on the radical Vorticist aesthetics promoted by Pound and Wyndham Lewis's short-lived journal, *Blast*, has led to a tacit scholarly categorisation of Binyon as an early Modernist and to an accompanying oversight of the prominent Aesthetic Movement influence in his work.<sup>10</sup> This is in stark contrast to the academic reception of Symons, who is generally most well-known for *The Symbolist Movement in Literature* (1899) and on this basis is easily accommodated by secondary accounts of the Decadent, cosmopolitan *fin-de-siècle* reception of Pater's work and Aestheticism more generally.<sup>11</sup> This is a context that, by virtue of its chronologically narrow and necessarily Anglo-French 1890s focus, includes figures such as Wilde and Stéphane Mallarmé who are also known to have been significantly influenced by Pater.<sup>12</sup> Symons's early discussion of writers such as Mallarmé and Joris-Karl Huysmans in *The Symbolist Movement*, as well as the clear influence of Paul Verlaine in his poetry from this period, ensures that his work is easily assimilated into this context.<sup>13</sup> Furthermore, on the basis of the widespread influence of *The Symbolist Movement* in the 1900s and of Decadence in the 1890s (especially, in the case of the latter, as it was formulated in Symons's own journal, *The Savoy*), there is a strong case to be made for the sense in which Symons contributed substantially to the conceptual definition of the two overlapping movements with which he is most frequently associated – Symbolism and Decadence.<sup>14</sup>

Pater's influence on Binyon is most apparent in the latter's 1913 book, *The Art of Botticelli: A Study in Pictorial Criticism* – a study of the Florentine artist that was intended as a critical supplement to Herbert Horne's more factual volume published in 1908.<sup>15</sup> In the earlier sections of this book, Binyon devotes considerable space to situating his ideas in relation to those Pater articulated in *Studies in the History of the Renaissance* (1873).<sup>16</sup> In a sense, Binyon is critical of Pater, particularly of Pater's derision in the 'School of Giorgione' of paintings 'in which appeal is made to the mere intelligence', which Binyon believes suggests 'a wholly false antithesis' between literary 'mere intelligence' and the supposedly more formal and 'musical' concerns of artistic

practice.<sup>17</sup> However, the space Binyon devotes to exploring Pater's aesthetics in detail in this instance also indicates the admiration he held for the elder writer more generally, and this impression is supported by his praise of Pater in the same book as 'one of the finest and most fastidious of English critics'.<sup>18</sup> Binyon also reserves harsher criticism for 'writers who [in following Pater] have perverted this ideal of fusion into an ideal of emptiness' – writers, in other words, who 'have been misled by the analogy of music'.<sup>19</sup> Binyon did not necessarily disagree with Pater; it is more that he believed the nuances of Pater's famous statement that 'all art constantly aspires towards the conditions of music' had been lost on other writers whom Pater had influenced.<sup>20</sup> Binyon believed that the importance of the more 'literary' role of cultural narrative to artistic practice – one that Pater did not necessarily reject – had been unjustly neglected in *fin-de-siècle* and contemporary Edwardian understandings of Pater.<sup>21</sup> While Binyon is critical of these aesthetics in the paintings of Whistler, he does not refer to any of the writers whom he feels have misinterpreted Pater's work by name. It would be easy to assume that Binyon was thinking of figures such as Wilde and Symons when he wrote this, given what John J. Conlon has characterized as their Paterian 'debts of the wrong kind', presumably referring to the aspects of Wilde's and Symons's work that had the potential to strike contemporary readers as excessively sensual and sensationalist, at the expense of the more philosophical and spiritual qualities that critics – including, ironically, Symons – have noted elsewhere in Pater's work.<sup>22</sup> However, Binyon does not overtly criticize either of these two writers anywhere in *The Art of Botticelli*, or any other writers who would now be associated with Decadence, and so it would be misleading to propose a clear-cut opposition between the aesthetics of Decadence and the separate form of Paterian aesthetics that Binyon was also proposing in the period.

As implied above, despite his general admiration for the fastidiousness of Pater's writings, Binyon's aims were more public-facing, and this is also the aspect of his aesthetics that most clearly distinguishes his interpretation of Pater from Symons's reading. In addition to his reverence for the subtlety of Pater's writings, Binyon was also concerned that there should be a

more substantial audience for the visual arts (and attendant progressive aesthetics) beyond the intellectual elite that Pater had envisaged as the primary audience for *Studies in the History of the Renaissance*.<sup>23</sup> This would clearly have been informed by Binyon's professional role at the British Museum. Like Pater, Binyon was a career scholar. However, Binyon was employed by an institution that was open to the general public, in contrast to the selective educational role adopted by a traditional university such as Oxford, where Pater was a Fellow. It is notable in this regard that Binyon's first art-historical book, *Dutch Etchers of the Seventeenth Century* (1895), was published in his professional capacity at the British Museum and drew on the strengths of the Department of Prints and Drawings where Binyon was employed, while also incorporating the first of the many allusions to Pater that consistently characterize Binyon's art writings.<sup>24</sup> By contrast, Pater's first book, *Studies in the History of the Renaissance*, was specifically intended (at least initially) for a small group of readers and should not be considered educational in a traditional sense.<sup>25</sup>

On a more textual level, this emphasis on a distinctively worldly aestheticism in Binyon's work also manifests itself in the open-ended structure of his texts. Instead of presenting the reader with a hermetic and dogmatic argument about aesthetics, Binyon's writings display a provisional and open-ended quality that prompts the reader to consider the relationship between his subtle, aestheticism-infused writings and the outside world. This is most apparent at the end of *Painting in the Far East* of 1908 – a blend of aesthetic criticism and informative scholarship – in which Binyon decries the state of the streets surrounding the museums that house the pristine Chinese and Japanese artworks with which his study is concerned. Here, Binyon laments how '[we] fill a museum with fine works from diverse countries, and place it in the midst of streets that desolate eye and heart, without an effort to make them part of the beauty we desire.'<sup>26</sup> After evoking the East Asian artworks that form the primary subject of the book to the nuanced degree of sensuous detail that the genre of aesthetic criticism might be said to require, Binyon implicitly questions the value of the isolated and unworldly forms of artistic contemplation that

this genre was also understood to encourage, indicating a desire to move beyond Paterian aesthetic experience for its own sake. This contrasts with Symons's interpretation of Pater in the same period. Symons's writings are impressionistic and in this way as open to the realities of urban modernity as Binyon's. However, in contrast to Binyon, Symons's poetry, essays, and Huysmans-like urban sketches utilize Pater's ideas towards an embrace of the more artificial and potentially tawdrier aspects of the modern city against which Binyon's writings seem to rebel, and, in this manner, are most accurately categorized as Decadent.<sup>27</sup> Symons's writings present a different route through which Pater's aestheticism was brought fully into contact with the urban realities of late-nineteenth and early-twentieth-century London, yet towards an aesthetic that embraces the impressionistic and the personal, in contrast to the more public-facing aims of Binyon's approach.

Symons's emphasis on the modern city in his essays and poetry, especially his interest in music-hall culture, therefore elaborates an understanding of Edwardian London life that differs from Binyon's in the primacy Symons attached to documenting his personal experiences.<sup>28</sup> This contrasts with the subject-matter of Binyon's art writing, which rarely includes direct references to his day-to-day experience of modern London. Instead, Binyon describes the art and culture of different countries and continents.<sup>29</sup> In books such as *The Flight of the Dragon* and *Painting in the Far East*, he synthesizes these descriptions with a critique of European materialism, suggesting that an improved awareness of the nuances of East Asian painting and culture might prompt his British audience to re-examine their surroundings. This is an important distinction between the aims of the two writers. While Binyon is concerned with the ways in which closer attention to Paterian detail might improve the lives of London's inhabitants, Symons's aim is to evoke the present-day city rather than to change it. In this way, the writings of Binyon and Symons in this period represent two key, often complementary and yet at times revealingly divergent visions of how Pater's ideas might meaningfully be elaborated into the early twentieth century.

\* \* \*

Shortly after Pater's death, in 1896, Symons published an extensive essay on his formative 'master', which was subsequently included in a 1904 collection by Symons bearing the appropriately Paterian title, *Studies in Prose and Verse*. This essay demonstrates a thoughtful and discriminating understanding of Pater's work. From the beginning of the essay, Symons makes clear his high regard for Pater's writing, describing Pater's style as 'the most carefully and curiously beautiful of all English styles', with an emphasis on the 'curious' that emphasizes Pater's uniqueness, suggesting the singular influence that he would have exerted on Symons's work.<sup>30</sup> Symons reaffirms this impression by describing Pater's *Studies in the History of the Renaissance* as 'entirely individual, the revelation of a rare and special temperament'.<sup>31</sup> He concedes, however, that Pater's style in the *Renaissance* 'had many affinities with the poetic and pictorial art of Rossetti, Swinburne, and Burne-Jones' and further allows that the *Renaissance* seemed, 'on its appearance in 1873, to have been taken as a manifesto of the so-called "aesthetic school"'.<sup>32</sup> This indicates that, while Symons was happy to concede synaesthetic correspondences between Pater, Rossetti, Swinburne, and Burne-Jones on an individual level, he nevertheless regarded the "aesthetic school" with a pronounced degree of scepticism (there would otherwise be no need to distance himself from it by placing its title in quotation marks and implying that this school is 'so-called' by individuals other than himself). In this way, Symons's attitude towards Pater as a unique artist resonates in a positive way with Karl Beckson's characterization of Symons as a writer who '[lacked] systematic philosophic grounding in literary theory', in the sense that he was ambivalent about conflating Pater's ideas with an entire 'aesthetic school', which might entail overlooking the 'entirely individual' qualities that instil Pater's prose with its distinctive poetics.<sup>33</sup>

Later in the same essay, Symons describes how, in Pater's writing, 'an almost oppressive quiet, a quiet which seems to exhale an atmosphere heavy with the odour of tropical flowers, broods over these pages; a subdued light shadows them [...] here are the simplest words, but they take colour from each other by the cunning accident of their placing in the sentence'.<sup>34</sup>

Here, Symons mentions all the senses except that of touch; for him, Pater's sentences evoke an 'almost oppressive quiet', a state in which quietness is tinged with 'the odour of tropical flowers' – an atmosphere so strong that it even appears to 'brood over [the] pages' with a 'subdued light'. Symons further emphasizes how this takes place on the most detailed textual level possible, with the 'simplest words', which are also confused with the sensuous imagery that they evoke for the reader, in the sense that 'they take colour from each other'. Symons's awareness of 'the cunning accident of their placing in the sentence' belies his use of the word 'accident' and demonstrates a sophisticated awareness of the construction of Pater's sentences. Symons shows that he was aware of a near-physical sense of facture in Pater's work when he describes the 'goldsmith's work of his prose'.<sup>35</sup> Symons argues that, in this way, Pater is 'like Baudelaire', observing the paradoxical sense in which Pater's 'prose too has "rêvé le miracle d'une prose poétique, musicale sans rythme et sans rime."<sup>36</sup> Symons implies that, without literally appropriating qualities that are specific to poetry or music, Pater nevertheless attains the effects of these media through his miraculous prose. Symons's mention of Baudelaire also demonstrates an awareness of the French precedents for Pater's art writing, which is complementary to the synthesis of Anglo-French literary traditions that would later characterize the Decadence of Symons's own work. The synaesthesia-informed mention of the 'odour of tropical flowers' in his characterization of Pater's prose suggests the influence of Huysmans's key Decadent novel, *À rebours* (1884), in which certain poems by Baudelaire are described as having 'fragrant stanzas'.<sup>37</sup> On this basis, Symons demonstrates a sophisticated awareness of the nuances of Pater's aesthetics that is comparable to Binyon's in the earlier sections of *The Art of Botticelli*, even if Symons's account is informed by a more Decadent emphasis on the French influence in Pater's work that goes unnoticed by Binyon. Yet, in the final pages of his essay, Symons arguably goes further than Binyon by implying that Pater's writing reformulates our expectations of the aims of discursive art writing, beyond the already considerable achievement of subtly refining this genre with the incorporation of a sensuous lyricism that might otherwise be associated with poetry. According

to Symons, ‘philosophy, as [Pater] conceives it, is a living, dramatic thing [...] a doctrine being seen as a vivid fragment of some very human mind, not a dry matter of words and disembodied reason’.<sup>38</sup> He elaborates that, in Pater, ‘we have criticism which, in its divination, its arrangement, its building up of many materials into a living organism, is itself creation, becomes imaginative work itself’.<sup>39</sup> Here, Symons’s sense of Pater’s work as a ‘vivid fragment’ and ‘a living organism’ deepens our current sense of how the lack of premeditated theory, or ‘disembodied reason’, in both writers’ work is perhaps their key shared asset. Symons suggests, not only that Pater’s writing should be considered ‘imaginative work’ that withstands comparison with the painterly facture of artists such as Burne-Jones or Watteau, but that in Pater’s hands the essay itself is a medium uniquely able to reconfigure analytical ‘philosophy’ as ‘a living, dramatic thing’.

This aspect of Symons’s thought is clearly complementary to the sensuous emphases of Decadence, especially the open-minded receptiveness to the experience of the more dissipated elements of the modern city suggested by Symons’s poetry from the period.<sup>40</sup> However, it is also a quality that Symons’s writings share with Binyon’s. Although Binyon’s understanding of Pater’s stylistic methods may have been less overtly sophisticated than Symons’s appears to be in the essay that I have been discussing, his writings in *The Art of Botticelli* and *The Flight of the Dragon* (Binyon’s brief but influential 1911 study of traditional Chinese and Japanese art, which doubles as a critique of European materialism) convey the same preference for the ‘vivid fragment’ over ‘disembodied reason’, and on this basis belong to the same lineage.<sup>41</sup> This is particularly the case in the sections of *The Flight of the Dragon* that are concerned with the image of the dancer. For Binyon, discussion of dancing is inextricable from the role of ‘rhythm’. The word is central to his aesthetics, but, consistently with the work of an aesthete who also rejected the rigidity of theory, he is reticent about providing a fixed definition.<sup>42</sup> Binyon begins this early section of *The Flight of the Dragon* with a disingenuously rhetorical question. ‘But what is rhythm?’, he inquires, before elaborating that ‘No one seems to know precisely, though we can often recognise what we cannot define.’<sup>43</sup> From the beginning of this key section, Binyon partly aligns himself with what

Beckson identifies as the Paterian ‘lack of a systematic philosophic grounding in literary theory’ in Symons’s work by making it clear that he is uninterested in furnishing the reader with a straightforwardly explanatory account of this elusive subject.<sup>44</sup> In the next paragraph, Binyon remarks that rhythm ‘is not a mere mechanical succession of beats and intervals.’<sup>45</sup> Binyon’s biographer, John Hatcher, accurately describes ‘rhythm’ as Binyon’s ‘favourite word’, and it would be reasonable to surmise that the longevity of Binyon’s attraction to this term owed much to the sense that its final meaning seemed to him to always be malleable and slightly out of reach, suggesting that, like Pater and Symons, Binyon saw his aesthetic criticism as a ‘living organism’ – an imaginative form of philosophical thinking open to modification and evolution.<sup>46</sup>

The theme of dance also provides insight into the previously ignored resemblance between Binyon’s and Symons’s writings. Dance was an integral and recurring theme in Symons’s work – in both his essays and poetry. Of Symons’s essays, the last chapter of *Studies in Seven Arts*, ‘The World as Ballet’, which was first published in 1898, is the central text in this regard, and anticipates Binyon’s discussion of dance in *The Flight of the Dragon*, albeit with a few telling differences. The first important point of similarity is the way in which both Binyon and Symons envisage dancing as a synthesis of the spiritual (or intellectual) and the physical. In particular, Symons’s closing remarks in this brief chapter bear revealing comparison with Binyon’s sense that ‘the essence of the impulse towards creation [...] is a spiritual rhythm passing into and acting on material things.’<sup>47</sup> Symons accounts for the ballet in comparable terms:

And something in the particular elegance of the dance, the scenery; the avoidance of emphasis, the evasive, winding turn of things; and, above all, the intellectual as well as sensuous appeal of a living symbol, which but can but reach the brain through the eyes, in the visual, concrete imaginative way; has seemed to make the ballet concentrate in itself a good deal of the modern ideal in matters of artistic expression.<sup>48</sup>

Symons’s sense that ballet possesses ‘the intellectual as well as sensuous appeal of a living symbol’ demonstrates that he envisaged dancing – or ballet, at least – as consisting of the same finely balanced relationship between the physical and the intellectual that Binyon implies, in a discussion that touches on dancing, when he claims that the ‘impulse towards creation [...] is a

spiritual rhythm passing into and acting on material things.<sup>49</sup> Binyon's further characterization of dance as a 'plastic idea' also appears at first glance to be simply a reformulation of Symons's concept of ballet as a 'living symbol'. Binyon's 'favourite word', rhythm, also appears in the last sentence of Symons's essay, when the latter remarks that the dancer's 'rhythm reveals to you the soul of her imagined being.'<sup>50</sup> Here, Binyon's emphasis on the relationship between spiritual and rhythmic qualities in the visual arts finds its direct parallel in Symons's account of ballet. The key difference so far is that, while Symons mentions rhythm, he is less obviously preoccupied with this quality in his discursive writing than Binyon.<sup>51</sup> In Binyon's prose, movement and rhythm are often the prevailing qualities, in contrast to the more calmly impressionistic tenor of Symons's essayistic writings; in Binyon's criticism, even architecture is characterized by 'so many coordinated energies, each exerting force in relation to each other'.<sup>52</sup> These differing emphases go to the heart of the two writers' aesthetics as expressed in their essays. Binyon's emphasis on movement and 'force' may be linked to his aversion to stasis and his accompanying desire to effect change in public attitudes through his writings, while Symons's discursive writings do not harbour these aims and so these qualities are emphasized to a lesser extent. Binyon finds the traditional arts of China and Japan to be especially congenial to his aesthetics because the 'predominant desire' of these arts, he feels, is 'to attain rhythmical vitality'.<sup>53</sup> In Binyon's account, the key distinction between European and East Asian art effectively amounts to the difference between movement and stasis. He implies that, while there may be 'a few stories of illusive deception in European art [...] like that of Philip IV mistaking a portrait of Velazquez for a man', they do not bear comparison to the stories associated with Chinese and Japanese art, in which 'we hear of horses so charged with life that they galloped out of the picture' or 'of dragons leaving the wall on which they were painted and soaring through the ceiling'.<sup>54</sup> This helps to explain why it was Binyon's essays, rather than Symons's, that held such strong appeal for radical avant-gardists Ezra Pound and Wyndham Lewis, who took inspiration from Binyon's emphasis

on movement and dynamism and reconfigured it as a restless, discontent response to the pressures of modern urban life.<sup>55</sup>

