



ARTHUR SYMONS AND *THE SAVOY*

Anne Margaret Daniel

I saw him in the Café Royal,
Very old and very grand.
Modernistic shone the lamplight
There in London's fairyland.
'Devill'd chicken, devill'd whitebait,
Devil if I understand.
Where is Oscar? Where is Bosie?
Have I seen that man before?'

—*On Seeing an Old Poet in the Café Royal*
John Betjeman

When Arthur Symons died in January 1945, shortly before his eightieth birthday, the *Times Literary Supplement* did not mince words in its obituary. The “last of the eminent aesthetic writers was dead,” but wartime England did not really care; the 1890s were “so long ago,” and *fin-de-siècle* literary styles and definitions “fallen so far out of current speech” that even distinguishing among them was something of an irrelevancy. New Critics, followers of Auden, and the forthcoming angry young men—doubtless angry young teenagers at the time—had neither interest in nor patience for gilt-mailed, patchouli-scented poetry or prose. When John Betjeman saw Symons in the Brasserie of the Café Royal and drafted the lines on the “old poet” in the manager’s autograph book, Betjeman later recalled that Symons was all alone: “He knew no one . . . I don’t think anyone spoke to him.”¹ Symons, though he had continued to write and publish from the turn of the century until his death, was, and is, thought of as a writer, poet, and critic frozen in the Nineties. This is fair; after his terrible breakdown, the “thunderbolt from hell”² of 1908, Symons’ critical work was intermittent and tentative, his style even more self-referential and confessional, his opinions vastly changeable, and his poetry simply bad.³ What Symons had done, though, in the 1890s mattered more than most remember.

¹ Roger Lhombreaud, *Arthur Symons: A Critical Biography* (London, 1963), pp. 299–300 (quoting Guy Deghy and Keith Waterhouse, *Café Royal: Ninety Years of Bohemia* [London, 1955], p. 150).

² Arthur Symons, *Confessions: A Study in Pathology* (New York, 1930), p. 1.

³ The Arthur Symons Papers (hereinafter “Symons Collection”) in the Rare Books collection of Princeton University Library consist of twenty-eight boxes of material ranging from early sketches and reviews, to drafts for works for *The Savoy*, to idiosyncratic writings and artworks of Symons’ later years. The decline in his writing is a sad one; neat manuscript drafts and carefully typeset, corrected proofs are replaced by erratically typed, misspelled and haphazardly hand-corrected material, much of it unpublished.

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His book *The Symbolist Movement in Literature* (1900) has become known as Symons' most valuable work. A collection of essays on French writers from Balzac to Verlaine, Rimbaud, and Huysmans, with Symons' translations of selected poems appended, the book would be accorded great influence in the 1920s by many of the "high Modern" writers in English, like T. S. Eliot and Symons' old friend W. B. Yeats. However, Symons' far greater, but far less noted, contribution to literature was as an editor, not as an author. In 1895, Symons accepted Leonard Smithers' offer to found and edit a new literary and artistic magazine, and from the summer of 1895 until late 1896, Symons was almost solely in charge of an experiment called *The Savoy*. This magazine, at once a response and alternative to established journals and reviews as well as more avant-garde publications like *The Yellow Book*, was a popular failure (particularly after a bookseller's ban devastated its potential market) and died within the year. But thanks to Arthur Symons, some of the richest and strangest *fin-de-siècle* art and writing was published, and is preserved. Symons assembled in *The Savoy* a truly unique sample of *fin-de-siècle* culture, introducing young writers and artists soon to be canonical and forgotten alike, but giving them a chance. Like the Courtauld Gallery's collection, *The Savoy's* overall strength is not that it has all of anything, but that it has something of everything—excellent examples of everything from its times. *The Savoy* preserves and presents perfectly representative samples of the variety of literary forms—aesthetic, symbolist, decadent, realistic, and naturalistic—experimented with in English literature during the 1890s.

The Savoy's poetry and critical contents particularly reflect Symons' own ruling passions: *symbolisme*, and his complete obsession with the decadent (which continued until his death). He included in the magazine several of his own translations of his beloved Verlaine and Mallarmé, as well as several critical essays on Verlaine. Most of the original poems appearing in *The Savoy* are of the (decadent) Dowsonian gone-with-the-wind and (*symboliste*) Yeatsian long-hair-and-mysterious-roses variety; not surprisingly, most are indeed by Dowson, Yeats, and Symons himself. These three men account for the lion's share of poetry in the magazine, and Yeats's increasing output, as Symons got his next-door neighbor more involved in both writing for and helping to edit *The Savoy*, is a special aspect of the later numbers. Symons' own "Literary Causeries," which end these later issues, deal almost exclusively with French writers of the 1880s and 1890s. He continually urges the Goncourts, Huysmans, and Mallarmé as inspiration to those writing stories and novels in English.



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The Savoy's fiction and prose contents have more variety than any of the other literary and artistic genres in the magazine, but all the stories and essays are on subjects near and dear to Symons himself. His own Lucy Newcome stories and contributions by William “Fiona Macleod” Sharp, Hubert Crackanthorpe, and the anonymous author of “A Mere Man” are good examples of what soon came to be called psychological realism. Symons also chose for publication a work of more-than-Scandinavian naturalism entitled “The Idiots,” a first published story by a young man writing under the name of Joseph Conrad. Symons also published many women writers in *The Savoy*. The sixteen-year-old Sarojini Chattopadhyay’s “Eastern Dancers” and translations of the poems of Mathilde Blind are there; other *Savoy* contributions by women included an illustrated poem by Leila MacDonald, “Morag of the Glen” by “Fiona Macleod,”⁴ and the novella “Beauty’s Hour: A Phantasy” by one “O. Shakespear.” Best known today as Yeats’s mistress in 1896 and longtime friend thereafter—and Ezra Pound’s mother-in-law—Olivia Shakespear published many novels (all long out of print) in the 1890s. “Beauty’s Hour,” a combination of Cinderella story and inversion of Robert Louis Stevenson’s *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* (1886), is an early and exceptional work by this forgotten author that stands out among *The Savoy's* fictions. Symons’ selection of such works for *The Savoy* made possible the publication of young authors and artists, male and female, whose work had no other venue because they were not known or were considered too controversial for other periodicals—and whose work might otherwise have gone unseen.



The Savoy was conceived of, according to Symons, as “a new kind of magazine, which was to appeal to the public equally in its letterpress and its illustrations.”⁵ Leonard Smithers asked Symons—whose *London Nights* he published in June 1895, to howls of critical abuse and moral condemnation—to edit the proposed magazine, and Symons seized upon Aubrey Beardsley, recently fired from *The Yellow Book*, as his art editor.⁶ Together, the enthusiastic Welshman, the former Sheffield solicitor, and the boy from Brighton went to Dieppe to work—and of

⁴ Symons, like his contemporaries, thought this reclusive Scots author was a woman. When he was dying, in 1905, William Sharp confessed to his wife that he had written as “Fiona Macleod.”

⁵ Arthur Symons, “Aubrey Beardsley: An Appreciation,” in *The Collected Drawings of Aubrey Beardsley with an Appreciation by Arthur Symons*, ed. Bruce S. Harris (New York, 1967), p. vii.

⁶ Karl Beckson, *Arthur Symons: A Life* (Oxford, 1987), pp. 116–17.



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course to play, too.⁷ The three young men—Symons was 30, Smithers 34, and Beardsley only 23—spent most of the summer of 1895 just across the Channel from Beachy Head, planning the magazine. Its title was Beardsley’s idea.⁸ Karl Beckson, Symons’ most thorough biographer, speculates that Beardsley chose *The Savoy* for its potential shock value, since the celebrated London hotel of the same name had been featured prominently that spring in the Oscar Wilde trials.⁹ Beardsley knew French, and might also have been amused by the homonymic qualities of “savoy” and “savoir.” Although he did every cover for the magazine, and continued to draw and write illustrated poetry for *The Savoy* when he could, Beardsley was in France and Belgium for his health during most of 1896.¹⁰ Symons, back in London, had to be ultimately responsible for the art editing too.

The Savoy’s first two (quarterly) numbers ran to nearly 200 pages each, and sold for two shillings and sixpence. When the heavy, yellowy-green-covered periodical became a monthly in July (“having taken to menstruation,” said Dowson),¹¹ the price fell to two shillings and the average number of pages was halved. *The Savoy* was not particularly savaged by critics—though Beardsley was always a target for parody by this time. But neither was it ever popular. It never sold well before its July ban by W. H. Smith & Son, and afterwards it came to a swift end in December.

“We are not . . . Decadents,” insisted Symons, in his editorial note to the first number of *The Savoy* in January 1896. Given both the cover and the contents, the Marquis of Queensberry’s recent and memorable phrase to Oscar Wilde certainly applies to Symons’ disclaimer about his magazine: “I do not say you are it, but you look it.” Even the works of realism in *The Savoy* always have a decadent veneer or base; say what he might, Symons could not make *The Savoy* anything but a decadent manifesto, and it was he, as editor, who made it so. The January number included art by Beardsley, Will Rothstein, and Max Beerbohm, essays by Cesare Lombroso and Havelock Ellis, and the poetry of Ernest Dowson, Verlaine,

⁷ Smithers had begun as a solicitor; Symons was born in Milford Haven; and Beardsley published his first artwork at sixteen in his school paper at the Brighton Grammar School.

⁸ “An Appreciation,” p. vii.