By contrast with Binyon, Symons's writings on the role of dance tend more towards impressionism than Vorticism, allowing us greater insight into the differences between Binyon's and Symons's aesthetics in the Edwardian period, despite their both drawing substantially on Pater and seemingly agreeing on the ideal fusion between the spiritual and physical that dancing, as an art-form, encapsulates. Symons's writings on dance notably differ from Binyon's in the positive, Decadent emphasis they place on artificiality. This was closely related to the fact that, while Binyon was drawn to the generalized theme of dancing in various historical cultural contexts, Symons was drawn specifically to ballet in the context of 1890s London.<sup>56</sup> Nicholas Freeman has argued recently that 'ballet's fusion of music, dance, and theatrical design make it, for Symons, the greatest of arts', elaborating that the genre also allowed Symons to '[celebrate] artificiality as something in itself rather than basing its success on mimetic assessment.'<sup>57</sup> Symons shares Binyon's and Pater's positive emphasis on the imagined, but, in the particular delight that Symons took in attending balletic and music-hall performances in London, this emphasis becomes inextricable from an accompanying pleasure in the artificial that was specific to his Decadent milieu.<sup>58</sup> In an essay titled 'At the Alhambra: Impressions and Sensations', first published in *The Savoy* in 1896, Symons describes his impressions both as a spectator and behind the scenes at the Alhambra theatre on Leicester Square.<sup>59</sup> This sense of artificiality is made apparent from the beginning of the essay, when Symons remarks that 'in the general way I prefer to see my illusions very clearly, recognizing them as illusions, and yet, to my own perverse and decadent way of thinking, losing none of their charm.'<sup>60</sup> In particular, Symons is preoccupied with the *maquillage* (the cosmetics) of the dancers, which was also the titular subject of a poem from his 1892 collection, *Silhouettes*.<sup>61</sup>

Symons's unabashed delight in the artificial in this 1896 *Savoy* essay prefigures his description of dancers in 'The World as Ballet' (1898), where it acquires a more overtly erotic – and, to a modern reader, uncomfortably objectifying – dimension. Symons describes

[...] all these young bodies, made more alluring by an artificial heightening of whites and reds on the face, displaying, employing, all their natural beauty, themselves full of the sense of joy in motion, or affecting that enjoyment, offered to our eyes like a bouquet of flowers, a bouquet of living flowers, which have all the glitter of artificial ones.<sup>62</sup>

In this later essay, the positive emphasis on the artificial becomes more sophisticated, to the extent that even the 'living flowers' to which the dancers are compared take on the appearance of artificial ones. This emphasis on the artificial is symptomatic of Symons's Decadent interpretation of Aestheticism, in the sense that artificial aids such as cosmetics remind the viewer of the unreality of what they are seeing, which, to the same extent in Symons's work as in Binyon's and Pater's (but in a different manner), brings our attention to the inadequacy of unvarnished truth and fact in the face of the synthesising power of the imagination. With the lengths to which Symons goes in evoking the *maquillage* of the dancers and the fabricated ambience of the theatre, he implicitly accords the same imaginative artistic status to the pronounced artificiality of theatrical costume and set design as Binyon accords to the fine arts. In the same way as the ballets Symons attends lose '[none] of their charm' despite, or perhaps even because of, the heightened artificiality of the setting, 'the waves on Korin's famous screen' in an example from Binyon's account in *The Flight of the Dragon* lose none of their aesthetic impact because of their supposed lack of fidelity to the appearance of 'real waves'. Binyon even implies that these imagined waves are superior because they have been 'divested of all accident of appearance'. 'We might in dreams see waves such as these', Binyon claims, attesting perhaps to his belief in the aesthetic superiority of the imagination and its occasionally tenuous relationship to external stimuli.<sup>63</sup>

Symons's *Savoy* article on the Alhambra theatre also exhibits a pronounced degree of literary impressionism, of the variety that links Symons's work with French texts such as

Huysmans's *Croquis parisiens* (1880).<sup>64</sup> This is particularly apparent when Symons describes viewing 'a ballet from the wings'.<sup>65</sup> To do this, Symons claims, 'is to lose all sense of proportion, all knowledge of the piece as a whole; but, in return, it is fruitful in happy accidents, in momentary points of view, in chance felicities of light and shade and movement.'<sup>66</sup> Symons's perspective is passive as he registers the details that arise from 'happy accidents' and 'chance felicities' that, he seems to imply, require no effort of will on his part. In a sense that is closely related to the role of impressionism in his work, Symons suggests that standing in this position catches the aesthetic critic off-guard, temporarily suspending the Paterian desire to construct an imaginative narrative around sensory experience. This position causes the spectator to 'lose all sense of proportion, all knowledge of the piece as a whole'.<sup>67</sup> Symons seems to anticipate this interpretation when he elaborates that viewing the stage from this unorthodox position is akin to '[seeing] the reverse of the picture', implying that this first-hand composite experience of viewing a ballet both as a normal member of the audience but also – more importantly – seeing the ungainly mechanics of the ballet from the wings does not properly fit with the pristine imaginative and sensory spaces that aesthetic criticism seeks to evoke in its non-Decadent formulations.<sup>68</sup> For both Binyon and Pater, an atmosphere of 'shrine-like seclusion' is at times an integral part of the contemplative aesthetic narratives they wish to unfold for the reader.<sup>69</sup> Huysmans's *À rebours*, also takes place in hermetic confines, but it is significant that, towards the end of his novel, the protagonist and consummate aesthete Des Esseintes' self-imposed and determinedly artificial seclusion results in the disintegration of his physical health and mental wellbeing.<sup>70</sup> It is telling that, in possibly the most well-known episode from Huysmans's novel, Des Esseintes' attempt to impose his exacting aesthetic will on a tortoise – first, by gilding its shell and then by encrusting its gilded shell with jewels – only results in the animal's death.<sup>71</sup> In this way, both Huysmans's and Symons's Decadent texts elaborate Aestheticism by testing the hermetic implications of the movement against a more disorderly and naturalistic version of reality.

The unintended death of a tortoise in *À rebours* and the ‘reverse of the picture’ in ‘At the Alhambra’ complicate the pristine spaces of Paterian aestheticism by allowing for the respectively disquieting and diverting intrusions of the types of reality that would be more easily associated with the naturalistic aims of Impressionism, suggesting the manner in which Decadent texts synthesized and developed aspects of both earlier movements. This is related to Symons’s claim that, in this same music-hall setting, he saw his ‘illusions very clearly, recognizing them as illusions, and yet, to my own perverse and decadent way of thinking, losing none of their charm.’<sup>72</sup> This demonstrates a naturalistic awareness on Symons’s part that his aesthetic experiences are based on ‘illusion’, not reality. They are Decadent rather than idealistic experiences because Symons recognizes that they are prevented by their artificiality from effecting any Binyon-esque change in the outside world. These ‘illusions’ only seem to affect Symons, with his ‘own perverse and decadent way of thinking’, and only then in the moment at which he experiences them. This allows us to imagine a certain sense in which Symons, with his uncomfortable and even slightly seedy proximity to the theatre and to the dancers themselves, was interacting more directly with the realities of modern urban life than Binyon, which suggests more significantly that there are categories of human experience that Paterian aesthetic criticism cannot plausibly accommodate. The remainder of Symons’s description of seeing ‘a ballet from the wings’ confirms the dawning impression that – in this essay, at least – Symons is presenting himself as more of a Baudelairian *flâneur* than as a reticently Paterian aesthetic critic. This urbane, dissipated quality even inflects the prose itself, when Symons describes how ‘[you see] the girls at the back lounging against the set scenes [...] you see how lazily the lazy girls are moving, and how mechanical and irregular are the motions that flow into rhythm when seen from the front.’<sup>73</sup> In this quotation, Symons’s vocabulary becomes more languid as he comes to accept the reality of the scene in which he finds himself. Appropriately, he slyly gives the impression that he is slothfully incapable of thinking of a synonym for ‘lazily’ other than ‘lazy’, lending the prose itself a raw, louche quality very different from the classically rigorous prose that animates *The Flight of*

*the Dragon*. Symons's suggestion of these 'irregular [...] motions that flow into rhythm when seen from the front' evokes a pessimistic sense in which Binyon's more generalized emphasis on rhythmic qualities can only be appreciated in the rarefied air of the British Museum Print Room. In the 'Alhambra' essay, the refined Paterian aestheticism with which Symons was clearly enamoured fuses with the grittily real metropolis, prompting the intrusion of the impressionist sensibility that was an equally important aspect of his Decadent aesthetics, and also the feature that distinguished his work most clearly from Binyon's.

In conclusion, both Symons and Binyon were clearly influenced by Pater's aesthetic criticism, especially as it was formulated in *Studies in the History of the Renaissance*. The two younger writers share the same Paterian emphasis on the importance of the more sensuous yet ascetically imaginative aspects of aesthetic experience, and the subtle interplay between these two qualities that characterizes the *Renaissance*. However, Symons and Binyon developed these points of similarity towards different ends. Symons's essays and poetry in the 1890s were informed as much by French Decadence as they were by Paterian aestheticism, and this is apparent in the Des Esseintes-esque imaginative emphasis he places on the artificial, and in the unabashedly subjective delight he takes in his experiences of 1890s urban nightlife. Binyon's aims in key texts such as *The Flight of the Dragon* were different. Rather than luxuriating in the seductive, fabricated pleasures of 1890s and Edwardian London, Binyon instead imagines ways in which the streets of the city might be transformed by closer sensuous attention to the artworks of the European *quattrocento* and of East Asia, out of a desire that the 'streets that desolate eye and heart' might be made to aspire towards 'the beauty we desire'.<sup>74</sup> Future research into Binyon's work might further explore the implications of these idealistic desires. This idealism might be why Binyon's restless prose summons forth fantastical images of soaring dragons and crashing waves, while in his more discursive writings Symons is happy simply to immerse himself 'in chance felicities of light and shade' and the enjoyably obvious *maquillage* of the music-hall dancers.<sup>75</sup>

- 
- <sup>1</sup> Jason Edwards, *Alfred Gilbert's Aestheticism: Gilbert Amongst Whistler, Wilde, Leighton, Pater and Burne-Jones* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006), p. 87; Mario Praz, *The Romantic Agony* (London and New York: Oxford University Press), p. 358.
- <sup>2</sup> David Peters Corbett, *The World in Paint: Modern Art and Visuality in England, 1848-1914* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2004), p. 98.
- <sup>3</sup> Ezra Pound, 'Vortex', *Blast*, 1 (1914), 154.
- <sup>4</sup> Karl Beckson, *Arthur Symons: A Life* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987), p. 36; Arthur Symons, *Selected Early Poems*, ed. by Jane Desmarais and Chris Baldick (Cambridge: Modern Humanities Research Association, 2017), pp. 3-4.
- <sup>5</sup> Arthur Symons, *Studies in Prose and Verse* (London: J. M. Dent, 1904), p. 76.
- <sup>6</sup> Symons, *Selected Early Poems*, pp. 3-4.
- <sup>7</sup> Symons, *Studies in Prose and Verse*, p. 63; Arthur Symons, *Studies in Seven Arts* (New York: Dutton, 1907), p. v; Walter Pater, *Letters of Walter Pater*, ed. by Laurence Evans (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1970), p. 70.
- <sup>8</sup> Symons, *Studies in Seven Arts*, p. v.
- <sup>9</sup> John Hatcher, *Laurence Binyon: Poet, Scholar of East and West* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995), p. 45.
- <sup>10</sup> Rupert Richard Arrowsmith, *Modernism and the Museum: Asian, African, and Pacific Art and the London Avant-Garde* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), p. 105; David Peters Corbett, 'Make It New: Laurence Binyon, Pound and Vorticism', *Paideuma*, 26, 2-3 (1997), 183-84; Zhaoming Qian, *Orientalism and Modernism: The Legacy of China in Pound and Williams* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1995), p. 13.
- <sup>11</sup> See Kostas Boyiopoulos, 'Introduction: Sensual Text, Textual Sense – Aestheticism to Decadence', in *The Decadent Image: The Poetry of Wilde, Symons, and Dowson* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2015).
- <sup>12</sup> John J. Conlon, *Walter Pater and the French Tradition* (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 1982), pp. 68-69, p. 139.
- <sup>13</sup> Symons, *Selected Early Poems*, pp. 4-5.
- <sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 1.
- <sup>15</sup> Laurence Binyon, *The Art of Botticelli: An Essay in Pictorial Criticism* (London: Macmillan, 1913); Herbert P. Horne, *Botticelli: Painter of Florence* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980).
- <sup>16</sup> Binyon, *Art of Botticelli*, p. 39.
- <sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 41.
- <sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 46.
- <sup>20</sup> Walter Pater, *Studies in the History of the Renaissance* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), p. 124.
- <sup>21</sup> In the preface to *Studies in the History of the Renaissance*, Pater describes how 'artists and philosophers' in this period 'do not live in isolation, but breathe a common air and catch light and heat from each other's thoughts', conveying Pater's nuanced sensitivity to the role of cultural narrative in fifteenth-century Italy. *Ibid.*, p. 6.
- <sup>22</sup> Conlon, *Walter Pater and the French Tradition*, p. 69; Catherine Maxwell, *Second Sight: The Visionary Imagination in Late Victorian Literature* (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 2011), p. 78; Symons, *Studies in Prose and Verse*, p. 76.
- <sup>23</sup> Robert M. Seiler, ed., *The Book Beautiful: Walter Pater and the House of Macmillan* (London and New Brunswick: Athlone Press, 1999), p. 70.
- <sup>24</sup> Laurence Binyon, *Dutch Etchers of the Seventeenth Century* (London: Seeley, 1895), pp. 9-10.
- <sup>25</sup> Seiler, ed., *The Book Beautiful*, p. 70.
- <sup>26</sup> Laurence Binyon, *Painting in the Far East* (New York: Dover, 1959), pp. 271-72.
- <sup>27</sup> Symons, *Selected Early Poems*, p. 12.
- <sup>28</sup> Arthur Symons, *Spiritual Adventures*, ed. by Nicholas Freeman (Cambridge: Modern Humanities Research Association, 2017), p. 92.
- <sup>29</sup> Binyon, *Painting in the Far East*, pp. 271-72.
- <sup>30</sup> Symons, *Studies in Prose and Verse*, p. 63; Beckson, *Arthur Symons*, p. 53.
- <sup>31</sup> Symons, *Studies in Prose and Verse*, p. 64.
- <sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 65.
- <sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>37</sup> Joris-Karl Huysmans, *Against Nature*, trans. by Margaret Mauldon (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), p. 97.

- <sup>38</sup> Symons, *Studies in Prose and Verse*, p. 74.
- <sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 75.
- <sup>40</sup> Symons, *Selected Early Poems*, p. 12.
- <sup>41</sup> Symons, *Studies in Prose and Verse*, p. 74.
- <sup>42</sup> Laurence Binyon, *The Flight of the Dragon* (London: John Murray, 1911), p. 9.
- <sup>43</sup> Binyon, *Flight of the Dragon*, p. 15.
- <sup>44</sup> Beckson, *Arthur Symons*, p. 31.
- <sup>45</sup> Binyon, *Flight of the Dragon*, p. 15.
- <sup>46</sup> Hatcher, *Laurence Binyon*, p. 179.
- <sup>47</sup> Binyon, *Flight of the Dragon*, p. 15.
- <sup>48</sup> Symons, *Studies in Seven Arts*, p. 391.
- <sup>49</sup> Binyon, *Flight of the Dragon*, p. 15.
- <sup>50</sup> Symons, *Studies in Seven Arts*, p. 391.
- <sup>51</sup> This is separate from the role of rhythm in Symons's poetry, which is outside the scope of the current article.
- <sup>52</sup> Binyon, *Flight of the Dragon*, p. 17.
- <sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 17, 20.
- <sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 20.
- <sup>55</sup> Corbett, 'Make it New', 183-84.
- <sup>56</sup> Symons, *Spiritual Adventures*, p. 88.
- <sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 89.
- <sup>58</sup> Beckson, *Arthur Symons*, p. 77.
- <sup>59</sup> Symons, *Spiritual Adventures*, p. 88.
- <sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 90.
- <sup>61</sup> Symons, *Selected Early Poems*, p. 47.
- <sup>62</sup> Symons, *Studies in Seven Arts*, p. 389.
- <sup>63</sup> Binyon, *Flight of the Dragon*, p. 21.
- <sup>64</sup> Joris-Karl Huysmans, *Parisian Sketches*, trans. by Brendan King (Sawtry: Dedalus, 2004), p. 16.
- <sup>65</sup> Symons, *Spiritual Adventures*, p. 92.
- <sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>67</sup> Pater, *Renaissance*, p. 6.
- <sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>69</sup> Binyon, *Art of Botticelli*, p. 115; Pater, *Renaissance*, p. 119.
- <sup>70</sup> Huysmans, *Against Nature*, p. 173.
- <sup>71</sup> *Ibid.* pp. 36-38, pp. 42-43.
- <sup>72</sup> Symons, *Spiritual Adventures*, p. 90.
- <sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 92.
- <sup>74</sup> Binyon, *Painting in the Far East*, pp. 271-72.
- <sup>75</sup> Symons, *Spiritual Adventures*, p. 92.

## Symons and Print Culture: Journalist, Critic, Book Maker

Laurel Brake

Birkbeck, University of London

My intent here is to explore the range and ingenuity of Arthur Symons's participation in print culture, and to probe how he managed his bread and butter work as a journalist, critic, and book maker. My focus is his article 'The Painting of the Nineteenth Century', in its differing functions and forms over a four-year period (1903-1906), as a periodical book review and a chapter on painting that appeared in *Studies in Seven Arts*, a book comprised of articles from the press.<sup>1</sup> What initially drew me to this article was its evidence of Symons's sustained support for Simeon Solomon, a queer British artist from a London-based family of Jewish painters, in the decade that followed the Wilde trials, and among the inhibitions they fostered.<sup>2</sup> Nearly a generation younger than Solomon, Symons (1865-1945) was born just as Solomon (1840-1905) began his career. Solomon appears in both the 1903 and 1906 versions of Symons's review, and in between a newspaper review of an exhibition of Solomon's work in 1905/1906. Symons enters late into Solomon's story in these pieces, towards the end of the artist's life.

In the mid-1860s Solomon was taken up by Oxford aesthetes including A. C. Swinburne and Walter Pater, who in 1873 helped Solomon deal with a charge of sexual impropriety.<sup>3</sup> Before Solomon's brief imprisonment that year, the first of many for public homosexual practices, drunkenness, and homelessness, his early work met with increasing respect in the art world. Religious, visionary, symbolic, and characterized by homosexual imagery and themes, his visual art and his prose poem *A Vision of Love* retained admirers in the course of his inchoate lifestyle that led to destitution, and death in a workhouse in 1905. Thus, Symons's interventions in these articles occur at an extreme period of Solomon's life and isolation, and then after the artist's death.