⁹ Beckson finds, rightly, that the title was “rather daring” since “some of the damaging testimony against Wilde was associated with the hotel of that name” (*Arthur Symons: A Life* 121). Wilde had been convicted in May; Symons wrote to Verlaine in April: “We can think of nothing here but the Oscar Wilde case” (*Arthur Symons: Selected Letters, 1880–1935*, ed. Karl Beckson and John M. Munro [London, 1989], p. 110 n.4).

¹⁰ *Arthur Symons: A Life*, p. 135.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 141.



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Yeats, and Symons—a *prima facie*, *Q.E.D.* case for *The Savoy* as a publication of *décadence par excellence*. Symons' alleged desire to avoid controversy, and any coupling with *The Yellow Book* in popular opinion, was hopeless from the start—indeed, from the outside in. Beardsley, the former cover artist and principal illustrator for *The Yellow Book*, did every cover for *The Savoy*. The paper upon which it was chosen to print his covers was emphatically not the bright, decadent yellow of *The Yellow Book*, but a “tame” light green that, with the passage of a hundred years, has faded triumphantly into a soft, rose-and-khaki-toned yellow, showing its true colors. Symons did tone down the January cover before he let it appear; Beardsley was made to remove not only the plump genitalia from the imp/*putto* figure in the foreground, but the copy of *The Yellow Book* lying in the grass directly below the little figure's crotch (*The Savoy* 1, [cover]; hereinafter cited by number and page). The contents page is a fey, sly, eye-catching interpretation of traditional English iconography: a huge figure of John Bull, prettily dressed in a beaded cape with a tassel and delicate winged boots circled by rosebuds, gestures to the edge of the page with one hand, cradling the literary and artistic nature of the magazine (a plume and a pen) in the other. At his throat is a corsage of English roses, Irish shamrocks, and Scottish thistle; his little English bulldog peers around the corner behind him, its head beneath a flowing bow.

Beardsley's lovely, lavish work immediately precedes Symons' very formal and rather bland editorial note. “It is hoped,” Symons states passively, “that ‘THE SAVOY’ will be a periodical of an exclusively literary and artistic kind.” Those “who look to a new periodical for only very well-known or very obscure names” are advised to turn elsewhere; *The Savoy* will provide a mix of known and unknown, as long as the authors' and artists' work is good. The magazine is not to be particularly didactic or strident, and most importantly, it is to have no specific tone or voice: “We have no formulas, and we desire no false unity of form or matter. We have not invented a new point of view. We are not Realists, or Romanticists, or Decadents. For us, all art is good which is good art” (1.5). Democratic statements, perhaps, but from a prejudiced pen. Symons was to be the judge of “good art,” and good art was for him only one sort: that which was “no doubt a decadence,” with “all the qualities that mark the end of great periods . . . an intense self-consciousness, a restless curiosity in research, an over-subtilizing refinement upon refinement, a spiritual and moral perversity.”¹²

¹² A *Critical Biography*, p. 99 (quoting Symons in *Harper's Monthly Magazine*, European ed. [November 1893]: 858 et seq.).



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If he really sought to avoid controversy, the piece Symons chose to lead off the first issue of *The Savoy* made a total loss of his stated intention, as it is an essay on religion and decadence by George Bernard Shaw. “On Going to Church” (not an activity notably associated with Shaw) is an ill-tempered condemnation of mid-1890s society that appears to strike out against a particular decadent stereotype. Shaw complains bitterly and extensively about artificial stimulation and enervation, on which the decadents had the franchise; what they call “fine art,” he grouses, is “produced by the teapot, the bottle, or the hypodermic syringe” (1.13). This behavior belongs to “a world which, unable to live by bread alone, lives spiritually on alcohol and morphia” (1.13). Shaw’s ethnocentric and imperialist conclusion is that western cultures have been leveled towards the status of “lesser”—Oriental and African—ones. Shaw’s argument is not terribly different from the essence of conservative statements about the decline of America’s inner cities today when he states that “increased facilities which constitute the advance of civilisation include facilities for drugging oneself. These facilities wipe whole races of black men off the face of the earth; and every extension and refinement of them picks a stratum out of white society and devotes it to destruction” (1.14). And the stratum of English society devoted to destruction consists of “our carnivorous drunkard poets,” but the blame for them falls upon the high Anglican, Victorian society in which they were raised, and to which they are now reacting (1.16).

Symons chose to follow this self-justifying broadside against drugged artists and the repressive world that engendered them (really a wonderful case of “blaming it on society”) with an appalling piece on a topic peculiarly dear to *The Savoy*’s editor. Frederick Wedmore’s “To Nancy” really appears to have been included to refute any contemporary suggestion that *The Savoy* might be read and actually enjoyed by New Women. Only a man with a fetish for just-pubescent music hall girls—like Arthur Symons—could possibly enjoy “To Nancy,” and to have featured such a poor bit of writing so prominently in his new magazine, he certainly must have.

Written in an old traditional style, the eighteenth century’s epistolary form, “To Nancy” is anything but traditional in its subject matter. The story is a series of advice letters from her self-styled father figure, Clement Ashton, to fifteen-year-old Nancy Nanson. Ashton’s relationship with Nancy—as he repeats compulsively and not a whit convincingly—is strictly that of audience and observer to actress. He is an artist, and, like Basil Hallward, he paints the young



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object of his desire as often as she will sit for him. In another echo of *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1890–91), Ashton comes to the low music hall where she performs, just as Dorian goes to the theatre to find Sibyl Vane, and watches Nancy assume first the role of a boy while retaining a “tender touch or two” beneath her assumed “manliness,” and then the role of a dancing girl who kicks her feet higher and higher into the air until, “flushed and panting, it was over” (1.35; exactly who is flushed and panting is debatable). Inevitably Ashton is terrified, as Nancy celebrates her sixteenth birthday, that she may begin playing more of a woman’s role in real life. The idea of a sexually active Nancy is not really to be entertained. Lewis Carroll had tried obsessively, with pen and camera, to freeze one little mid-Victorian girl as a child forever; later Victorian and Edwardian writers had a powerful model to follow in him. Obliquely, unable even to allude to what the “crooked way” might be, Ashton advises Nancy emphatically to “Go the straight way!” but insists, rather unconvincingly, that “whatever way you go, I shall always be your friend” (1.41). Nancy’s answers, when she is permitted room to give them, take up a tiny fraction of the space of his epistles. She does nothing at all to indicate she is preparing to stray from the proverbial straight and narrow, despite her profession (and her fatally Dickensian name), and she is given no response to Ashton’s mixed final word. One feels that Nancy was, perhaps, enjoying her birthday cake with her family and could not be bothered to take up pen and paper for a reply.

Symons selected “The Eyes of Pride” as one of Ernest Dowson’s few prose pieces to appear in *The Savoy*. This shows a solid critical judgment on Symons’ part, for Dowson was a far better poet than writer of prose. However, “The Eyes of Pride,” though far better than Wedmore’s offering, is in the same vein—and right up Symons’ alley. A strained bit of strongly Ibsen-influenced realism, taking its name from a line by George Meredith and dedicated to a fifteen-year-old girl with whom Dowson was obsessed at the time,¹³ the story is about an artist and his obsession. The decadent and self-centered artist, very like Dowson and bearing the wonderful name of “Seefang,” sees young Rosalind Lingard while painting in a “primitive Breton village” and falls in love, or something like it, with her. (Inexplicably, everyone in the primitive Breton village seems to have a Scandinavian name, but let that pass.) Despite his initial distaste—“he had promptly

¹³ *Arthur Symons: A Life*, p. 130.



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disliked her, thought her capricious and ill-tempered. Grudgingly, he had admitted that she was beautiful, but it was a beauty which repelled him in a girl of his own class”—Seefang manages to translate Rosalind into the beauty of his imaginary ideal, “with the ambered paleness and the vaguely virginal air of an early Tuscan painting, who would cure him of his grossness and reform him” (1.52–53).

Rosalind, shrinking from this indigestible mass of Paterian clichés, prefers to follow an older and societally honored tradition instead. She marries Lord Dagenham, a partly paralyzed old diplomat who inexplicably materializes in the primitive Breton village, for status and security (Seefang discovers the information about the groom’s peerage because he—in one last delightful moment of narrative disconnection—happens to have a copy of *Debrett’s* handy). For years, Seefang pursues a course of unnamed depredations; when they meet again, years later, both are coarsened and changed—but Rosalind is Lady Dagenham, and Seefang merely, in Stephen Dedalus’ perfect words, a most finished artist. In poetry, prose, and life, Dowson’s artists, and Dowson the artist, never escaped the Seefang role. His work is in nearly every issue of *The Savoy* and exhibits always what Symons called, in Dowson, “[t]hat curious love of the sordid, so common an affectation of the modern decadent, and with him so expressively genuine” (4.93). Symons might have been speaking of Dowson, but he was also describing himself.

Another friend and kindred spirit of Symons, sexologist Havelock Ellis, contributed several pieces of “literary” criticism to *The Savoy*; all dealt with the psychology and physiology of his subjects far more than their work. When Symons and Ellis had lived together in Paris in 1890, Symons pursued French writers and sought to learn from them, while Ellis conducted his own brand of research at asylums and hospitals. At the Salpêtrière Clinic, Ellis saw Jean-Martin Charcot “give a demonstration on a patient” and spent time with noted anthropologists as well.¹⁴ Back in London, Ellis and Symons took adjacent rooms in Fountain Court and continued their friendship and, I believe, sometime collaboration—or at least discussions of each others’ works and ideas. Ellis’ multipart series on Friedrich Nietzsche, whose principal works had only been published in German in the 1880s and were still recent discoveries in London, was his longest contribution to *The Savoy*; but for the debut issue, Symons selected a piece on one of his own favorite French writers, Emile Zola. Basing his essay on purportedly

¹⁴ Ibid., p. 56.