Symons links the various iterations of his text with the work of Pater, a valued friend of Symons, whose death Symons had lamented in a long tribute in 1896.<sup>4</sup> That obituary, published when the Wilde trials were still fresh in living memory, indicates Symons's refusal to be governed

by the fear and prohibitions that followed Wilde's imprisonment. Like Symons, Pater had been a lifelong supporter of Solomon and collector of his works, and Symons reveals in these articles the networks, private and professional, that Symons, Solomon, and Pater shared. If the brave tributes by Symons to Solomon and Pater are noteworthy in 1903-1906, they are characteristic of Symons's past record, while his imaginative focus in his book on the larger picture of Europe is also a continuation of transnational work on Decadence and Symbolism he published in 1893 and 1898.<sup>5</sup> Distinguished by its breadth and acuity of cultural reading, *Studies in Seven Arts* includes chapters on innovative and largely contemporary forms of nineteenth-century sculpture, painting, symphonic music, opera, acting, theatre design, and drama, respectively by Rodin, Beethoven, Wagner, Richard Strauss, the actress Eleonora Duse, Gordon Craig, and Alfred Jarry's 'Ubu Roi'. Part of its distinctive portrait of what is retrospectively called Modernism is its turn from the default perspective of literature, a single art, to the variety and range of other arts, which he groups together as characteristic of a modern movement.

### **'The Painting of the Nineteenth Century': Symons, Simeon Solomon, and Walter Pater at the *Fin de Siècle***

Even in its book form in 1906, 'The Painting of the Nineteenth Century' clearly acknowledges its origins as a 1903 review article (in the *Fortnightly Review*), and its function as a response to a specific book at its time of publication, D. S. MacColl's *Nineteenth-Century Art* (1902). Although Symons's article has been revised for his book, he neither seeks to obscure the origins of his chapters as journalism, or to suppress their gestation over time in the press, but supplies dates at the end of chapters, here 1903 and 1905, showing that each 1906 piece is part of *a process* of creativity, and a particular response in time, as journalism is. Symons's persistence in naming MacColl and his book, and refusing to disguise the review genre of the piece in its altered book form, is one of Symons's distinctions as a critic. He does however remove several informative sentences from the 1903 text to take account of changes in MacColl's circumstances, notably his promotion from 1906 to Director of the Tate Gallery. But in both texts it is as painter-critic that Symons most values

MacColl, whose watercolours Symons had already reviewed in the *Saturday Review* in the mid-1890s, and whose paintings Symons preferred to his prose!<sup>6</sup>

Symons's review of MacColl's book is generous, in a Paterian mode of appreciation. Despite this positive note, Symons shows his mettle as a critic by an oblique critique, a quiet identification of an omission. Symons extends his appreciation to the paintings of Solomon, whom MacColl's book excludes. Symons's agency is heightened by the review function. The significance of Symons's introduction of Solomon is also revealed by the cultural climate of the time: the status of Solomon in 1903, who was in the throes of alcoholism and destitution before dying in 1905 in the workhouse. If MacColl's omission may be seen as part of a general critical reluctance to mention him, Symons's response to the same climate was to include him.

The absence of Solomon from MacColl's book may be compared with a biography of Walter Pater by A. C. Benson, published in 1906, the same year as Symons's book. Benson does not mention Simeon Solomon at all, although Pater and Solomon were close friends in the 1860s and early 1870s, and in contact until Pater's death. Other close friends of Pater's, Symons himself, and Lionel Johnson, appear only once in Benson, among a terse list of Pater's 'decadent' friends whom Benson thought better otherwise to exclude. Such was the climate for biographers and memoirists a decade after the Wilde trials, when the power of the law that made male homosexual practices a crime and incarcerated Wilde, inhibited print, shaped social practices, and ensured censorship in biography. In 1906, in their respective books, Symons's and Benson's inscription of the surrounding gender issues is comparable, though they handle it in characteristically different ways: Benson, born into the higher echelons of the Anglican Church and writing from the University, excludes Solomon and other risqué figures and implies rather than states the topic of queer Pater; while Symons, known for his risqué writing that some regarded as his self-appointed brand, names Solomon and Pater, and attends at length and regularly to their work.

In his tribute to Solomon, Symons inscribes links between himself, Pater and Solomon. Echoing Pater at many points, Symons's 1903 review becomes in places a prose poem recognizably

related to the style of various passages in Pater's writing. Nevertheless, its detailed attention to Solomon distinguishes the piece, as does its slightly tongue-in-cheek tribute to Pater. This Paterian note in both the 1903 review and the 1906 chapter is re-enforced in 1906 by the book in which the chapter appears: its title *Studies in Seven Arts* echoes Pater's *Studies in the History of the Renaissance*, as do titles of two other books published in 1897 and 1904, a series in which Symons's new book takes its place.<sup>7</sup> The book opens with quotations from Pater in the first sentence of the first paragraph of the Introduction, followed by Pater-inflected descriptive prose over the five pages devoted to Solomon (pp. 57-61). Solomon's picture 'The Sleepers and the One that Waketh' is evoked for readers through Symons's deployment of Paterian ekphrasis:

Three faces, faint with languor, two with closed eyes and the other with eyes wearily open, lean together, cheek on cheek, between white, sharp-edged stars in a background of dim sky. These faces, with their spectral pallor, the robes of faint purple tinged with violet, are full of morbid delicacy, like the painting of a perfume. Here, as always, there is weakness, insecurity, but also a very personal sense of beauty, which this only half-mastered technique is just able to bring out upon the canvas, in at least a suggestion of everything that the painter meant.<sup>8</sup>

Moving on to later works by Solomon, Symons suggests that as recently as ten years ago, Solomon 'could still produce, with an almost mechanical ease, sitting at a crowded table in a Clerkenwell news-room, those drawings which we see reproduced by some cheap process of facsimile, in pink or in black, and sold in the picture-shops in Regent Street, Oxford Street, and Museum Street.'<sup>9</sup> He continues with another Pater-inspired paragraph, echoing rhythms and diction of Pater's pieces on 'Diaphaneitè', Winckelmann, Leonardo, Botticelli, and Giorgione:

A void and wonderfully vague desire fills all these hollow faces, as water fills the hollow pools of the sand; they have the sorrow of those who have no cause for sorrow except that they are as they are in a world not made after their pattern. The lips are sucked back and the chin thrust forward in a languor which becomes a mannerism, like the long thin throats, and heavy half-closed eyes and cheeks haggard with fever or exhaustion. The same face, varied a little in mood, scarcely in feature, serves for Christ and the two Marys, for Sleep and for Lust. The lips are scarcely roughened to indicate a man, the throats scarcely roughened to indicate a woman. These faces are without sex; they have brooded among ghosts of passions till they have become the ghosts of themselves; the energy of virtue or of sin has gone out of them, and they hang in space, dry, rattling, the husks of desire.<sup>10</sup>

These instances of heteroglossia confirm the covert personal and professional links between Symons, Solomon, MacColl, and Pater inscribed in this piece.<sup>11</sup>

Such networks are endemic in nineteenth-century journalism, which generated a special vocabulary to describe the forms these relations took in print: ‘log rolling’ and puffing. Journalists mounted several attacks against these practices across the century; and they exploited, then revised, a system of reviewing and anonymity or pseudonymity that enabled them.<sup>12</sup> This brings me to my first general point, that Arthur Symons was an indefatigable *journalist*, as well as a critic, poet, and author of books. Although the model of bibliography privileges his books and edited books (a traditional hierarchy) followed by the list of a huge number of articles, from the early 1880s Symons is publishing in serials, from the initial *Wesleyan-Methodist* to the *Academy*, *Athenaum*, *London Quarterly Review*, and *Saturday Review* that rapidly supersede it.<sup>13</sup> By 1893, when ‘The Decadent Movement in Literature’ appears in the monthly *Harper’s New Monthly Magazine*, helping to establish his reputation as a critic, followed by *The Symbolist Movement in Literature*, he is publishing articles weekly, and often more than one per week. While biographies of Symons refer to his serial work in general as part of his busy life, they seldom if ever confront the elephant in the room, that his journalism is at the core of his writing life, and of his writing.<sup>14</sup>

His publishing practices are characteristic of journalism at the end of the century. Following an appearance in a newspaper or journal, text or portions of it are reprinted, revised and repurposed in another article or chapter, which may re-appear in later and different gatherings of periodicals and books. By the early nineteenth century, newspaper journalism was characterized by just such practices: by scissors-and-paste sourcing of editorial copy – in book parlance ‘reprinting’ – but with little or no pejorative baggage; this was not piracy, but normalized communication of news, normally from the ‘metropolitan’ and ‘foreign’ press.<sup>15</sup> Symons’s manipulation of his writing, which he might have seen in Pater, is also normative practice for him, and much energy must have gone into his endless repurposing of his press pieces. It probably

depended on his keeping a full ‘morgue’ or cuttings collection, well catalogued and organized to allow him easy access to his incessant scissors-and-paste practices.

Aspects of Symons’s writing pitch and style also derive from journalism: what literary critics call his taste for the ‘avant-garde’ can also be understood as a journalist’s quest for ‘the story’ – his critical nose for ‘news’ and what is new in the contemporary art and literary worlds. His racy style conveys temporalities – the precise moment, along with its broader context, fulfils the journalists’ mantra to keep the reader on board, not only to finish reading the piece, and perhaps purchase the book, find it in a library or go to the performance or exhibition, but to purchase the journal next week. These journalistic aspects of Symons’s prose, all of which originated in the press, should take their place beside the emphasis on his literary and attachments and affinities (with Pater for example), that literary critics and biographers favour. Symons’s article ‘Painting in the Nineteenth Century’ exemplifies many of these characteristics; it begins life as a book review article in a monthly periodical (the *Fortnightly Review*), it is influenced by a weekly newspaper review (the *Outlook*) of an art exhibition, and it re-appears in a revised form in a book of other press pieces, among which some of its content is incorporated.

It also puffs the book and D. S. MacColl (1869-1948), as author, critic, and painter, another journalistic practice.<sup>16</sup> The review is a kindness from one critic to another, as well as the acquisition of some cultural capital – MacColl’s pleasure, the affiliation of Symons’s name with MacColl and his progressive art politics, and the visibility of a major signed article by Symons in the *Fortnightly*. MacColl was one of Symons’s professional peers in the art world, an ascendant art critic of his generation at the *Spectator* (1890-1896) and the *Saturday Review* (1897-1906); and editor of the *Architectural Review* (1901-1905), while Symons was at the *Star* as theatre critic, at the *Outlook* as art critic, and a contributor to *Browning Society Papers*, *Time*, and the *Athenæum*. Both MacColl and Symons are invested in the idea of ‘the contemporary’, including for example Impressionism, although Symons’s posture is different from and wider than MacColl’s’: Symons’s art is poetry, his criticism includes literature and drama, and he is distinguished by his familiarity with French

literature and culture, whereas MacColl's implication in the art world – as head of the Tate from 1906 and from 1911 of the Wallace collection – was mainly in the context of art collections in Britain. As young critics of a new generation, they also share a taste for controversy: MacColl was prominent in the debate about the New Art Criticism between February and April 1893 in the *Spectator* and *Westminster Gazette*,<sup>17</sup> and in 1903 he spearheaded a long-running story about the fulfilment of the Chantrey Bequest at the Royal Academy in the *Saturday Review*.<sup>18</sup> When in 1901 MacColl curated his portion of the Glasgow International Exhibition of Nineteenth-Century Art, on British Impressionism, he did boldly include Solomon's work, but he did not mention him in the book based on that exhibition that Symons reviewed. For his part, Symons's pieces on the MacColl book show a similar taste for the provocative.

Symons's review, despite MacColl's omission of Solomon, includes Solomon, a name and a move meaningful to some of Symons's *Fortnightly Review* readers in 1903, and by more readers in 1906, by which date two posthumous shows that included Solomon had recently been mounted in 1905 and 1906.<sup>19</sup> In addition, the unmistakable echo of Walter Pater's style in both iterations of the article was similarly risqué.<sup>20</sup> However, while Symons's racy contemporaneity can be distinguished from Pater's whose work also habitually appeared first in the press, it is similarly distinct from George Moore's raspish and immoderate voice in *Modern Painting*. Symons's prose is more influenced by journalism than Pater's, but less than Moore's in *Modern Painting* (1893), which Symons charges with being 'full of injustice, brutality, and ignorance; but [...] full also of the generous justice, the most discriminating sympathy, and the genuine knowledge of the painter'; 'it stands out among the art criticism of our time'.<sup>21</sup> But Symons's determination to praise Moore, for all that, is a recognizable variant of Pater's model of aesthetic criticism, 'appreciation', which Symons praises in his Pater piece in *The Savoy* in late 1896: 'Pater [...] may almost be said never, except by implication, to condemn anything. Is it necessary to *say* that one dislikes a thing? It need but be ignored; and Pater ignored whatever did not come up to his very exacting standard, finding quite enough to write about in that small residue that remained over.'<sup>22</sup>

That the 1903 periodical article was signed ‘Arthur Symons’ would have also alerted readers to expect a fresh, timely, edgy piece. By this date that signature was familiar to readers of the cultural press; ‘Symons’ was a ‘brand’, and he was publishing across the media, and often. In the early 1890s he was a member of the Rhymers’ Club and his poems had appeared in its two anthologies; in 1892 his second book of poetry *Silhouettes* was dedicated to Yeats, an affiliation he perpetuated by using ‘Silhouette’ as his critical pseudonym in the daily *Star*, where Symons was drama critic. In 1893 this same Symons had published a controversial lengthy overview ‘The Decadent Movement in Literature’ in France and Britain in *Harper’s*, and its successor, *The Symbolist Movement in Literature* in 1899, again dedicated to Yeats.

Some readers of the 1903 *Fortnightly Review* article might also recall the *Savoy*, founded and edited by Symons in 1896, illustrated by Beardsley among others, and published by Leonard Smithers, a publisher-bookseller, and a dealer in the literature of decadence and pornography. A niche journal, publishing art and literature only, the *Savoy* presented itself as experimental and ‘alternative’, particularly with reference to *The Yellow Book*. As its self-proclaimed rival, the *Savoy* was also its unmistakable successor, initially imitating *The Yellow Book* in its quarterly frequency, and in its treatment of Art as equal to Literature, with the demarcation and parallel indicated in separate Tables of Contents. But the new journal boasted of being free of editorial ideology – neither ‘decadent’ on the one hand or censorious, in contrast to *The Yellow Book*, which in succumbing to panic during the Wilde trials in the spring of 1895, had dismissed Aubrey Beardsley, its landmark, and lost contributors as a result. Many of them, including Beardsley, re-appeared in the *Savoy*.<sup>23</sup> After two quarterly intervals, Symons’s *Savoy* abandoned its imitation of *The Yellow Book*’s frequency, and went monthly.

Symons’s *Savoy* was an important player in the history of Decadence and the 1890s, publishing as it did excellent work by many renowned writers and artists of the *fin de siècle* and early Modernism, including Max Beerbohm, Mathilde Blind, Joseph Conrad, Hubert Crackanthorpe, Ernest Dowson, Havelock Ellis, Ford Madox Hueffer, Fiona Macleod, George Moore, Olivia

Shakespeare, Paul Verlaine, Frederick Wedmore, Theodore Wratislaw, and Yeats. The Literary Contents of the last issue, which included poetry, a critical essay, a travel article, a short story, and a final editorial, were all by Symons, but it reflected the general policy of the *Savoy* that contributors were encouraged to submit copy across genres and not to confine themselves to one form in which they were most proficient or had established themselves. Thus Beardsley not only designed the *Savoy* and published artwork, but also contributed poems and a short story; Beerbohm an article and a caricature; Dowson stories and poems; Selwyn Image poems and criticism; and Yeats fiction and poetry. Those eight issues over one year of the *Savoy* consolidated Symons's position, a young man of thirty, in the history of the nineties, before he published his Symbolism monograph.

The intellectual boldness of the *Savoy* is part of Symons's core practice as an editor and critic, just as much his brand and that of the *Savoy* as Beardsley's black and white designs and writing. It is repeated in his later projects – the adventurous and prescient contents of *Studies of the Seven Arts*, the Decadence and Symbolist Literature projects, and his inclusion of the 'decadent' French poet Verlaine in various pieces – among them the 'Decadent Movement', the *Symbolist Movement*, and the *Savoy*. Symons's inclusion of Pater in the context of Decadence in 1893 was similarly provocative (not least possibly to Pater), as was an article dedicated to Pater in the *Savoy* eighteen months after the Wilde trials. Symons's inclusion of Solomon in a variety of reviews and articles, including 'The Painting of the Nineteenth Century' is part of this larger picture of Symons's nerve and nose.

### **Networks, print and personal: Symons, MacColl, Pater, and Solomon**

Symons's interest in the art of Solomon began early in his career, at the age of twenty-two: Symons wrote to his friend Herbert Horne, editor of the *Century Guild Hobby Horse* inquiring about Solomon's work in September 1887, after he had seen some of Solomon's work in Manchester. As a friend of Horne, the Rhymers and their circle including Lionel Johnson from 1890, Symons would have had exposure to original drawings and paintings by Solomon, as well as the prints with

which Johnson covered his walls in his room in Fitzroy Street. Johnson had been Pater's great undergraduate friend who, leaving Oxford on graduation, moved to London, where Pater's and Johnson's friendship continued. In meeting Johnson, Symons was consolidating his contact with Pater, whom he had met in 1888, after a correspondence of two years.<sup>24</sup> By 1893, Symons and Pater were well acquainted and, as noted, Symons included Pater in his long critical article on 'The Decadent Movement' that appeared in the November 'Decadence issue' of *Harper's*. Pater did not only figure in this issue as Symons's subject; they were partners in their public affiliation with Decadence in the American press, as 'Apollo in Picardy', one of Pater's most explicit queer stories appeared in the back of the same issue.

Earlier that year, in June, Pater had been a covert participant in the New Art Criticism debate that broke out in the press between February and April 1893, in which MacColl figured prominently, as one of the three key figures. George Moore weighed in to support him. When Pater decided to review Moore's irascible book *Modern Painting* in the *Daily Chronicle* newspaper, Pater was tacitly supporting MacColl and the New Art Criticism, as well as Moore, and making a visible and signed contribution to this contemporary critical debate.<sup>25</sup> By 1893 Pater had known MacColl over a decade, having met and entertained him when MacColl was an Oxford undergraduate in 1882 and co-editor of the *Oxford Magazine*, to which Pater agreed to contribute. At the end of the year of the New Art Criticism debate, in autumn 1893, MacColl had Pater in mind: he brought together Pater and William Rothenstein, a young artist, in connection with Rothenstein's first book project, *Oxford Characters*, in which Pater was to appear. Pater died unexpectedly and prematurely soon after he sat for Rothenstein, and before the serial part including him and his fellow 'character' was published in April 1895, but MacColl figured in these last years of Pater's life.

Symons invoked these New Art Criticism connections in 1903 in his periodical review of MacColl's book, when he acknowledged George Moore's book, along with John Ruskin's and Pater's as predecessors of MacColl's book, which Symons hailed rhetorically and immediately as

‘the most important book on painting which has been published since Ruskin’s *Modern Painting*.’<sup>26</sup> This accolade is introduced by Symons alongside significantly more tempered criticism of Ruskin, and even of Pater, about whom Symons writes ‘Had he [Pater] devoted himself exclusively to art criticism, there is no doubt that, *in a sense*, he would have been a great art critic.’<sup>27</sup> Symons is playing to his readers, spicing up his introduction to his article with hyperbole on the one hand and a touch of mild denigration on the other.