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scientific elements behind Zola's energetic and realistic writing, Ellis insisted that the "considerable and confused amount of racial energy . . . stored up in Zola" (he was of French, Greek, and Italian heritage) contributed greatly to his prose and made Zola a "zealot in his devotion to life" (I.71; 73). Ellis was particularly obsessed with what he saw as Zola's own obsessions, a fascination with "sexual and digestive functions." The former Zola shared with Laurence Sterne, the latter with Jonathan Swift, and what Ellis saw as his failure to "balance" these obsessions in his writings suggested to Ellis that Zola was insane (1.76–77). Ellis reached this conclusion about most of the writers whose work he analyzed—or, perhaps, set out to analyze their work only after reaching the conclusion. Symons was intensely interested in the links between genius and insanity, and this makes his own breakdown and struggle to recover, after the *fin-de-siècle*, in which he was at home, had given way to a new world, the more poignant somehow.

For poetry in the first issue of *The Savoy*, Symons chose first his own translation of a brief, dreamy, and sweetly innocuous verse by Verlaine ("Mandoline"), Beardsley's coyly shocking, beautifully illustrated, but not very good "The Three Musicians," and some spectacular work by his new neighbor in Fountain Court. W. B. Yeats had met Symons through Rhymers' Club meetings in the early 1890s and had sublet rooms from Ellis while Symons was planning *The Savoy*. The two men, exactly the same age and possessing many of the same interests, from the occult to symbolism (though Yeats never evinced any interest in little girls other than Iseult Gonne), became good friends in 1895–96. Yeats's poems, Irish folk and fairy tales, and criticism appear with increasing regularity in the magazine, as, I believe, he took more and more interest in planning and editing it along with Symons (and Yeats's letters of the time bear this out).¹⁵ His two poems in the first issue, "The Shadowy Horses" (later called "He Bids his Beloved be at Peace"¹⁶) and "The Travail of Passion," are Yeats's Celtic Twilight at its best, dreamy and dripping with sexy religious allusion, as well as being entirely tangled up in Yeats's lifelong pre-Raphaelite hair fetish—the sweeping waves gracing the idealized heads of Elizabeth Siddal and Jane Morris are echoed in (Mary Magdalen's,

¹⁵ See, e.g., *The Letters of W. B. Yeats*, ed. Allan Wade (New York, 1955), pp. 233–34 (WBY to Olivia Shakespear, August 6, 1894). Yeats's editorial advice is good and Shakespear took it, for her story that Yeats would solicit for *The Savoy*.

¹⁶ *The Variorum Edition of the Poems of W. B. Yeats*, ed. Peter Allt and Russell K. Allsop (New York, 1971), p. 154.



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most likely) loosened hair in “The Travail of Passion” and the falling hair of the nameless Beloved in “The Shadowy Horses.”¹⁷

Symons’ own “Dieppe: 1895” follows the Yeats poems. It is—as are most of Symons’ essays—a very self-referential, semiautobiographical account of his particular impressions and the impact which something, in this case a resort town, made upon him.¹⁸ That this was also the summer when he, Smithers, and Beardsley planned *The Savoy* in Dieppe makes it an appropriate work for the first issue. In reality, Symons spent the summer dashing about “decked . . . out in a whole suit of French summer clothing from the Belle Jardinière,” diligently and tirelessly soliciting contributions for his new magazine from the (decadent, artistic) beach-combers.¹⁹ His own article on Dieppe downplays entirely Symons’ hard work and business abilities, focusing only on the purported languor with which he conducted people-watching strolls along the beach and through the casinos. Drawn to Dieppe because it floats in suspension between London and Paris, because it is French yet full of English artists, Symons insists that he went only for a weekend (not so) and was seduced into staying two months (1.102). The story features two lovely descriptive passages, the first on the colors of beach dresses and bathing costumes, beginning with a breathless “Ah! but the *plage* . . .” (1.85–86). The second passage is about the “Bal des Enfants,” an afternoon dance for children visiting the resort. Just as their parents dress for supper and dancing in the evenings when they are asleep in the care of their nurses, so the children masquerade as little adults for this event, gravely dancing together in tiny pairs. Symons is most struck by the youth of the players, as well as the “masquerade” aspect of the Bal, and mourns, as ever and always, the evanescence of female youth: “I hate to think of those long, thin legs getting stouter, and being covered up in skirts” (1.92). Yet he is cruel to the one “child” who evinces an interest in him, a little blonde gypsy girl. Symons offers her some of the verses he has been

¹⁷ Brenda Maddox finds in these poems, and others collected in *The Wind Among the Reeds*, a sinister “dread of the smothering, strangling powers of female hair” born of Yeats’s affair with the long-haired Olivia Shakespear (Brenda Maddox, *Yeats’s Ghosts* [New York, 1999], p. 29). Maud Gonne, and Yeats’s wife George, both kept their cascades of hair well after the style went out of vogue.

¹⁸ *Punch* mocked “Simple Simons’s” style exquisitely in the February 1, 1896 number, substituting Margate for Dieppe: “What is it in this little watering-place that appeals to the poet, and that turns us all, at one moment, into helpless and driveling idiots?” (quoted in *A Critical Biography*, p. 121). Though *Punch* indicates that Symons’ name should be pronounced “simons,” it was “simmons” (Anne Yeats, conversation with author, *The Silver Swan*, Sligo, Ireland, 4 August, 1995).

¹⁹ *Arthur Symons: A Life*, p. 122 (quoting Charles Conder).



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writing, and then snatches them away from the window as she approaches, smiling (no love villanelles for someone who might already be old enough to understand them), and he refuses to bid his “little friend” goodbye as the gypsy caravan moves away (1.94–95).²⁰ Clearly, she no longer interests him, as a self-sufficient fifteen-year-old already over the hill.

The rest of the January *Savoy* pales beside Beardsley’s sparkling “Under the Hill,” an illustrated fiction sanitized from his “Venus and Tannhauser” and demurely subtitled “A Romantic Story.” Had “Venus and Tannhauser” been published, *The Savoy* would absolutely have been a one-issue periodical and Beardsley, Smithers, and Symons all the subjects of legal action. As appearing, the tale of Helen (perhaps of Troy, but positively a beauty) and the Abbé Fanfreluche filled the last pages of the first *Savoy* with rococo excess, strange and delightful turns of phrase, and an overall style as decadent as, to paraphrase its author, the bloom upon wax fruit. Yeats would later complain—in a perfect example of Yeatsian hindsight, which is often self-serving and renders his autobiographies such wonderful pieces of revisionism—that *The Savoy* might have survived “but for our association with Beardsley . . . but for his *Under the Hill*.”²¹ What is certain is that *The Savoy* would have died a far quicker death but for “Under the Hill.” Beardsley’s art and prose sold *The Savoy* because they, and he, were considered shocking, and Symons knew this and—despite his written disclaimers about decadence—used Beardsley to great effect. Some reviewers found “Under the Hill” offensive, and it was swiftly parodied in *Punch*, by Ada Leveson and other writers, which meant that Symons was right about Beardsley and that his work had made *The Savoy*, in London literary quarters, if not with the general reading public, a most palpable hit.²²

“Under the Hill” deploys shock value with aplomb, as when Helen cautions her “fat manicure” Mrs. Marsuple (“Priapusa” in Beardsley’s original text) to stop kissing her so passionately: “Dear Tongue, you really must behave yourself” (1.160; 164). The story is not a particularly good, or even original, one and lends

²⁰ Symons had a gypsy fetish all his life. There are many mentions of gypsies, and whole stories about them, in his papers. In 1910 he wrote to Augustus John that he was researching in “27 Gypsy books” for a forthcoming article, and had been delighted by a glimpse of “a lovely golden-haired Welsh Gypsy” while out for a drive (*Arthur Symons: Selected Letters* 214).

²¹ Yeats confessed, though, that he thought the “fragment promise[d] a literary genius as great maybe as his artistic genius.” W. B. Yeats, *The Autobiography of William Butler Yeats* (New York, 1965), p. 216.

²² *Arthur Symons: A Life*, p. 131. Beardsley was dubbed “Weirdsley” by *Punch*.



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itself to easy parody in its lavish prose (particularly the catalogues of interesting clothing, weird statuary, and unorthodox edibles) and wacky, wicked descriptions (like Helen's "little malicious breasts;" 1.163). Yet its eccentricity of style, its excess in both the prose and illustrations, and its cliffhanger "to be continued" ending—Helen refuses her "frock" and blithely trots off to supper without it (1.166–67)—lead the first issue of *The Savoy* to a definite conclusion. The January number might have contained a vitriolic Shaw, some rather poor realism, and psychological, literary, and social criticism, but for Symons to end the first *Savoy* with "Under the Hill" sounded from the beginning a ringingly decadent note that could not be belied or passed off as anything else.

The second issue of *The Savoy* (April) bears "Edited by Arthur Symons" prominently on both its cover and title page. Perhaps in an attempt to make the magazine look more mainstream, the cover appropriately featured a young lady trying on spring hats; and this issue also included, for subscribers, a belated, graceful Madonna and child Christmas card. However, both illustrations were by Beardsley—and, of course, look it. The April issue contains more art than that of January, and Beardsley did most of it, along with Beerbohm (a caricature of Beardsley), Will Rothenstein, Joseph Pennell, and William T. Horton. Horton's primitive drawings, inspired by lines of scripture, stand out for their dark and Blakean look.