We see Symons similarly accommodating critique to a larger model of praise in a 1906 review in the *Outlook* in January 1906 of the Royal Academy’s winter exhibition, where Symons links the work of Solomon with that of Burne-Jones and D. G. Rossetti. Symons dismisses a show dedicated to Solomon’s work at the Baillie Gallery as too mixed in quality, to which he contrasts the Royal Academy show, of fewer pieces of higher quality:

at the separate exhibition at the Baillie Gallery there was, along with a few good things, and many things interesting as steps in a progress, such a multitude of things at once violent and inane, at once helpless, and struggling, that it was impossible to think seriously of what seemed to be the attempts of a bad poet to express himself in a medium which he had not mastered. But at the Academy we see what Solomon, at the beginning of his career, could do.<sup>28</sup>

Nevertheless, in a transitional sentence as he moves from Solomon to Rossetti in this Royal Academy review, Symons is glad to abandon the ‘chilly emblems’ of Solomon’s work for the warmth of Rossetti’s. Symons chose not to review the Baillie Gallery show separately later in the previous year but rather to incorporate this paragraph in a more positive ‘appreciation’, however one not devoid of mild criticism itself.

Likewise, despite the irony with respect to Pater the art critic in the 1903 article and 1906 chapter and book, they both are suffused by Paterian language, and writing. Why are these articles and book so Paterian? Clearly Symons, as Karl Beckson suggests, experienced Pater’s death in July 1894 as a great loss.<sup>29</sup> Symons’s immediate attempt to recruit contributors to a volume memorialising Pater ‘came to nothing’ and thwarted his own plan to commemorate Pater, to the extent that Symons does not seem to have even written an obituary in the press in the autumn of

1894 following Pater's death. He does however become a self-styled defender of Pater's reputation, and vociferous in his objection to Edmund Gosse's publication of Pater's journalism from the *Guardian* in 1896, in the wake of the Wilde trials, echoing the views of Pater's posthumous editor Charles Lancelot Shadwell, a Fellow of Oriel College, Oxford, and Pater's sisters.<sup>30</sup> Nevertheless Symons finally published his 1896 tribute to Pater in the *Savoy*.<sup>31</sup> A decade later in 1906, it is not simply that the first British biography of Walter Pater by A. C. Benson and Symons's *Studies in Seven Arts* both appeared that year.<sup>32</sup> In the months before Symons's book was published in November, Symons was reviewing Pater, as part of his work as a journalist. In May, Symons was fashioning a review of Benson's biography of Pater, a work that might have influenced his writing of the Preface of *Studies in Seven Arts* with its many echoes of and quotations from Pater. Moreover, in September that same year, he published a fresh memoir on Pater in the *Monthly Review*, two months before *Studies in Seven Arts* appeared. Penned in July/August, the *Monthly Review* article was loosely linked in the journal to the occasion of Benson's biography by a footnote, following which it was duly placed by Symons in his 'morgue' or system, to be used subsequently for scissors-and-paste re-purposed publication – in 1919 an introduction to an edition of the *Renaissance* – and again in 1932.<sup>33</sup>

This focus on a single aspect of Symons's interests – in visual art, on a single instance of Symons's journalism in iterations in the early twentieth century, and on the matrix of professional and personal networks over fifteen years they involve – provides a glimpse of his working practices and writing as a journalist, critic and producer of books. As this article demonstrates, it needs to be populated with his poetry, his drama, and with other types of his journalism.

---

<sup>1</sup> Arthur Symons's variations on a review of 1903 take the following forms: It first appears as a periodical book review: 'The Painting of the Nineteenth Century', *Fortnightly Review* (March 1903), 520-34. It is a signed review article of D. S. MacColl, *Nineteenth-Century Art* (Glasgow: James Maclehose & Sons, 1902), which is a luxurious folio book. The review is then re-mediated as an article into a book of 'studies': 'The Painting of the Nineteenth Century', *Studies in Seven Arts* (London: Constable, [November] 1906), pp. 33-61. At the end of the article in *Studies in Seven Arts*, Symons lists two dates, 1903 and 1905, of articles that have contributed to the 1906 text that appears in his book. It is likely that the 1905 date refers to a review of an art exhibition of 1905 published in a weekly newspaper, the *Outlook* in early 1906. Earlier in 1905 the *Outlook* had doubled its price and

changed its format: as from its 4 March 1905 issue, the first at 6d, it would be not only ‘an organ worthy of the Unionist party and the Imperial cause, but a weekly review of Politics, Letters, Science and Art, without a rival of its kind’ (*Outlook* (25 February 1905), 272). Symons’s piece, ‘English Masters at the Royal Academy’, in which he reviews Simeon Solomon’s pictures among others, was published in the first issue of the *Outlook* in the new year (6 January 1906), 19-20), as a signed review. Symons probably wrote and submitted it in late 1905, and he may have mis-remembered the date of the publication of his review when he submitted his MS for his book on the seven arts later in 1906.

<sup>2</sup> For more about Simeon Solomon, see Colin Cruise, *Love Revealed. Simeon Solomon and the Pre-Raphaelites* (London: Merrell, 2005).

<sup>3</sup> In her thesis, “‘He hath mingled with the ungodly’: The Life of Simeon Solomon after 1873, with a Survey of the Extant Works’ (University of York, 2009), Carolyn Conroy recounts that Swinburne travelled to Oxford to confer with Pater and Ingram Bywater about Solomon’s trouble, about which discussion Swinburne wrote to Powell 6 June 1873. Conroy notes from Swinburne’s account that Pater seemed knowledgeable about the type of Solomon’s insanity, and expressed confidence in Solomon’s ‘recovery and rehabilitation’. She comments that Pater calmed Swinburne’s previous ‘angry, anti-Semitic taunts’ which were replaced by empathy with Solomon, and compassion (p. 87). Pater also went to see Rebecca Solomon, who provided him with more information about the events. Pater’s medical knowledge is explicable: he came from a line of surgeons, and his older brother William Thompson Pater was a doctor, who had been working in mental hospitals since 1865. In 1873, William was Assistant Medical Officer at the Hampshire Asylum in Fareham, and by 1875 he was in charge of the County Asylum in Stafford as its Medical Superintendent. Conroy notes (p. 91) that after Solomon was released from prison in late February 1873, he was ‘placed in a private asylum’ (See Robert Ross, *Bibelot* (April 1911), 144), and it is possible Walter Pater conferred with his brother about Solomon’s condition and aftercare, once he had seen Rebecca. In July 1871, prior to Solomon’s arrest, Swinburne had published a review article dedicated to Solomon (‘Simeon Solomon: Notes on his Vision of Love’, *Dark Blue* (July 1871), 568-77). Given his friendship with Solomon, and his acquaintance with Swinburne, Pater probably read it, although it was published anonymously in a little magazine. Swinburne never reprinted it. Pater does refer to Solomon approvingly if obliquely (‘a *Bacchus* by a young Hebrew painter’) after Solomon’s first imprisonment (‘A Study of Dionysus’, *Fortnightly Review* (December 1876), 752-72). Like Swinburne, Pater never reprinted it.

<sup>4</sup> Arthur Symons, ‘Walter Pater. Some Characteristics’, *Savoy*, 1.8 (December 1896), 33-41.

<sup>5</sup> Arthur Symons, ‘The Decadent Movement in Literature’, *Harper’s New Monthly Magazine* (November 1893), 858-68, and *The Symbolist Movement in Literature* (London: W. Heinemann, 1899).

In 1896 a version of the *Harper’s* article was announced as a ‘forthcoming’ publication in an advert for Leonard Smithers’s list of Works by Arthur Symons, editor of the *Savoy* in the last number of the journal; while still called *The Decadent Movement in Literature*, the forthcoming title included only continental authors: Verlaine, the Goncourts, Huysmans, Villiers de l’Isle-Adam, and Maeterlinck. It already excluded the English ‘decadents’ who appeared in the *Harper’s* piece, even though the topic was still focused on Decadence and not Symbolism, the form it would take in its 1899 version *The Symbolist Movement in Literature*, published by W. Heinemann rather than Smithers.

<sup>6</sup> [Arthur Symons], ‘The New English Art Club’, *Saturday Review* (18 April 1896), 394. On MacColl’s prose, see Symons, ‘The Painting of the Nineteenth Century’, p. 22.

<sup>7</sup> See Symons’s *Studies in Two Literatures* (1897), with its four parts: ‘Studies in Elizabethan Drama’, ‘Studies in Contemporary Literature’, ‘Notes and Impressions: English Literature’, and ‘Notes and Impressions: French Literature’ that was advertised in the last issue of the *Savoy* in December 1896 as one of five titles from Smithers. *Studies in Prose and Verse* had already appeared in 1904. *Studies in Seven Arts* followed in 1906, and *Studies in the Elizabethan Drama* appeared as a separate volume in 1920.

<sup>8</sup> Arthur Symons, *Studies in Seven Arts* (London: Archibald Constable, 1906), p. 59.

<sup>9</sup> Symons, *Studies*, p. 60.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 60-61.

<sup>11</sup> Symons’s personal and professional links with George Moore and A. C. Benson also figure in this context of his art and literary criticism.

<sup>12</sup> For Log Rolling, see ‘Puffing. Logrolling’, *DNCJ* (*Dictionary of Nineteenth-Century Journalism*), ed. by L. Brake and M. Demoor (London and Ghent: British Library and Academia Press, 2009), p. 517.

<sup>13</sup> See Karl Beckson, Iain Fletcher, L. W. Markert, and John Stokes, *Arthur Symons: A Bibliography* (Greensboro, NC: ELT Press, 1990).

<sup>14</sup> Beckson et al. (1990) attribute fifty-three articles to Symons in 1903, forty-one in 1904, and sixty-four in 1905.

<sup>15</sup> For ‘scissors-and-paste’ journalism, see Stephan Pigeon, ‘Steal it. Change it. Print it. Transatlantic Scissors-and-Paste Journalism in the *Ladies’ Treasury* 1857-1895’, *Journal of Victorian Culture*, 22.1 (2017), 24-39, and ‘Scissors and Paste Journalism’, *DNCJ*, p. 561.

<sup>16</sup> Lawrence W. Markert identifies MacColl’s book and Symons’s review of it as formative documents in the consolidation of Symons’s thoughts about art. See Markert’s chapter on ‘Art and Artists’ (pp. 87-125), and especially pp. 103-104 on Symons’s debt to MacColl, in *Critic of the Seven Arts* (Ann Arbor and London: UMI, 1998).

<sup>17</sup> See Kimberley Morse-Jones, ‘The “Philistine” and the New Art Critic: A new perspective on the debate about

Degas's "L'Absinthe" of 1893', *British Art Journal*, 9.2 (September 2008), 50-61, for more about this debate, which was occasioned by the exhibition of Degas' painting in the Grafton Gallery early in 1893. MacColl explained 'the new art criticism' as the application of the same aesthetic critical standards to current art as are applied to ancient art. In this way, MacColl was intent on the recognition of a few contemporary art 'masters' instead of the denunciation of all modern art. George Moore supported the attempts of MacColl and others to turn the tide of conservative criticism with its distaste for all contemporary art.

<sup>18</sup> For debate on the Chantrey Bequest spearheaded by D. S. MacColl, see the to-and-fro articles and letters in the *Saturday Review*, 25 April 1903-August 1904.

<sup>19</sup> The two exhibitions were an exhibition in John Baillie's new gallery devoted to work by Solomon in December 1905 and the Winter exhibition of the Royal Academy exclusively on 'deceased masters of the British School' in early 1906 that included some work by Solomon.

<sup>20</sup> This tribute of Symons to Pater itself derives from similarly timely and edgy pieces from the press, published by Symons over a decade between 1896 and 1906.

<sup>21</sup> Arthur Symons, 'The Painting of the Nineteenth Century', p. 522. Moore was a longstanding friend of Symons: six years earlier Symons dedicated his first book of criticism, *Studies in Two Literatures* (1897) to Moore, in the form of a two-page personal letter (pp. vii-viii).

<sup>22</sup> Arthur Symons, 'Walter Pater: Some Characteristics', *Savoy*, 8 (December), 33-50 (p. 38).

<sup>23</sup> For more on the *The Yellow Book* and the *Savoy*, see James G. Nelson, *Publisher to the Decadents* (High Wycombe: Rivendale Press, 2000) and Katherine Mix, *A Study in Yellow. The Yellow Book and its Contributors* (Lawrence, Kansas: University of Kansas Press, 1960).

<sup>24</sup> Their friendship proceeded by a recognizable series of stages of puffs: the youthful Symons reviewed *Imaginary Portraits* unsigned in the *Athenaeum* in June 1887 and signed in *Time* in August 1887; Pater obliged three months later, and reviewed Symons's first book on Browning, anonymously in the *Guardian* in November 1887; and Symons in turn dedicated his first volume of poetry to Pater in 1889.

<sup>25</sup> The context of Pater's intervention may be part of the explanation of the mystery of why Pater decided to support Moore at this juncture, when Pater had upbraided Moore in a letter a few years earlier. It was a mystery to Moore, who was surprised by the appearance of the review, and its praise. It may be that by throwing his weight behind Moore at this moment, Pater was demonstrating his support as a critic for MacColl and his stance on the New Art Criticism.

Moore's book, *Modern Painting*, was a collection of his pieces from the *Speaker*, a weekly journal in which he regularly published contemporary art criticism as its art critic. The reviews selected show him to be an unmistakable supporter of the New Art Criticism, a critic of the Royal Academy, and sympathetic to MacColl. Firstly, his inclusion of a large number of reviews of contemporary artists affiliated with new and noteworthy contemporary art based in impressionism – Whistler, Manet, Millet, Monet, Pissarro, which has no place in the Royal Academy. Then, secondly, there are admiring pieces on the New English Art Club and the New Art Criticism, and a critical one on 'The Organisation of Art', all in keeping with the New Art Criticism favoured by MacColl. In 'Our Academicians' Moore mentions the neglect by the Royal Academy of the work of Simeon Solomon among others; and in his piece on the New English Art Club, he enters into dialogue throughout the piece with MacColl, whom he describes as 'Mr. MacColl, the art critic of the *Spectator*, our ablest art critic, himself a painter and a painter of talent' (*Modern Painting* (London: Walter Scott Limited, 1893), p. 199).

<sup>26</sup> Symons, 'The Painting of the Nineteenth Century', p. 520.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid. Although this sentence appears in the *Fortnightly Review*, it is significantly expanded upon in *Studies* (1906), p. 36.

<sup>28</sup> Arthur Symons, 'English Masters at the Royal Academy', *Outlook* (6 January 1906), 19-20.

<sup>29</sup> Karl Beckson, *Arthur Symons. A Life* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987), p. 110.

<sup>30</sup> For more about Gosse's controversial publication of a private edition of Pater's *Essays from the Guardian*, see L. Brake, 'On Pater's *Essays from the Guardian*', *ELT*, 56.4 (Spring, 2013), 483-96.

<sup>31</sup> Arthur Symons, 'Walter Pater: Some Characteristics', *Savoy* (December 1896), 33-41.

<sup>32</sup> Reviewing Benson's life of Pater was tricky for Symons, as Benson was, like Pater, a friend, whose work Symons frequently reviewed. Symons's investment in Pater was considerable, and Symons reviewed Benson's book anonymously. In addition to his unsigned review (*Athenaeum*, 2 June 1906, 659-60), Symons had reviewed Benson's *Rossetti*, part of the English Men of Letters series, in the *Speaker* (18 June 1904), Benson's *Poems* in the *Athenaeum* in 1897, other *Poems* in the *Athenaeum* (21 Oct 1893), and perhaps unsigned reviews of other titles.

Symons's admiration for Pater trumped his loyalties to Benson. In his 1906 review, 'Walter Pater, by A. C. Benson', Symons repeatedly tried to find strengths in the book, but it nevertheless 'is not so much a creation as an analytical interpretation'. He persists in this critical mode: 'We miss, it is true, the personal note of one who had really known the man about whom he is writing. Intimate acquaintance certainly counts far more in a biographer than almost the greatest mental sympathy or acuteness. The Pater who is seen in this book is a portrait very closely copied from existing sketches and recollections; it is not, it could not have been a direct and wholly vital portrait from life.' (p. 659).

Symons's significant critique of his friend's biography of Pater is indicative of how seriously Symons took his self-

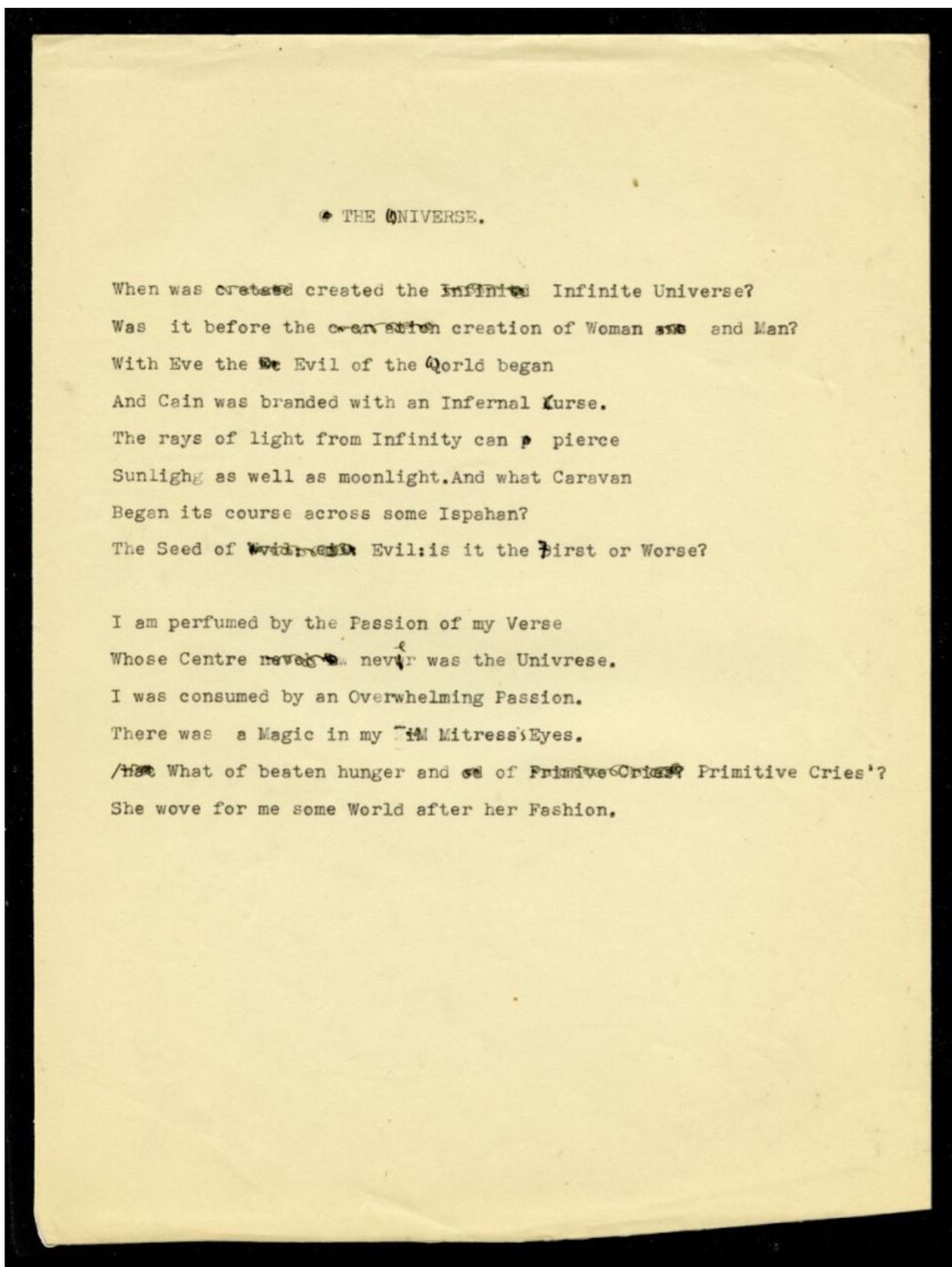
appointed role as Pater's protector: he even claims 'But, so far as actual detail is concerned, Pater's life was so uneventful that nothing further of any real importance is left for any future biographer.' As the first review to appear in the Literature department of the *Athenæum* of 2 June, Symons's review was accorded the most prominent position. It faced on the opposite page (658) a long column of ads for Macmillan's new list, of which the third title was Benson's new English Men of Letters, *Pater*. Thus, the prominence of the review functioned at once in the economy of the *Athenæum* and its advertisers, in the interests of Symons, its contributor, and of Benson, the hapless author of the reviewed title, whose sales might increase, despite the reviewer's reservations.

<sup>33</sup> In December 1896, Symons published 'Walter Pater. Some Characteristics', in the final issue of the *Savoy*, an issue written entirely by himself. He reprints it early in 1897 in the second section of *Studies in Two Literatures* called 'Studies in Contemporary Literature', where Pater appears among a different group of contemporaries: Christina Rossetti, William Morris, Coventry Patmore, and the essays 'Modernity in Verse' and 'A Note on Zola's Method'. In June of the same year, Symons reviews Gosse's privately printed edition of *Essays from the Guardian* in 1897 for the *Athenæum* (12 June 1897), 769-70, and he reviews it again eight years later in its Macmillan volume format in the *Athenæum* (2 September 1905), 301. Less than a year later, in June 1906, Symons reviews Benson's biography, *Walter Pater* in Macmillan's English Men of Letters series, in the *Athenæum*, 2 June, 1906. Four months after that, in September 1906, Symons publishes a personal memoir of Pater, loosely tied to the occasion of the publication of Benson's book in the *Monthly Review*, 72 (September 1906), 14-24. It was six weeks later, in November 1906, when *Studies in Seven Arts* appeared, heavily influenced by Pater – the title; the Preface; the style. Symons persists in his remediation of his Pater pieces: in 1919, he draws on them for his Introduction to an edition of Pater's *Studies in the History of The Renaissance*, published in New York by Boni and Liveright; and in 1932 Symons publishes *A Study of Walter Pater* as a separate volume in London, published by C. J. Sawyer.

'The Universe': An Unpublished Sonnet by Arthur Symons

Kostas Boyiopoulos

Department of English Studies, Durham University



• THE UNIVERSE.

When was ~~created~~ created the ~~infinite~~ Infinite Universe?  
Was it before the ~~creation~~ creation of Woman ~~and~~ and Man?  
With Eve the ~~the~~ Evil of the World began  
And Cain was branded with an Infernal Curse.  
The rays of light from Infinity can ~~p~~ pierce  
Sunlight as well as moonlight. And what Caravan  
Began its course across some Ispahan?  
The Seed of ~~Evil~~ Evil: is it the ~~first~~ first or Worse?

I am perfumed by the Passion of my Verse  
Whose Centre ~~never~~ ~~never~~ was the Univrese.  
I was consumed by an Overwhelming Passion.  
There was a Magic in my ~~the~~ Mistress's Eyes.  
/ ~~Has~~ What of beaten hunger and ~~of~~ of Primitive ~~Cries~~ Primitive Cries'?  
She wove for me some World after her Fashion.

© Kostas Boyiopoulos, photograph of 'The Universe', Arthur Symons Papers (C0182), Princeton University, Box 15. With thanks to Princeton Special Collections for permission to reproduce.

A steady trickle of sonnets permeates Arthur Symons's poetical oeuvre. Some of the most iconic pieces from his early volumes are sonnets; examples include 'The Opium-Smoker', 'The Absinthe Drinker', 'Nerves', and 'Idealism'. In the Arthur Symons Papers held in Firestone Library at Princeton University is an unknown and previously unpublished sonnet entitled 'The Universe'. The typescript, found among miscellaneous poems, is undated and spattered with blotches (strikethroughs) and a couple of typographic errors. It bears a thematic affinity with some post-Nineties volumes by Symons, comporting with his fixation with evil, sin, and damnation. From these clues we can hazard that Symons penned 'The Universe' after his mental breakdown period, possibly in the twenties or the thirties, although the sonnet's central concept could have originated much earlier. 'The Universe' expands and transforms the theme of urban sensuality of Symons's early work, plotting it on a more abstract plane. It is built around ideas of world-making and Judeo-Christian cosmogony. This is not a slapdash effort; it is an intriguing, puzzling piece, to say the least, and one that realizes the full potential of the sonnet form. Here it goes:

When was created the Infinite Universe?  
Was it before the creation of Woman and Man?  
With Eve the Evil of the World began  
And Cain was branded with an Infernal Curse.  
The rays of light from Infinity can pierce  
Sunlight as well as moonlight. And what Caravan  
Began its course across some Ispahan?  
The Seed of Evil: is it the First or Worse?

I am perfumed by the Passion of my Verse  
Whose Centre never was the Universe.  
I was consumed by an Overwhelming Passion.  
There was a Magic in my Mistress's Eyes.  
What of beaten hunger and of Primitive Cries?  
She wove for me some World after her Fashion.<sup>1</sup>

In its Petrarchan construction the octave sets up a centripetal design, spiralling towards the 'Centre' of the sestet. The two parts present a dramatic juxtaposition between the cosmic and the particular, total and narrow scope, perpetuity and ephemerality. The first quatrain re-examines the creation myth of Genesis, positioning the postlapsarian 'World' of the Fall in relation to an equally created

'Infinite Universe' that precedes and contains it. Cain's transgression designates an amplificatory process of evil that is triggered with Eve; Symons's alliterative pun on 'Eve' and 'evil' is quite telling. The idea that Eve is the harbinger of sin and evil is advocated by Jesus Ben Sira in the apocryphal Book of Ecclesiasticus: 'Of the woman came the beginning of sin, and through her we all die' (Ecc 25:24).<sup>2</sup> Eve, we might conjecture, joins (or spawns) the progeny of sinful, mythical *femmes fatales* that parade in Symons's work.

In the second, elliptical and enigmatic quatrain, with the 'rays of light from Infinity' that can pierce 'sunlight' and 'moonlight' Symons plays on Genesis 1:3-5, where God creates light and then, in a bizarre logic, separates it into light and darkness. Similarly, the 'light' of 'Infinity' in 'The Universe' is of a different order from the 'sunlight' of the visible cosmos. The speaker might be hinting at some intrusion or incursion of the plane of the 'Infinite Universe' in the finite 'World'. This intrusion of infinity turns into the peripatetic, oriental image of the 'Caravan' in 'Ispahan', a Persian city famous for its architecture and splendiferous gardens. Symons here possibly alludes to Oscar Wilde's imperialist posturing in 'Ave Imperatrix', where from 'Ispahan | The gilded garden of the sun', 'the long dusty caravan | Brings cedar wood and vermilion'.<sup>3</sup>

The volta marks a shift from the universal to the personal, conjuring the familiar atmosphere of Nineties Decadence, as with the rhyme words 'Passion'/'Fashion' that obviously nod to the refrains of Ernest Dowson's 'Non sum qualis eram bonae sub regno Cynarae'. This is not the first time Symons rhymes passion with fashion; he does so numerous times, for example, in *Love's Cruelty* (1923) with 'For Des Esseintes: II. Eyes' and 'Mad Song', and in a 1921 'Sonnet' printed in *Jezebel Mort and Other Poems* (1931). The sestet presents a poet-Pygmalion who is seduced and 'consumed' by his own 'Verse' and his 'Mistress's Eyes'. Is his mistress one that is written into the verse, or is *she* essentially the 'Verse'? In his eremite existence in Island Cottage Symons was ever more haunted by the memories of his glory days, especially by the memory of Lydia, the deified Bianca of his *London Nights*. In his biography of Symons, Karl Beckson prints from a poem entitled 'Lydia', dated 1940, which recycles some of the language of 'The Universe': 'Passion was secret to

the Universe | [...] we both lived in' and 'What Prime Evil curse | Had been thrown upon us?'<sup>4</sup>  
It seems that Lydia is metonymically transferred into the 'Passion of [Symons's] Verse'.

The poet-speaker endeavours to evade the 'Infernal Curse' and transform the memory of the unnamed mistress (possibly Lydia) by playing God. He imitates the act of divine creation *ex nihilo* while shutting out the cursed, immutable world of reality. In a defiant gesture he sidelines and dismisses wholesale the created 'Infinite Universe', carving out his own universe in the form of his poetic world ('the Passion of my Verse | Whose Centre never was the Universe'). From his sovereign point of view the speaker (and so Symons himself) replaces the divine creator.<sup>5</sup> This idea is reinforced by Symons's comments in his 1920 book on Baudelaire: in his state of intoxication, the French poet in his self-aggrandisement 'becomes the centre of the universe', declaring, '*Je suis un Dieu!* [I am a God!].'<sup>6</sup> The god-poet who is erotically consumed by his own creative efforts is an idea that for Symons is reflected in the poet-God who, by an act of *logos*, creates the world out of lust. In *Images of Good and Evil* (1899) Symons writes through his allegorical mouthpiece, 'Lust':

It was the lust of God, fulfilled  
With joys enjoyed, that bade him build  
The wanton palace of the earth.<sup>7</sup>

With nonchalant self-indulgence the speaker of 'The Universe' seems to muffle the 'beaten hunger' and 'Primitive Cries'; the consequences of Cain's curse. In contrast with the monumentality of the octet's Judeo-Christian cosmogony, his 'Verse'-mistress 'wove' for him 'some World after her Fashion'; that is, on capricious whim. Crucially, the weaving is not performed by the poet but by the mistress. The poet is not in control. The wording of that final line, in conjunction with the way Symons juxtaposes created existence by an implied divine being with the mortal artist's creations, is clearly articulated in *The Loom of Dreams*, and the prologue-poem of the same title (1900). While the world 'goes by' and 'Crowns are bartered and blood is shed', the speaker of this lyric 'sit[s] and broider[s] [his] dreams instead'.<sup>8</sup> The last of the three stanzas of 'The Loom of Dreams' is quite revealing, shedding light on 'The Universe':

And the only world is the world of my dreams,  
And my weaving the only happiness;  
For what is the world but what it seems?  
And who knows but that God, beyond our guess,  
Sits weaving worlds out of loneliness?<sup>9</sup>

There are complex theological and psychological ramifications from this subtle comparison that cannot be explored in the present article. But what is fascinating in ‘The Loom of Dreams’ and, therefore, also, in ‘The Universe’, is their fractal projection. In this light, ‘Infinity’ acquires a double sense. The pattern in ‘The Universe’ follows on from the ‘Infinite Universe’, to the world of ‘Woman and Man’, to that of the speaker’s ‘Verse’. These poems generate or ‘weave’ recursive, never-ending worlds, or create what is called a ‘Droste effect’ (a form of *mise en abyme* in which an image recurs within itself) to borrow a modern term.

The tragedy of the Symonsian speaker is that his Pygmalionic, virtual ‘World’ of pleasure in which he cocoons himself cannot be detached from the great scheme of things. It is part of the ‘Infinite Universe’. As such, it inherits the infernal curse of Eve and Cain. The speaker’s disconnected point of view is, in essence, polluted by his awareness of the total perspective with regard to encroaching reality. In the perplexing eighth line, with its emphatic caesura, the scriptural ‘Seed of Evil’ can be ‘Worse’. A possible allusion to the poet’s own evil seed is found in Dante’s *Purgatorio*, where Beatrice reproves Dante for his sinful transgressions, his ‘images of failing good’ bred of his ‘evil seed’ (Canto 30, ll. 131, 119).<sup>10</sup> Additionally, one of Symons’s cat lyrics dated 1928, entitled ‘Lines’, resembling ‘The Universe’, offers clues to the idea that sensuality is a curse and a contaminant that seeps through different planes of existence. Evoking a chain of being, cats are sensual creatures that possess their own ‘Universe’ which

[...] is forever hurled  
Onwards like ours by the same Curse  
That made the madness of the World.<sup>11</sup>

One wonders why Symons did not publish ‘The Universe’; perhaps he nursed it pondering how he might give clarity to some of its vague features. Nevertheless, this sonnet is not a mere literary curiosity, but one whose ‘scanty plot of ground’,<sup>12</sup> as Wordsworth has it, contains

everything: the infinity of the cosmos, both in the dimension of reality and that of fantasy. It provides a key to better comprehend Symons's psychology and perennial interests, and track the evolution of his particular mind-set. It is a cross-section of motifs which provides insight into Symons's egocentricity, his peculiar creation theology, his obsession with sin, and the idea of memory and art as substitutes for erotic experience.

---

<sup>1</sup> Arthur Symons, 'The Universe' (IS), Box 15, in Arthur Symons Papers (C0182); Manuscripts Division, Department of Rare Books and Special Collections, Princeton University Library. The poem is slightly formatted and typographic errors silently corrected.

<sup>2</sup> *The Bible: Authorized King James Version with Apocrypha*, intro. and notes by Robert Carroll and Stephen Prickett (1997; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), Apocrypha, p. 136.

<sup>3</sup> Oscar Wilde, *The Complete Works of Oscar Wilde: Stories, Plays, Poems, Essays*, intro. by Vyvyan Holland (1966; London: Collins, 1986), p. 711.

<sup>4</sup> Karl Beckson, *Arthur Symons: A Life* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987), p. 103.

<sup>5</sup> In a further explorative reading, the word 'Passion', twice deployed, conjures and subverts the image of the Christ: the 'Seed of Evil' leads to the 'Passion' of the poet and not of the Crucifixion.

<sup>6</sup> Arthur Symons, *Charles Baudelaire: A Study* (London: Elkin Matthews, 1920), pp. 72-73. Italics in original.

<sup>7</sup> Arthur Symons, 'Lust', in *The Collected Works of Arthur Symons*, 9 vols [incomplete set] (London: Martin Secker, 1924), II, p. 6. Also in line with the affinity of the creative act and eroticism, the 'Centre' for Symons could specifically be 'sex', the 'centre of Creation'. See Arthur Symons, *The Memoirs of Arthur Symons: Life and Art in the 1890s*, ed. by Karl Beckson (University Park and London: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1977), p. 138.

<sup>8</sup> Symons, 'The Loom of Dreams', in *The Collected Works of Arthur Symons*, II, p. 123.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

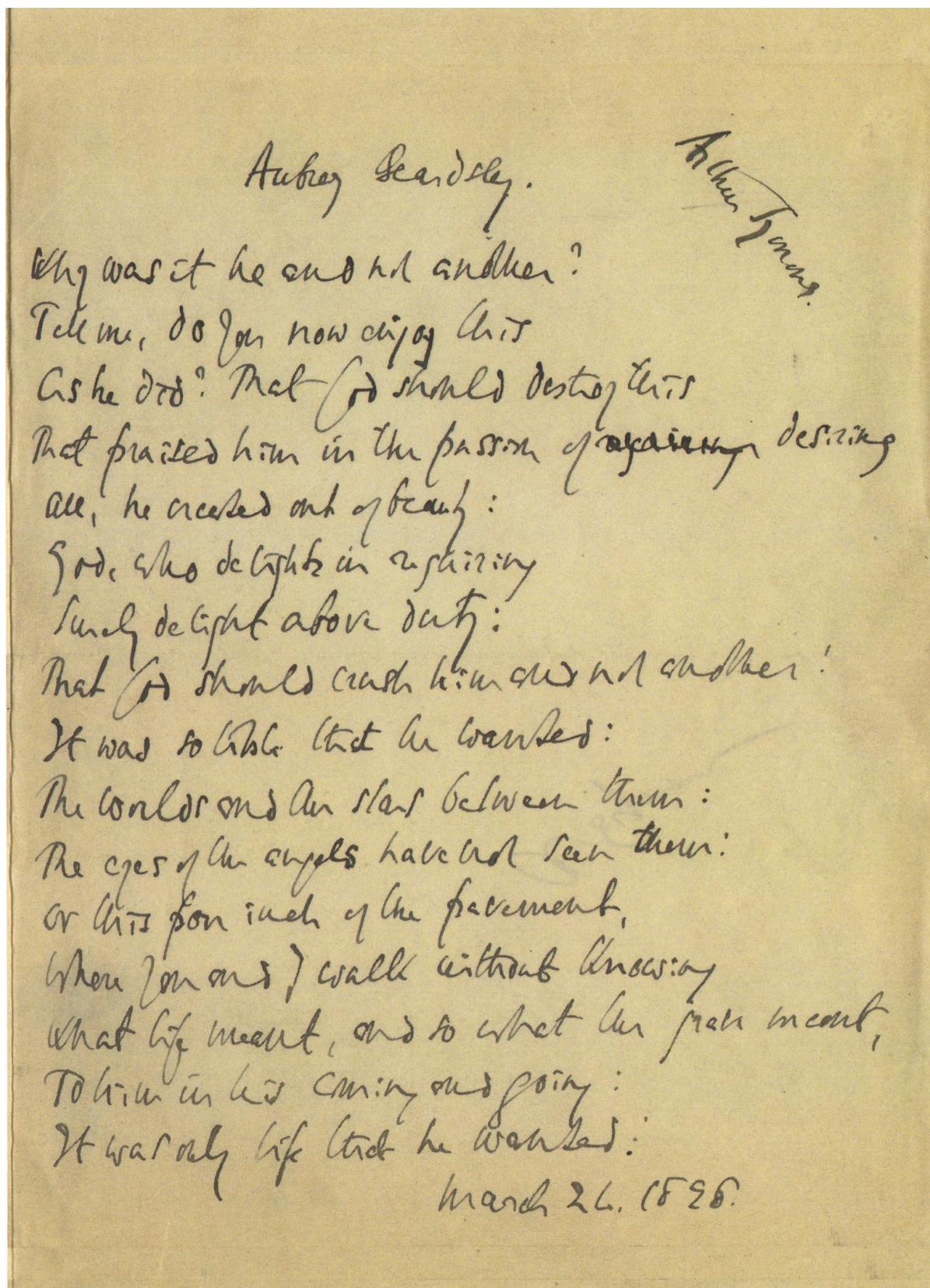
<sup>10</sup> Dante Alighieri, *The Divine Comedy*, trans. by Robin Kirkpatrick (London: Penguin, 2012), p. 302.