In tone with the art is the writing. Vincent O'Sullivan's "On the Kind of Fiction Called Morbid" is a calculatedly flippant and funny attack on readers content to select "three volumes and a brave binding" from Mudie's and consume their "morality packed in a box"—Victorian predecessors of the little old ladies from Dubuque (2.169–70). O'Sullivan defends quasi-romantic, mystical, and bizarre stories designed to delight the jaded, but particularly appreciates the "sombre," decay-and-death-filled narratives produced by those with "abnormal nerves," neither "understood or thought proper in the suburban villa" nor "tolerated by the Press, which is almost the same thing" (2.168). Here O'Sullivan perfectly describes Symons' favorite kind of writing—the sort with which he chose to stock the whole April issue. The nonfiction deals predominantly with psychological turmoil and Paul Verlaine, and the fiction likewise falls comfortably into the kind alien to suburban villas, whether lavishly decadent (the continuation of "Under the Hill," for example) or decadent in the nerve-wracked, psychologically realistic way ("A Mere Man" and Symons' own "Pages from the Life of Lucy Newcome").



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Symons selected three very similar long essays with a scientific overlay for the April *Savoy*: Cesare Lombroso's "A Mad Saint"; Ellis' "Friedrich Nietzsche"; and Yeats's "Rosa Alchemica." All deal with the workings of the mind, emphasizing the proximity of genius or enlightenment and madness or entrapment in the subconscious. "A Mad Saint" is the true history of Maria G., a woman who had wished to become a nun but was forced into marriage and motherhood instead. Hysterically convulsive, in the manner Symons knew well from his time in Paris with Ellis, and Ellis' stories of the Salpêtrière, Maria gives herself over to madness to escape her traditional fate. Lombroso is delighted that Maria's instincts, even when in the grip of madness, "appear to be chaste"—she rebuffs in order the sexual advances of a priest, a canon, a monk, and an abbot (2.14)—but points out that "the erotic element is . . . distinctly marked" in Maria's visions of God as a young gentleman (2.19). He finds "genius" in Maria's initial madness, but also indicates she has settled down into a comfortable normalcy by the end of the account; she has eschewed visions for plaiting straw chair-bottoms and resenting her mother-in-law, who interferes with Maria's writing (2.21; 14). Ellis—who translated Lombroso's piece—couches his own essay on Nietzsche in similar terms. Analyzing Nietzsche's writings psychologically, and as the product of noble Polish blood untainted by "thick, beery" German attributes, Ellis matter-of-factly describes them as the product of a genius gone insane (2.80; 83; 94). This would be the common critical opinion of Nietzsche for many years afterwards.²³

Yeats's "Rosa Alchemica" is a highly personal first-person account of the narrator's Rosicrucian-cum-occult experience in the company of Michael Robartes, that wild-eyed, bad-tempered guide into Yeats's visionary world. Lounging in his Dublin home, indulging in a dream brought on by too much Thomas Browne and an expensive collection of graven images (including those of Hera and the Madonna), the narrator (for simplicity, Yeats) is roused by Robartes' knock on the door. Cross that he must answer the door himself, since the "servants appea[r] to be out," Yeats is stunned to see "something between a debauchee, a saint, and a peasant" on the threshold (2.58–59). No person on

²³ Wrote the general editor of the first American edition of the one-volume collected works of Nietzsche, crossly, "The statement that [Nietzsche's] books were those of a madman is entirely without foundation . . . [I]t is puerile to point to his state of mind during the last years of his life as a criticism of his philosophy" (*The Philosophy of Friedrich Nietzsche*, ed. Willard H. Wright [New York, 1954], p. x).



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business from Porlock is Robartes; the visions only get worse, or, rather, better, after his knock on the door. Feeling himself dissolving into the powerful and exultant melancholy he fascinatingly calls “*hysteria passio*, or sheer madness, if you will,” Yeats goes out with Robartes and engages in a *séance* or ceremony that culminates in a series of visions of masks, mosaics, temples full of dancers, and a Piccadilly-esque Eros atop a fountain (2.62–63; 68). Yeats is drawn into the dance, partnered, to his delight, by “an immortal august woman, who had black lilies in her hair” (2.69). The woman dulls his senses first—“ages seemed to pass, and tempests to awake and perish in the folds of our robes and in her heavy hair”—but Yeats suddenly manages to ignore the hair and goes into a state of rigid horror as he deduces that she is a type of that decadent darling, the vampire. Not intent upon any of Yeats’s bodily fluids, but upon something at once less substantial and more devastating, she is—in a staggeringly coarse and effective simile—“drinking up [his] soul as an ox drinks up a wayside pool” (2.69). He wakes in an opium-den setting and flees over the prone bodies and along a Sandymount pier back to Dublin, where he immediately adopts (good Anglo-Irish boy that he was) a rosary as necklace and resolves—most ironically and unconvincingly—to fight against the powers of “the indefinite world” (2.70).²⁴