<sup>11</sup> Arthur Symons, 'Lines', in *Jezebel Mort and Other Poems* (London: Heinemann, 1931), p. 136.

<sup>12</sup> William Wordsworth, *Selected Poems* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1996), p. 150.

Arthur Symons, 'Aubrey Beardsley: A Memorial Poem'

Simon Wilson



## Aubrey Beardsley

Why was it he and not another?  
Tell me, do you now enjoy this  
As he did? That God should destroy this  
That praised him in the passion of desiring  
All, he created out of beauty:  
God, who delights in requiring  
Surely delight above duty:  
That God should crush him and not another!  
It was so little that he wanted:  
The worlds and the stars between them:  
The eyes of the angels have not seen them:  
Or this poor inch of the pavement,  
Where you and I walk without knowing  
What life meant, and so what this place meant,  
To him in his coming and going:  
It was only life that he wanted.

Arthur Symons  
March 26 1898

\* \* \*

### A Brief Note by Simon Wilson

Beardsley had died in Menton, France, on 16 March 1898. He was born on 21 August 1872 so was almost exactly twenty-five and a half years old at his death.<sup>1</sup> In 2016 Yale University Press published a monumental two-volume catalogue raisonné of Beardsley's work by Linda Zatlin (*Aubrey Beardsley: A Catalogue Raisonné* (Yale University Press, 2016)). It was Linda who drew my attention to this unpublished manuscript poem which surfaced a few years ago. The Arthur Symons symposium held at Goldsmiths, London, on 21 July 2017 ([symons2017.wordpress.com](http://symons2017.wordpress.com)) seemed a good occasion on which to publish it. Symons has clearly and carefully punctuated it, but I remain baffled by the comma after 'All' at the opening of line five.

---

<sup>1</sup> See Arthur Symons's obituary: 'Aubrey Beardsley', *Fortnightly Review*, 63 (May 1898), 752-61.

# A Note on Voluptuousness: A Personal Essay on Decadence and Pleasure

David Weir

Professor Emeritus of Comparative Literature, Cooper Union

What is the relationship between decadence and pleasure? Surely there must be some such relationship, but it has to be (as we used to say) problematic. Part of the problem involves cultural context, or rather, contexts. Decadence begins as a sensibility – a composite of pessimism, refinement, immorality, aestheticism – and ends up as a culture, in both senses: as something learned but also lived. Learned decadence was once housed in such institutions as the University of Oxford and the Bodley Head, but such institutions have also had a major role in the development of decadence as a lived culture. It is one thing to read about a character in a novel who has a set of blue china; it is another thing altogether to actually have a set of blue china and to enjoy using it. If that pleasure seems too mild and aesthetic for decadence, feel free to fill the cup of blue china with absinthe and have the character light up one of those opium-tainted cigarettes we read about – then stop reading and light one up for yourself. I'm pretty sure you will recognize the difference in the two activities. Also, you will probably take pleasure in both. But are these decadent pleasures, and is one more pleasurable – or more decadent – than the other? Moreover, despite the difference in readerly delights and some actual pursuit in life of those pleasures first encountered in art, isn't there an obvious continuity between the two? For my part, coming from one of the most backward backwaters of the United States, and being the first person in my family (by which I mean extended family, including third cousins and pets) to attend university, decadence was for me a form of that most mundane of American enthusiasms: self-improvement. If only I could become decadent, I thought, I could better myself to the point that I would cease to be American. The effort did not succeed, hélas, but at least the attempt offered an opportunity to contemplate the question of whether decadence and pleasure might somehow coincide.

That a relationship between decadence and pleasure exists is not in doubt, at least so far as popular conceptions of decadence go. Decadent pleasure in this popular sense involves excess – too much of a good thing. This meaning appears to cut across several Indo-European languages. In Spanish, ‘a decadent lifestyle’ is ‘un estilo de vida de excesos’; German synonyms for *dekadent* include *verschwendend* [extravagant] and *maßlos* [immoderate]; a Dutch synonym is *genotzuchtig* [self-indulgent], a compound of ‘pleasure’ *genot* and ‘sigh’ *zucht*. The French and Italian cognates *décadent* and *decadente* more or less combine these notions of excess, extravagance, and self-indulgence with the more familiar senses of ‘decay’, ‘decline’, and ‘degeneration’. Such meanings derive largely from Roman history, especially as represented in those mostly unreliable accounts (by Suetonius, Tacitus, the author of the *Historia Augustae*, and others) of particular Roman emperors whose appetites for food, drink, and sex were both boundless and exotic. They were voluptuaries as well as connoisseurs, larger-than-life types whose power allowed them to combine excess with refinement. A moment’s reflection, however, suggests a certain contradiction at the heart of this model of decadent pleasure. Excess and refinement are in some measure at odds with one another, since excess implies no principle of selection – ‘Let’s eat it all!’ – whereas refinement connotes discrimination – ‘Let’s have the Nebbiolo Alto with the white truffles.’ In fact, refinement might actually involve the *elimination* of certain pleasures as too common or crass for decadent delectation, a practice that is hard to square with the idea of excess.

That the Romans had a more multiform conception of pleasure than our modern notion of excess suggests is manifest in their varied vocabulary. The noun *voluptās* involves pleasure in the general sense of ‘enjoyment’, as something ‘agreeable’ to the mind or the senses, although some authors (Ovid, Petronius, Apuleius) use the word in a more specific way to refer to sexual intercourse. Usually, however, *libidō* is sexual pleasure, but even that meaning is specialized, the more general sense of *libidō* being simply ‘desire’, an urge to satisfy a ‘bodily craving’, not all of which are necessarily sexual. *Dēlicia*, more often in plural form as *dēliciae*, refers to pleasurable activities, ‘allurements’, and the like, sometimes even ‘luxuries’, although there is a specific word,

*luxus*, from which English ‘luxury’ is derived, that conveys ‘excess’ and ‘extravagance’. *Dēlectātiō* is the nominal basis for ‘delight’, while the verb form *dēlectare* means ‘to lure’, ‘to entice’, or ‘to charm’. Other verbs relating to pleasure include *placēre*, ‘to please or satisfy’, and *oblectare*, ‘to delight, amuse, divert, entertain’; and so on.<sup>1</sup> Yet none of these words – with the possible, partial exception of *luxus* – connotes anything inherently decadent, and I think I know why: namely, because decadence is less a form or type of pleasure in itself – a category of pleasure – as it is a judgement *about* pleasure. That scenario would certainly cover the case of excess, which necessarily involves the judgement that pleasure has – or should have – limits. But how much is too much? And is too much pleasure decadent? The basic ambiguity that attaches to the word *decadent* in multiple contexts applies here, since the judgement about pleasure may be both moral and aesthetic. Perhaps it is truer to say that while the basis for judging pleasure as decadent may once have been *both* moral and aesthetic, more recently the basis is *either* moral or aesthetic.

We probably have Walter Pater to thank for conflating morality and aesthetics and for making the prospect of decadent pleasure possible. Not that it was his intention to do so: the conflation was the result of the outraged reaction to the first edition of *Studies in the History of the Renaissance* (1873) that insisted, after the fashion of Matthew Arnold and John Ruskin, that art and life both have moral purpose; and of Pater’s response to that reaction in *Marius the Epicurean* (1885). Although Pater was more neo-Hegelian than neo-Kantian, his awareness of Kant’s categorical separation of pure (theoretical) reason, practical (moral) reason, and aesthetic judgement (taste) seems evident from the first page of the *Renaissance*, since he rejects the relevance of empirical observation to aesthetic experience when he denies the validity of Arnold’s advice to the critic ‘To see the object as it really is’.<sup>2</sup> But no sooner does Pater reinforce one Kantian boundary than he crosses another one, when he deliberately fuses practical experience with aesthetic experience: ‘What is this song or picture, this engaging personality presented in life or in a book, to *me*? Does it give me pleasure?’ (p. 4). The antecedent of the pronoun *it* is a bit slippery here, some composite of ‘song’, ‘picture’, and ‘engaging personality’, the latter

ambiguously situated ‘in life or in a book’ – but, one suspects, between the covers in either event. The ‘Conclusion’ clarifies all that lies behind that shimmering *it* on the first page: ‘Not the fruit of experience, but experience itself is the end’ (p. 119). Moreover, the ‘engaging personality’ that flashes its coy smile at us on the first page reappears in the ‘Conclusion’ as well, when Pater names the need to ‘catch at any exquisite passion’ to allay the elusiveness of perception, whether ‘work of the artist’s hand, or the face of one’s friend’ (p. 120). Here is a real and deliberate refusal to discriminate between art and life as the basis for aesthetic experience, which is tantamount to making taste do the work of morality.

And there it is – the basis for decadent pleasure: the decadent deploys taste, not morality, as the means of determining whether sensuous experiences are good or bad, acceptable or unacceptable. Pleasure is subjected to aesthetic judgement, not practical reason. Having let this particular genie out of the lamp, Pater went to some pains to put it back, or try to. His oft-quoted complaint to Edmund Gosse from 1876 – ‘I wish they wouldn’t call me a hedonist; it produces such a bad effect on the minds of people who don’t know Greek’ – shows how irritating all those ‘journalistic mosquito-bites’<sup>3</sup> were: the inability of the press to understand the necessity of pleasure in anything other than moral terms led to the self-censorship of the second edition of the *Renaissance* in 1877 and in 1885 to *Marius the Epicurean*, where Pater ‘dealt more fully’ with ‘the thoughts suggested’ by the original ‘Conclusion’ of 1873.<sup>4</sup> The key chapter in *Marius* where Pater deals more fully with those thoughts and where he ‘clarifies’ the meaning of ‘hedonism’ is titled ‘The New Cyrenaicism’. There, Pater allows himself a moment of self-referential playfulness when he mentions some acquaintances of Marius ‘who jumped to the conclusion’ that ‘he was making pleasure – pleasure, as they so poorly conceived it – the sole motive of life’.<sup>5</sup> In this passage, Pater surely has in mind all those young, rapt Oxonians who ‘jumped to the conclusion’ of the first edition of the *Renaissance*.

As for ‘hedonism’, Pater somehow manages to equate ‘that reproachful Greek term for the philosophy of pleasure’ (p. 119) with – wait for it – stoicism. Paraphrase cannot do justice to the

astonishing, almost heroic display of rhetorical sophistry Pater mounts in his defence of pleasure, however attenuated and qualified. Along the way Marius is associated with ‘the “new Cyrenaicism”’ (p. 120), a philosophy of pleasure that has its origins with Aristippus of Cyrene, an ancient city located in northern Africa (modern Libya). Practitioners of the original or ‘old’ Cyrenaicism actively sought pleasure and so are philosophically different from the Epicureans, who mainly wanted to avoid pain, rather than endure it like the Stoics.<sup>6</sup> Evidently, Marius is a ‘new’ Cyrenaic because his pleasures are not exactly pleasurable:

Not pleasure, but fullness of life, and ‘insight’ as conducting to that fullness – energy, variety, and choice of experience, including noble pain and sorrow even [...] – whatever form of human life, in short, might be heroic, impassioned, ideal: from these the ‘new Cyrenaicism’ of Marius took its criterion of values. (p. 120)

It would be a ‘new’ Cyrenaic indeed who would *choose* pain, however noble, yet this is Marius’ ‘theory’ – ‘which might properly be regarded as in great degree coincident with the main principles of the Stoics themselves’ (p. 120). What this stoical hedonist means to do with his theory is mainly what Pater announces in his preface to the *Renaissance*: pay the closest possible attention to his own sensuous impressions, regardless of whether those impressions are prompted by ‘works of art’ or ‘the fairer forms of nature and human life’, and then explain and analyze their influence on him (p. 4). So Marius will take care ‘[t]o understand the various forms of ancient art and thought, the various forms of actual human feeling’ in order ‘to satisfy [...] the claims of these concrete and actual objects on his sympathy, his intelligence, his senses’ and ‘become the interpreter of them to others’ (p. 120). Pater does not use the word ‘decadent’ in his characterization of Marius’ pleasure, but the importance of interpretation here is consistent with the notion that pleasure is decadent mainly on the basis of aesthetic judgement.

But regardless of whether we are talking about some bygone, *fin-de-siècle* era or the present day, a lot depends on who is doing the judging. During the days of Oscar Wilde and the early André Gide, for example, there is no doubt that the homosexual pleasures they each enjoyed were judged to be decadent in the moral sense. Indeed, for a time *decadent* served as a euphemism

for *homosexual*, and those who practised homosexuality were immoral, as the title of Gide's 1902 *récit* proudly proclaims: *L'Immoraliste*. By contrast, in the United States and other Western democracies today, the moral basis for judging homosexuality as a form of decadence no longer obtains. Yes, of course, religious fanatics on the far-right fringe still equate homosexuality with bestiality, but in America, at least, debates about 'same-sex marriage' and 'gays in the military' are mostly settled.<sup>7</sup> The larger point here is that the moral judgement that once deemed homosexual pleasure decadent is now moot, although the aesthetic judgement perhaps continues to resonate: as Carl Van Vechten's epigram quoting Allen Norton so memorably puts it, 'A thing of beauty is a boy forever'.<sup>8</sup>

One species of the moral argument that judges certain pleasures decadent concerns the notion that it is possible for human beings to violate nature, to do things that are unnatural. The extremist religious position holding that homosexuality is no different from bestiality is an example of such judgement. But how is bestiality unnatural? One of the more unusual items in my vocabulary is the lexeme 'stump-trained heifer', a term for a female bovine sufficiently disciplined to stand with her rear end positioned near a tree-stump so that an ardent farm-boy can be at the appropriate height to satisfy his natural desires. Certainly, some people will judge this particular pleasure decadent on moral grounds, whereas others will say that such bovine pleasures fail the aesthetic test, not the moral one, and so do not qualify as decadent. Lest I appear to endorse bestiality, I will concede that arguments against the practice most certainly exist that have nothing to do with the religious prohibitions detailed in Leviticus 18:23 ('It is confusion') and 20:15-16 ('Their blood shall be upon them'). All kinds of objections can be mounted against congress with quadrupeds, from the ethical (see: societies, humane) to the medical (see: Fracastoro, Girolamo).<sup>9</sup> But however unethical or unsafe, it cannot be decadent because bestiality is not unnatural so much as all too natural. It is, after all, a form of sexuality, which is a problem for decadence generally, by which I mean that sexual pleasure is so natural

(indeed, there would be no nature without it) that it poses a problem for anyone who wants the experience of it to be decadent.

There is a scene in Ettore Scola's *La Nuit de Varennes* (1982) where the great enlightenment pornographer Nicolas-Edme Restif de la Bretonne (Jean-Louis Barrault) is momentarily distracted from his quest to track Louis XVI's flight from Paris to Varennes on the night of 20-21 June 1791. Madame Faustine (Caterina Boratto), one of Restif's old flames who now runs an elegant brothel, tempts him with a new girl (Annie Belle), very young, whose tiny feet immediately appeal to the fetishistic desires of the author of *Le Pied de Franchette* (1769). When Restif goes into elaborate verbal ecstasies over the 'petits pieds' of the young girl, Faustine tells her that he is a great writer, whereupon the object of the great writer's podophilic ardor asks, with some alarm, whether she will have to do anything special. Faustine comforts her with this assurance: 'Un intellectuel ou un forgeron, dans un lit, c'est la même chose' [An intellectual or a blacksmith: in bed, they're the same thing]. That's the problem: how does the (male) decadent differentiate himself from the (male) blacksmith in bed? By going to bed with the blacksmith? That by-gone solution to the problem of making sexual pleasure decadent depends not only on the now-defunct moral prohibition against homosexual relations but also on class distinctions that have less erotic frisson now than they did in the days when aristocrats walked the earth (see: Montesquiou-Fézensac, Marie Joseph Robert Anatole, Comte de).

So what is the poor decadent to do? Hard to say. If we take literature as a guide to life (and who doesn't?), we can find some instruction in *À rebours*, chapter 9. There Joris-Karl Huysmans offers three examples of Des Esseintes' sexual adventures, which the decadent recalls after letting a bonbon 'consist[ing] of a drop of schoenanthus scent' [une goutte de parfum de sarcanthus] and sugar dissolve in his mouth.<sup>10</sup> Schoenanthus, better known as camel grass, is common to Saudi Arabia and northern Africa. While chewing or brewing the root of it is said to have certain medicinal benefits, modern sources do not indicate any aphrodisiac value.<sup>11</sup> Huysmans evidently thought otherwise, which explains why he calls it 'female essence' (p. 96) [d'essence feminine (p.

145)]. In any event, the bonbon's *madeleine*-like effect first produces memories of Des Esseintes' affair with the muscular American acrobat known as 'Miss Urania', whose manly strength, the decadent hopes, will allow him to experience 'that extravagant delight in self-abasement which a common prostitute shows in paying dearly for the loutish caresses of a pimp' (p. 97) [l'exorbitant attrait de la boue, de la basse prostitution heureuse de payer cher les tendresses malotrues d'un souteneur (p. 146)]. Unfortunately, the manly woman turns out to be 'positively puritanical in bed' (p. 98) [elle avait une retenue puritaine, au lit (p. 146)] so Des Esseintes ends the affair without achieving the decadent pleasure he desires. The second recollected affair is more successful. This is the one with the ventriloquist whom Des Esseintes uses, first, to recreate the dialogue between the Chimera and the Sphinx from Gustave Flaubert's *La Tentation de Saint-Antoine* (1874) and, second, to create the illusion 'of being caught *flagrante delicto*' (p. 101) [d'être pris en flagrant délit (p. 149)] by simulating the sounds of an outraged lover at the bedroom door. The charade gives Des Esseintes 'extraordinary pleasure' (p. 101) [des allégresses inouïes (p. 149)] by making him feel like 'a man running a risk, interrupted and hustled in his fornication' (p. 101) [cette panique de l'homme courant un danger, interrompu, pressé dans son ordure (p. 149)]. This time, it is the woman who quite understandably cuts short the affair, leaving the decadent for 'a fellow with less complicated whims and more reliable loins' (p. 101) [un gaillard dont les exigences étaient moins compliquées et les reins plus sûr (p. 149)]. The last affair is with a 'poorly clad' [pauvrement vêtu (p. 150)] young man who asks Des Esseintes 'the quickest way to get to the Rue de Babylone' (p. 102) (what's in a name?) [la plus courte pour se rendre à la rue de Babylone (p. 149)]. The 'mistrustful friendship' [une défiante amitié (p. 150)] that ensues gives Des Esseintes a peculiar kind of pleasure: 'never had he submitted to more delightful or more stringent exploitation, never had he run such risks, yet never had he known such satisfaction mingled with distress' (p. 102) [jamais il n'avait supporté un plus attirant et un impérieux fermage; jamais il n'avait connu des périls pareils, jamais aussi il ne s'était senti plus douloureusement satisfait (p. 150)].

What do these three experiences have in common? First, all three evidently illustrate the pleasures of sex *à rebours*; that is, in each instance Des Esseintes, more or less, imagines himself in some kind of feminine position. In the case of Miss Urania, the role-reversal is quite explicit: ‘he got to the point of imagining that he for his part was turning female’ (p. 97) [à se regarder [...], de son côté, l’impression que lui-même se féminisait (p. 146)]. This dimension is less obvious in his relationship with the ventriloquist, but Des Esseintes does ‘cling [...] to her like a child wanting to be comforted’ (p. 101) [se réfugeant, ainsi qu’un enfant inconsolé (p. 149)], implying a less-than-manly attitude toward the woman, who, after all, parts her hair ‘like a boy’s’ (p. 99) [une raie de garçon (p. 147)]. Hence, an element of implicit ‘inversion’ (one nineteenth-century term for homosexuality) is involved in the first two recollected affairs, an element that becomes explicit with the last. Two of the three have in common an element of risk, absurdly contrived in the case of the ventriloquist, socially real in the case of the shabbily dressed young man who accosts Des Esseintes on the street. The element of risk in the last affair is evidently the product of the class difference between the aristocrat and the street hustler that further compounds the social taboo against same-sex relations. While homosexuality was not illegal in the Paris of Huysmans’s day, sodomy having been decriminalized in 1791, it was hardly accepted by the broader society – or by the police, who maintained special departments to surveil and control homosexuals until 1981.<sup>12</sup> But there is a third component to these recollected pleasures that might make them decadent, and that is the fact of recollection itself, which ensures that they all undergo the process of aesthetic judgement.

The memories are prompted by the synaesthetic trigger of the schoenanthus scent, of course, so the ‘morose delectation’ (p. 103) [délectation morose (p. 150)] of these past pleasures occurs in an aesthetic context from the start. Huysmans’s use of the ecclesiastical term ‘morose delectation’ is a clever touch because it brings the pleasures into the orbit of sin, suggesting, almost, that the pleasurable acts themselves are not sinful so much as the pleasurable recollection of them is. Morose delectation involves moral judgement, but such judgement is like aesthetic

judgement in so far as it is reflective or retrospective. Des Esseintes' pleasures occur in a literary text, so naturally there is an element of narrative retrospection to them. This literary fact aside, however, I contend that there is necessarily something retrospective about the idea of decadent pleasure itself, so when I say we can look to literature as a guide to life, what I mean is not that we should comb the pages of the decadent canon looking for specific pleasures that we might then emulate in life; rather, we should recognize that there is a post-facto quality to decadent pleasure. This is not quite the same as Ernest Hemingway's celebrated insight into the nature of morality: 'what is moral is what you feel good after and what is immoral is what you feel bad after'.<sup>13</sup> We are not in the realm of practical reason just now, and Hemingway's capsule restatement of the categorical imperative is not that helpful. What I have in mind is better captured by that old joke that has me asking, 'Do you smoke after sex?' and you say, 'I don't know. I never looked'. Well, look; and tell me what you see when you cast your glance downward, or, better, backward. Decadence somehow lies on the other side of pleasure; pleasure, in short, is something you have to go through to get to decadence. This much is suggested early on in *À rebours* through the black feast celebrating Des Esseintes' hard-earned impotence. Indeed, the pleasures of the black feast are doubly decadent because the feast itself memorializes the decadent hero's past profligacy while the recollection of the memorial banquet is an occasion for even more morose delectation.

Huysmans is supposed to have based Des Esseintes' fictional black feast on the account of a funerary dinner staged by Grimod de la Renière (1758-1838), the classical prototype being the black banquet served up by the emperor Domitian, described by the Greek historian Cassius Dio. The pleasures of food seem to have been beside the point in the case of both Domitian, who wanted to terrify his guests, and Grimod, who wanted to embarrass them. Few details have survived about the legendary Grimod dinner (a room draped in black, choirboys wafting funeral incense),<sup>14</sup> but the food does not seem to have been black in fact, whereas Cassius Dio says that Domitian did serve black food, 'in dishes of the same colour'.<sup>15</sup> Hence the better model for the

mordant meal in *À rebours* seems to be Domitian's rather than Grimod's, with the difference that Des Esseintes clearly means to entertain his guests. Whatever decadent pleasure might inhere in the black feast, however, lies not in the appeal to the sense of taste but to sight, in the carefully realized aesthetic vision that subordinates both food and drink to the colourless colour scheme.

One of the things that interests me about the black feast is Des Esseintes' choice of wines. Usually, such choices are intended to complement the food on the basis of taste: a great Nebbiolo Alto, such as one of Luigi Ferrando's black-label Caremas, matches the flavour of shaved white truffles extraordinarily well. But Des Esseintes goes against the grain of such thinking by choosing wines on the basis of colour, not taste: 'From dark-tinted glasses they had drunk the wines of Limagne and Roussillon, of Tenedos, Valdepeñas, and Oporto' (p. 13) [bu, dans des verres sombres, les vins de la Limagne et du Roussillon, des Tenedos, des Val de Peñas et des Porto (p. 71)]. Obviously, the wines named are supposed to be especially dark, the most familiar and least problematic on the list being the wine from Oporto, or Port, made from such black-skinned grapes as Touriga Nacional, Tinta Baroca, Touriga Francesa, Tinta Roriz (the Portuguese name for Spanish Tempranillo), and Tinto Cão, among others. Carignan, another dark grape, was heavily planted in Roussillon, and the black-skinned Tempranillo finds its way into the red wine of Valdepeñas, the poor man's Rioja.<sup>16</sup> One nineteenth-century account of the wines of Tenedos, a Turkish island in the Aegean, describes them as 'deep red' with a 'flavour not unlike strong Burgundy',<sup>17</sup> while a still earlier description claims, 'A Tenedos wine has much the taste and colour of Red Port'.<sup>18</sup> The outlier on Des Esseintes' list is Limagne, a part of the Auvergne region that produces indifferent wines today. Possibly, the grape in the glass is Auvernat, the local version of Pinot Noir; 'its skin is as black as jet', an old source says.<sup>19</sup> All of this business is exceedingly odd, but the strangest part of it may be that Des Esseintes and his guests are drinking wines at all. During the latter half of the nineteenth century, one vintage after another fell prey to phylloxera, the root-eating aphid that began the destruction of the French wine industry in 1863 and was not brought under control until well after the publication of *À*

*rebours*. The phylloxera epidemic might well explain why wine does not figure prominently in the decadent pleasures of Des Esseintes – aside from that one sentence in the episode of the black feast – or of other decadent heroes. Sure, Dorian Gray is ‘sipping some pale-yellow wine from a delicate gold-beaded bubble of Venetian glass’ – at breakfast – when Basil Hallward arrives in a panic after he learns of the death of Sybil Vane,<sup>20</sup> but the wine is at best secondary as a signifier of decadence compared to Dorian’s utter insouciance in the face of human tragedy. Moreover, the other references to wine in that novel seem about as generic as the one Ernest Dowson summons when Cynara’s shadow falls ‘between the kisses and the wine’.<sup>21</sup>

We also have phylloxera to thank for the popular association of decadence with another alcoholic pleasure: absinthe. At first, absinthe was the drink of French soldiers who had acquired a taste for the stuff in Algeria (as an alcoholic antidote to malaria)<sup>22</sup> and, evidently, of the poor – as the history of artistic representations suggest. None of the figures in Édouard Manet’s *Le Buveur d’absinthe* [*Absinthe Drinker*] (1859), Honoré Daumier’s *L’Absinthe* (1863), or Jean-François Raffaëlli’s *Les Buveurs d’absinthe* [*The Absinthe Drinkers*] (1881), for example, would ever be mistaken for the dandified decadents we know in literature. Wine was still available, of course, but the relative scarcity of grapes inflated the price even as that same scarcity drove the cost of absinthe down, as distillers began to use industrial alcohol made from beets instead of grapes.<sup>23</sup> Hence, absinthe-drinking might have been a bohemian pleasure, but it was not an especially decadent one – except in the usual moral sense, for which we have Marie Corelli and any number of other absinthe abolitionists to blame. But then there is Paul Verlaine, shit-faced from absinthe at the Café François 1er (or possibly Café Procope) in those famous photographs by Dornac (aka Pol Massan, aka Paul Cardon)<sup>24</sup> from 1892, the year before Edgar Degas’ *L’Absinthe* (1876) was exhibited in London at the Grafton Gallery. Degas’ painting of the actress-model Ellen Andrée and the artist Marcellin Desboutin (who trained in the studio of Thomas Couture) at La Nouvelle Athènes likely did little to encourage the notion of absinthe-drinking as a decadent pleasure,<sup>25</sup> but

Verlaine – or his reputation – did. We know this because 1893 was also the year that Edmund Gosse (him again), with Henry Harland as his guide, finally succeeded in tracking down Verlaine:

I learned that there were certain haunts where these later Decadents might be observed in large numbers, drawn together by the gregarious attraction of verse. I determined to haunt that neighbourhood with a butterfly-net, and see what delicate creatures with powdery wings I could catch. And, above all, was it not understood that that vaster lepidopter, that giant hawk-moth, Paul Verlaine, uncoiled his proboscis in the same absinthe-corollas?<sup>26</sup>

The cultural lepidopterist Gosse published the account of his 1893 expedition as one of his *French Profiles* in 1905, the same year that Belgium banned the sale of absinthe and Jean Lanfray, a farm-worker in Vaud, Switzerland, shot and killed his pregnant wife and his two daughters. Lanfray was an absinthe drinker, meaning he drank a couple of glasses of absinthe after he had polished off as many as five litres of wine a day, plus a few glasses of brandy. Nonetheless, absinthe took the rap, and the sensational ‘absinthe murder’ of 1905 had a lot to do with the Swiss ban that took effect in 1910, with France and other European countries, as well as the United States, following suit soon thereafter.<sup>27</sup> I mention these familiar facts because the prohibition undoubtedly has something to do with the mistaken (in my view) elevation of this rather ordinary liqueur into the ranks of decadent pleasures.

But at the end of the day legal prohibition is no better than moral stricture as a basis for decadent pleasure. It’s not that the decadent is beyond good and evil so much as he or she is beyond caring about good and evil. Is this perverse? I doubt it, but perversity is another one of those moral categories that has found a place in popular conceptions of decadence, especially as regards sexuality, though the best example of perversity in the decadent canon concerns not sex but alimentation. When Des Esseintes develops a ‘taste’ for his peptone enemas and takes his nourishment *à rebours*, he is being ‘perverse’ in a sense so literal as to be comic, having ‘turned around’ the normal, natural method of ingestion by taking food in through the ‘wrong’ orifice. The problem of applying this canonical model of perversity to sexuality is immediately apparent, not only because there is no such thing as the wrong orifice when it comes to sex, but also because of the incalculable relativity of morals and manners (see: heifer, stump-trained).

The psychoanalytic theorist Robert J. Stoller succinctly defined ‘perversion’ as ‘the erotic form of hatred’, a fantasy that may or may not be actually enacted, but when it is, the hostility that lies at the heart of the fantasy takes the form ‘of revenge hidden in the actions that make up the perversion and serves to convert childhood trauma to adult triumph. To create the greatest excitement, the perversion must also portray itself as an act of risk-taking’.<sup>28</sup> We are now a long way from peptone enemas, but the sense of risk does resonate with the decadent pleasures Des Esseintes recalls in Chapter 9 of *À rebours*. And the general notion of perversion as an erotic form of hatred seems especially relevant to the activities of any number of sadists, from the Divine Marquis himself to the fictional dominatrix Clara who makes that hapless male masochist accompany her through the terrors of the Orient in Octave Mirbeau’s *Le Jardin des supplices* (1899). But even in that *grand guignol* narrative the horrors must pass through some kind of aesthetic filter to satisfy the tastes of the decadent heroine: ‘I’ve seen every horror, all human tortures ... It was very beautiful! But I’ve seen nothing as beautiful – do you know what I mean? – as these Chinese convicts ... it’s most beautiful of all!’ [‘Toutes les terreurs, toutes les tortures humaines, je les ai vues ... C’était très beau! ... Mais je n’ai rien vu de si beau ... comprends-tu? ... que ces forçats chinois ... , c’est plus beau que tout!].<sup>29</sup> These would be the convicts to whom Clara feeds rotten meat and experiences near-orgasmic delight in doing so. Perverse? Yes. Decadent? I guess, but I am reluctant to call such pleasures decadent because the aesthetic dimension seems rough and arbitrary, with very little evidence of the artifice that would make the judgement ‘beautiful’ credible. Clara’s perverse pleasures, in short, are not sufficiently refined.

To refine is to remove, and the thing that must be most removed from pleasure to make it decadent is time. Anyone who has ever had a good hangover understands, at a basic level, what this means. The way you feel the morning after gives you a sense of just how decadent your pleasure was the night before. Not that every hangover is of equal quality: one whose origins lie in *Vitis vinifera* L. (‘Nebbiolo’) is preferable, by far, to one whose proximate cause is *Artemisia absinthium*. This is a judgement of taste, and one that necessarily requires a certain amount of time

to make. It's hard to make a judgement about pleasure *in medias res* because one needs time to assess the experience in order to place it on the scale of decadence, since decadence is what you feel good about after being bad. More important, you need a certain amount of time to make the badness better: reflection is the friend of refinement. So perhaps Pater's Marius is right after all to equate hedonism with stoicism: to so discriminate and refine his pleasures that they cease to be a source of pleasure. That would do as a definition of decadent pleasure in a way, since it combines the popular conception of excess with an extraordinarily rarefied sense of taste – too much refinement. Again, to refine is to eliminate, so the only way to make aesthetics fully do the work of morality is to bring the aesthetic sensibility to bear on pleasure wholly and completely – excessively so. That would be perverse. That would be decadent.

---

<sup>1</sup> For these and other definitions of Latin words related to pleasure, see *Oxford Latin Dictionary*, ed. by P. G. W. Glare (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982), and *Cassell's New Latin Dictionary*, ed. by D. P. Simpson (New York: Funk & Wagnalls, 1959).

<sup>2</sup> Walter Pater, *Studies in the History of the Renaissance*, ed. by Matthew Beaumont (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), p. 4.

<sup>3</sup> Edmund Gosse, 'Walter Pater', *Critical Kit-Kats* (New York: Dodd, Mead, 1903), p. 258; originally published as 'Walter Pater: A Portrait', *Contemporary Review*, 67 (December 1894), 795-810.

<sup>4</sup> Pater, *Studies*, p. 177, n.118.

<sup>5</sup> Walter Pater, *Marius the Epicurean*, ed. by Michael Levy (New York: Viking Penguin, 1985), p. 119.

<sup>6</sup> For a recent discussion of these distinctions, see Kurt Lampe, *The Birth of Hedonism: The Cyrenaic Philosophers and Pleasure as a Way of Life* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2015). In his chapter on Pater, Lampe notes that, despite the novel's title, 'Marius does not engage seriously with Epicureanism' (p. 173).

<sup>7</sup> For the U.S. Supreme Court decision establishing the right to same-sex marriage, see *Obergefell v. Hodges*, 576 U.S. \_\_\_ (2015); for legislation mandating more liberal policies toward homosexuality in the armed forces, see *Don't Ask, Don't Tell Repeal Act of 2010*, HR 2965, 111th Cong., 2nd sess., *Congressional Record*, 156 (December 22, 2010): Public Law 111-321.

<sup>8</sup> Carl Van Vechten, *Interpreters and Interpretations* (New York: Knopf, 1917), p. 148. The epigram prefaces an essay on Vaslav Nijinsky.

<sup>9</sup> Actually, the common notion that syphilis was contracted from sheep appears to have no sound scientific basis, but the idea persists because the name of the disease derives from that of the shepherd Syphilus in *Syphilis sive Morbus Gallicus* [Syphilis, or the French Disease], a pastoral epic in Latin published in 1530 by the Renaissance physician Girolamo Fracastoro (c. 1478-1553). In the poem, Syphilus loses his sheep to drought and, as a result, impiously offers homage to the king Alcithous instead of the sun-god Sirius, whereupon Sirius punishes Syphilus with the eponymous disease. See *Syphilis sive Morbus Gallicus* (Verona, 1530), n.p., or the anonymous prose translation published as *Syphilis* (St. Louis: Philmar, 1911), pp. 53-55.

<sup>10</sup> Joris-Karl Huysmans, *Against Nature*, trans. by Robert Baldick (London: Penguin, 2003), p. 96; Joris-Karl Huysmans, *À rebours* (Paris: Garnier-Flammarion, 1978), p. 145.

<sup>11</sup> Umberto Quattrocchi, *CRC World Dictionary of Grasses: Common Names, Scientific Names, Eponyms, Synonyms, and Etymology*, vol. 1 (Boca Raton, FL: Taylor & Francis, 2006), pp. 550-51.

<sup>12</sup> Louis Compton, *Homosexuality and Civilization* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003), p. 528.

- <sup>13</sup> Ernest Hemingway, *Death in the Afternoon* (New York: Scribner, 1999), p. 13.
- <sup>14</sup> For an account of Grimod's 1783 banquet, see Nichola Fletcher, *Charlemagne's Tablecloth: A Piquant History of Feasting* (New York: St. Martin's, 2004), pp. 85-87.
- <sup>15</sup> Cassius Dio Cocceianus, *Dio's Roman History*, trans. by Earnest Cary, 9 vols (London: Heinemann, 1925), VIII, p. 337.
- <sup>16</sup> Jancis Robinson, ed., *The Oxford Companion to Wine*, 2nd edn (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), pp. 540, 600.
- <sup>17</sup> J. C. Hobhouse, *A Journey through Albania, and Other Provinces of Turkey in Europe and Asia, to Constantinople, During the Years 1809 and 1810* (London, 1813), p. 674.
- <sup>18</sup> Jeremy Bentham, *Correspondence of Jeremy Bentham*, vol. 3, ed. by Ian R. Christie (London: UCL Press, 2017), p. 278.
- <sup>19</sup> Philip Miller, *The Gardeners Dictionary*, 8th edn (London, 1768), n.p.
- <sup>20</sup> Oscar Wilde, *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, ed. by Joseph Bristow (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), p. 92.
- <sup>21</sup> Ernest Dowson, 'Non Sum Qualis Eram Bonae sub Regno Cynarae', in *Decadent Poetry from Wilde to Naidu*, ed. by Lisa Rodensky (London: Penguin, 2006), p. 86.
- <sup>22</sup> Phil Baker, *The Book of Absinthe: A Cultural History* (New York: Grove Press, 2001), p. 106.
- <sup>23</sup> Baker, *The Book of Absinthe*, p. 125.
- <sup>24</sup> For the identity of Dornac, see Elizabeth Emery, *Photojournalism and the Origins of the French Writer House Museum (1881-1914): Privacy, Publicity, and Personality* (London and New York: Routledge, 2016), p. 67. Baker, *The Book of Absinthe* (p. 60), identifies the site of the photographs as the Café Procope, whereas Emery (p. 99), says it was the Café François 1er.
- <sup>25</sup> Baker, *The Book of Absinthe*, p. 121.
- <sup>26</sup> Edmund Gosse, *French Profiles* (New York: Dodd, Mead, 1905), p. 182.
- <sup>27</sup> Barnaby Conrad III, *Absinthe: History in a Bottle* (San Francisco: Chronicle, 1988), pp. 2-3, 4-5.
- <sup>28</sup> Robert J. Stoller, *Perversion: The Erotic Form of Hatred* (London: Pantheon, 1986), p. 4.
- <sup>29</sup> Octave Mirbeau, *Le Jardin des supplices* (Paris: Charpentier, 1899) p. 137; *Torture Garden*, trans. by Michael Richardson (Sawtry: Dedalus, 1995), p. 106.

Joris-Karl Huysmans, *Drifting (À van-l'eau)*, translated by Brendan King  
(Sawtry: Dedalus, 2017), 109 pp.  
ISBN 9781910213643

Tina Kover

Durham University

J.-K. Huysmans (1848-1907) is considered an important figure in not one, but two nineteenth-century literary movements: Naturalism and Decadence. The novella *À van-l'eau*, published in 1882, might be said to hover astride the line dividing the two and to encompass his stylistic transition from the former to the latter, containing as it does both the meticulous attention to the realistic and often mundane details of everyday life that is characteristic of Naturalism, and the self-loathing malaise that is a prominent feature of Decadent art and literature.

*À van-l'eau*, translated by Brendan King as *Drifting* in the new Dedalus European Classics series, is the brief (a mere sixty pages in this English-language version) tale of the hapless middle-aged Parisian clerk Jean Folantin and his ultimately fruitless search for entertainment, stimulation, and, not least, a decent meal. The story begins as M. Folantin is finishing an unpalatable dinner in the first of a series of unsatisfactory restaurants; it is the dead of winter, and his solitary lodgings are cold and dreary. We quickly learn that Folantin's life has been one of poverty and near-constant misery since birth; that he has toiled at the same thankless and low-paying government Ministry job since leaving school (an occupation shared by Huysmans himself), and that he has no family, few friends, and is hopelessly single. The high sex drive of his youth has deserted him, as has any hope of ascending the professional ladder. To top off this seemingly endless recitation of woes, he is plagued by chronic indigestion, which is only made worse by the poor-quality offerings available at the dirty, clamorous, and uncongenial cafés and restaurants within easy distance of his flat (he cannot travel too far without discomfort, we learn, due to a painful leg).

As the almost unrelentingly dismal story proceeds, readers are treated to description after description of inhospitable eating-houses and stomach-turning food, rendered in King's adroit translation so vividly and in such detail that, in true Naturalist fashion, we can almost smell the stale grease in the air and feel the sickening crunch of gristle between our teeth. Folantin finds brief moments of pleasure in the public heated baths and the delicate beauties of the Parisian early spring, but these are all too fleeting as he engages in near-constant flagellation of both himself, for his unfortunate life choices, and the world around him, for being so full of misery and inconvenience (a clear harbinger of the cynicism and world-weariness so prominent in Huysmans's later, more firmly Decadent works).

Folantin's half-hearted attempts to explore art and literature are short-lived; the brief rekindling of an old friendship fails to survive our hero's disgust at his companion's taste in both dining establishments and comic opera, and a fleeting effort to raise his own spirits by focusing on his own comparative comfort in the face of others' poverty and unhappiness flickers out with the return of winter. As the book proceeds, our (anti-)hero's days continue to be an unending series of attempts to fill the empty hours, to discover some tiny spark of interest in something, *anything*, that might flare into passion and bring his life some meaning.

What rescues us from the tedium suffered by Huysmans's hero is twofold: first there is the consummate attention to detail for which the author was known during both the Naturalist and Decadent phases of his career. Reading *Drifting* is an experience of the senses. We taste the unappetizing cheese and runny eggs; we hear the clatter of cutlery and the clamour of voices; we feel the icy sleet battering our faces and smell the cruciferous smoke of cheap cigars. And even in this dreariest of novellas there are moments of exquisitely observed beauty, such as:

[...] and when he tired of knocking the dust off printed volumes, he'd lean over the parapet, and the sight of boats with their tarred hulls, cabins painted leek-green, and main masts lowered, pleased him; he would stand there enchanted, contemplating a casserole pot simmering on a cast-iron stove in the open air, the inevitable black-and-white dog running, its tail cocked, the length of a barge, and blond-haired children seated by the tiller, hair in their eyes and fingers in their mouths.

The second quality that keeps *Drifting* from being unremittingly grim is its black humour. Brendan King has translated eight of Huysmans's books for Dedalus and authored a number of articles on the writer as well; he is clearly quite comfortable with Huysmans's darkly comic style, and, with the exception of a few slightly jarring linguistic anachronisms (King's English-speaking protagonist uses 'Great!' to express frustration and refers at another point to 'stuffing your face'), handles the language with a deft touch. His lengthy introduction to the novella is both informative and accessible, providing valuable insight into its context within both Huysmans's career and the contemporary French literary scene, and making a solid case for *Drifting's* importance as both art and entertainment. A worthy addition to the Dedalus catalogue.

Michel Winock, *Décadence fin de siècle, L'Esprit de la cité*  
(Paris: Gallimard, 2017), 288 pp.  
ISBN 9782070107032

Fay Wanrug Suwanwattana

University of Oxford

In his latest publication, Michel Winock, a prolific historian specialising in intellectual history and the history of the French Republic and whose writings have been recognized by many prestigious prizes (*Prix Médicis* 1997 and *Prix Goncourt de la Biographie* 2010), focuses on a network of writers, journalists, pamphleteers, and activists in the last decades of nineteenth-century France (1870s-1890s). These are significant figures who, in their manners, responded and engaged with the generally perceived sentiment of decadence pervading *fin-de-siècle* French society. Alongside more 'literary' writers such as Barbey d'Aurevilly, Léon Bloy, Paul Bourget, Joséphin Péladan, Rachilde, Maurice Barrès, Joris-Karl Huysmans, Octave Mirbeau, and Remy de Gourmont, Winock brings into focus the less studied parodic and subversive vein of decadence illustrated by Charles Cros, Alphonse Allais, the *Fumistes*, and other ephemeral groupings. Writers less often recognized as Decadent *per se*, such as Alfred Jarry and Paul Claudel, are also given particular attention. Alongside these groups of writers, Winock provides an extensive study of influential journalists such as the patriotic Paul Déroulède, the anti-Semitic Henry Rochefort, and Édouard Drumont (author of the notorious anti-Semitic pamphlet *La France juive*), and also the anarchist figures and their sympathisers in literary circles. To deal with such complex materials, the seventeen chapters forming this essay focus on these figures' writings, professional networks and private relationships, as well as exploring key concepts in their historical and cultural development. These key concepts range from nationalism, socialism, communism, antisemitism, anti-immigration, anti-militarism, Boulangism, the fear of the 'mass', and decadent sexuality, to the consolidation of republican ideology and anti-republicanism.

Winock's definition of Decadence as the construction of a collective 'imaginaire', a state of mind, an atmosphere, a moral climate characterized by the perceived decline of French race and society at the turn of the century, is not new. What is however particularly compelling is his close examination of changes in ideas associated with Decadence – both reacting against it and inspired by it – and he unfolds their overlapping, intertwining and, at times, antagonistic relations. Thus, we understand for example how Maurice Barrès' evolving nationalism, which feeds into his literary work, was inspired at once by socialism and antisemitism, how Octave Mirbeau while collaborating with right-wing, monarchist and Bonapartist journals, was at the same time a supporter of anarchist groups and wrote subversive literary texts. This disentanglement of *fin-de-siècle* values and ideas from a historical perspective is particularly welcome for twenty-first century readers, who may otherwise find it difficult to grasp the associations between ideas which today appear to be irreconcilable.

If *Décadence fin de siècle* focuses first and foremost on artists and writers, the aesthetic and thematic aspects of literary works are always examined in relation to politics and historical events. The rejection of the Republic and its parliamentary system, along with contempt for its associated bourgeois values, scientism, and positivism, is primarily held up as the chief reason why writers and artists considered their society to be decadent. While this approach brings out the political dimension of Decadent texts and their potential in posing serious political and historical questions, as opposed to the generally perceived image of Decadence as an aloof and ivory-tower aesthetic, it doesn't do full justice to the ambiguities and ambivalent attitudes of such literary texts (one exception occurs in Chapter 4 dedicated to Joséphin Péladan, where Winock points out, in passing, the ambiguous relationships between eroticism and asceticism, perversion and norms that are cultivated in Péladan's novels). Reading this essay, one is left wondering how the authors studied can be regarded as 'Decadent'. Since their writings are primarily presented as being in reaction against Decadence, they are perhaps fundamentally 'anti-Decadent'. As a result, Decadence as it unfolds throughout this study risks being too narrowly associated with a sentiment of revolt against

modernity, an echo of Antoine Compagnon's notion of 'les antimodernes', yet without the subtlety and nuances attended to in the practice of literary criticism. However, if both the tension between the aesthetics and politics mobilized in Decadent literary writings and the interplay between Decadence and anti-Decadence are left under-explored, this weakness is satisfactorily compensated for by Winock's skills as a historian and essayist. He successfully highlights networks of far-reaching ideas and their circulation in literary, intellectual, and political circles.

Overall, this is an overarching study of Decadence in its nineteenth-century historical context, with a focus on the essentially political nature and implications of the concept played out within a small and limited milieu whose 'mentalité collective' nevertheless represented a 'fait historique'. If Winock's study doesn't provide a new argument about literary Decadence and its aesthetics, it nonetheless puts into perspective the ways in which Decadent authors and their writings were entangled in the politics of their time.

*Décadence fin de siècle* can be of interest to both the general public seeking an introduction to the French *fin de siècle* period with a focus on history of ideas and intellectual history, and specialists of Decadent studies who wish to extend their approach of Decadence beyond literary aestheticism and towards an interdisciplinary dimension. A brief chronology at the end of the volume situating political and social events along with literary and journalistic publications is very useful for this purpose. Winock's approach to the subject in terms of intellectual history is very welcome at a time when scholars of Decadence have been seeking to open up new perspectives and renew their critical apparatus. Many resonances of so-called Decadent cultural phenomena still haunt our current vocabulary, imagination and debates, and *Décadence fin de siècle* attests to the continuing importance of nineteenth-century Decadence for twentieth and twenty-first century cultural and literary studies.

## Notes on Contributors

**Leire Barrera-Medrano** has recently completed a PhD at Birkbeck College, University of London entitled ‘Aesthetics of Extremes: Spain and British Decadence, 1880-1920.’ She has an upcoming chapter on Spanish mysticism in *Michael Field, Decadent Moderns* (Ohio University Press, 2018 – in press) and has published an article on Vernon Lee and Spain in *Cahiers victoriens et édouardiens* (83 Printemps | 2016). She is co-organising the AHRC-TORCH funded conference ‘Women Writing Decadence: European Perspectives’ that will take place at the University of Oxford on 7-8 July 2018. She also co-edits Girasol Press, an Anglo-Spanish publishing endeavour.

**Kostas Boyiopoulos** is Teaching Associate in English Studies at Durham University. His main areas of interest are Fin de Siècle studies, aestheticism and decadence. He is the author of *The Decadent Image: The Poetry of Wilde, Symons, and Dowson* (Edinburgh University Press, 2015), funded by the Friends of Princeton University Library Research Grant. He is co-editor of the essay collection *Decadent Romanticism: 1780–1914* (Ashgate, 2015) and *The Decadent Short Story: An Annotated Anthology* (Edinburgh University Press, 2014). He has published essays on Oscar Wilde, Ernest Dowson, Arthur Machen, and others. Two coedited collections of essays, *Literary and Cultural Alternatives to Modernism: Unsettling Presences* and *Aphoristic Modernity*, will be published this year by Routledge and Brill respectively.

**Laurel Brake** is Professor Emerita of Literature and Print Culture at Birkbeck, University of London; she habitually works on the nineteenth-century press and print culture, and Walter and Clara Pater. She is author of *Walter Pater, Print in Transition* and *Subjugated Knowledges*, and co-editor of various works – digital and print – on the press, including online ncese (Nineteenth-Century Serials Edition), *DNCJ (Dictionary of Nineteenth-Century Journalism)*, and *The News of the World and the British Press, 1843-2011*. She publishes regularly on Walter Pater and his work, including ‘Walter Pater and the New Media’ (2018) in *Testing New Opinions* (ed. by Gillard Estrada, Lambert-Charbonnier, and Ribeyrol). She was a co-founder and co-editor with Billie Inman of the *Pater Newsletter*; recent work on the Paters has appeared in *SWPA*. At present she is writing *Ink Work* on Walter and Clara Pater and editing an edition of Walter Pater’s journalism.

**Bénédicte Coste** teaches Victorian literature and culture at the University of Burgundy, France. She mainly works on Walter Pater and late-nineteenth-century writers whose reception in France she explores. Her publications include: « *Cette époque de doute* » : *Penser la croyance avec Walter Pater* (2017); *Walter Pater, esthétique* (2011); *Walter Pater, critique littéraire*. « *The Excitement of the Literary Sense* » (2010). With Professor Catherine Delyfer, she co-edited *Aesthetic Lives* (Rivendale, 2013). With Professor Delyfer and Professor Christine Reynier, she co-edited the collection of essays *Reconnecting Aestheticism and Modernism* (Routledge, 2016). She is currently writing a monograph on the controversies linked to British Aestheticism.

**Rita Dirks** is Associate Professor of English at Ambrose University. Her research and specialty teaching interests include Decadence, Modernism, and Women’s & Gender Studies. Her recent publications focus on Oscar Wilde, Derrida, and Canadian Literature. Her paper is part of an on-going research project for a monograph on Canadian Decadence.

**Tina Kover** is the translator of more than a dozen works of fiction and nonfiction, including Alexandre Dumas’s *Georges*, Benoît Peeters’s *Hergé: Son of Tintin*, and Anna Gavalda’s *Life, Only Better*. Her translations have twice been nominated for the IMPAC Dublin International Literary Award and she was the recipient in 2009 of a Literary Translation Fellowship from the U.S. National Endowment for the Arts. She lives in the northeast of England.

**William Parker** is currently working on a PhD at the Courtauld Institute of Art, University of London. His research focuses on works of aesthetic criticism by English art scholar and poet Laurence Binyon (1869-1943). In particular, his research addresses the manner in which Binyon's Edwardian writings on the visual arts were influenced by Walter Pater's criticism, despite Binyon's documented acquaintance with, and influence on, London-based modernists such as Ezra Pound and Wyndham Lewis. In this way, his research addresses the relationship between literature and the visual arts more generally, as well as the specific relationship between Aestheticism and Modernism. Before arriving at the Courtauld, William studied English Literature and History of Art at the University of East Anglia. He co-organises the Art Writing Research Group at the Courtauld with Thomas Hughes and Maria Alambritis, and his research has also been published in *ELT*.

**Fay Wanrug Suwanwattana** is a PhD student in Modern French at Merton College, University of Oxford. Her thesis is entitled 'Decadent Indochina and French Colonial Literature from 1880s to 1920s' which she is undertaking under the supervision of Prof. Jennifer Yee. Looking into an interplay between Decadence and the French empire, her research focuses on fin-de-siècle colonial literature in Indochina and aims to examine the transnational aspect of literary Decadence, in its intersection with colonialism. Alongside her research in French studies, she has also published on contemporary Thai literature and has participated in international conferences on Asian and Thai studies.

**David Weir** is Professor Emeritus of Comparative Literature at the Cooper Union in New York City, where he taught literature, linguistics, and cinema for thirty years. He has published books on Jean Vigo, James Joyce, William Blake, orientalism, anarchism, and decadence. His most recent publication is *Decadence: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford University Press).

**Simon Casimir Wilson** OBE MA (Courtauld) is a retired Tate curator and independent writer on art. He has a special interest in book design in Britain in the 1890s and a particular focus on Aubrey Beardsley.

## EDITORIAL

**Jane Desmarais (Editor-in-Chief)** is Senior Lecturer in English in the Department of English and Comparative Literature at Goldsmiths, University of London. She has written numerous essays on the theme of Decadence and has co-edited several works, including *Decadence: An Annotated Anthology* (with Chris Baldick, Manchester University Press, 2012), *Arthur Symons: Selected Early Poems* (with Chris Baldick, MHRA, 2017), and *Decadence and the Senses* (with Alice Condé, 2017). She is currently working with David Weir on a volume on Decadence for the *Cambridge Critical Concepts* series (forthcoming in 2019). Her monograph, *Monsters under Glass: A Cultural History of Hothouse Flowers, 1850 to the Present*, will be published by Reaktion in 2018.

**Alice Condé (Deputy Editor)** is a Postdoctoral Associate Tutor in the Department of English and Comparative Literature at Goldsmiths, University of London. She is co-editor of *Decadence and the Senses* (with Jane Desmarais, Legenda, 2017) and is currently co-editing *'Betwixt the Bounds of Life and Death': Selected Essays on Ernest Dowson (1867-1900)* (with Jessica Gosling, Peter Lang, forthcoming 2018). Her essay on 'Decadence and Popular Culture' is forthcoming in Jane Desmarais and David Weir's volume on Decadence for the *Cambridge Critical Concepts* series.

**Jessica Gossling (Deputy Editor)** is a Fractional Lecturer in the Department of English and Comparative Literature at Goldsmiths, University of London, and Editorial Assistant for *The Literary Encyclopedia*. Her current research focuses on the Decadent threshold poetics of Charles Baudelaire, Joris-Karl Huysmans, Arthur Symons, and Ernest Dowson. She is co-editor of *‘Betwixt the Bounds of Life and Death’: Selected Essays on Ernest Dowson (1867-1900)* (with Alice Condé, published by Peter Lang in 2018), and her essay on ‘À rebours and the House at Fontenay’ is published in *Decadence and the Senses*. Alice and Jessica are the webmistresses of [volupte.gold.ac.uk](http://volupte.gold.ac.uk).

**Robert Pruett (Reviews Editor)** is a PhD student of Medieval and Modern Languages at St Cross College, University of Oxford. He is currently preparing a thesis entitled ‘Remy de Gourmont and the Symbolism of Chastity’, and regularly presents research on fin-de-siècle French and Belgian literature. Alongside the *Cercle des Amateurs de Remy de Gourmont* (CARGO), he co-organized the *Fin de Siècle Symposium* (Balliol College, Oxford, November 2016), the proceedings of which will feature his essay on ‘The Concept of Chastity in Remy de Gourmont’s Theory of Art and Mind’.