O’Sullivan’s caricatured Mudie’s members would doubtless have found the foregoing odd and disturbing; they would also have looked alarmed, or simply blank, at the mention of Paul Verlaine. Symons adored Verlaine. Later that year, he would advertise in *The Savoy* for a subscription for a monument to Verlaine; he was the English committee chair. He translated many of Verlaine’s poems, and, in the second number of *The Savoy*, three nonfiction selections, by Yeats, Edmund Gosse, and Verlaine himself, extol the virtues of Verlaine and his poetry. Gosse’s preachy little piece is the most readable of the three. First praising Symons in his introduction for bringing “the Symbolists and Decadents of Paris” to English attention, Gosse insists on Verlaine as a gigantic butterfly, a “vaster lepidopter,” a “giant hawk-moth” (an interesting variation on J. M. Whistler’s signature symbol?). Armed with his net, Gosse sets out along the Boul’ Mich to capture this tremendous “Symbolo-decadent” poet, yet he is not at all disappointed to find

²⁴ The use of rosary as symbol is, I believe, of very personal relevance at the end of this self-referential story. Yeats, of a Protestant family, was, in the 1890s, trying hard to overcome his Ascendancy stigma in an effort to identify himself as “truly” Irish. His adoption of such a Catholic item at the end of “*Rosa Alchemica*” is perhaps a manifestation of this tendency.



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Verlaine grown old and bald, “like an owl,—a timid, shambling figure in a soft black hat, with jerking hands” (2.113; 115). The delicacy in Verlaine’s delivery of his poetry and his self-effacement are, tellingly, more important to both Gosse and Yeats—and clearly to Symons, too—than are Verlaine’s youthful work and reputation. Where the father has faded so quietly, there is no need for *The Savoy*’s young critics to slay him noisily, and they pay him an almost jocular, yet deferential, tribute instead.²⁵

Realism—but always with a decadent heart—rears its head in several poor short stories, and one better one, but does not occupy much space in the April *Savoy*. Wedmore’s dreadful saga of Nancy Nanson concludes, under the title “The Deterioration of Nancy,” with the man completely abjuring a now grown-up young woman. Nancy’s “grand-fatherly friend” chastises her harshly for being so very much older and wiser now that she is no longer his little toy-girl but a “woman” of sixteen, and he alludes extensively to some sort of situation (predictably, sexual) into which he believes she has fallen. Nancy is granted only enough space to assuage his fears. After outlining her absolute horror at the very idea of entering into a sexual relationship, she confesses “I was on deep waters. But I did not go under” (2.108). Ashton is mightily comforted by this, but, still, he can no longer see her. His correspondence with the young woman—and Symons’ own need to publish it—mercifully ends here.

Dowson’s “Countess Marie” is little better, and is quite similar to both the Wedmore and his own earlier “The Eyes of Pride.” Rejecting the love of an upstanding Anglo-English officer, Mallory, Marie sells herself in marriage to the dissolute and inaptly named Comte Raoul des Anges. After this “paralytic imbecile” dies in an asylum, Marie rejects Mallory’s offer to be an English country squire’s wife and chooses to live alone in France, nursing her sickly daughter Ursule (2.180). It is a bit surprising to find in Dowson such a stolid Victorian literary concept as English imperialist good/French aristocrat bad, but Symons, who after all married a nice middle-class girl who paid the bills in the end, bore a touch of the paradox himself. And the self-sacrificed woman, the separated lovers, and the sickly (clearly syphilitic) progeny of a doomed match reassert the story’s decadence.

²⁵ Beardsley was, as ever, of a different mind; he referred to Verlaine at the time as a “dear old thing” (*Arthur Symons: A Life* 98).



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Symons included his own “Pages From the Life of Lucy Newcome” in this number. Lucy is rather a stock figure—the young mother who must use any means necessary (namely menial labor and older men) to support her sickly, illegitimate child—but the story is told well and with some feeling, if also with condescension. Lucy, who bears in Symons’ drafts the name of Muriel Broadbent, his mistress during 1895,²⁶ is often infantilized (“almost before she knew it, she was asleep, in her old baby-fashion, sucking her thumb;” 2.150) but also maternal, until the child conveniently dies. Having accepted the charity of a “kind” middle-aged “gentleman” named Barfoot, to help save her baby and, then, to bury it, Lucy feels herself bound to honor an unspoken and unspeakable bargain with Barfoot. At the end of Symons’ story she waits for him to arrive to claim the sexual conclusion to his “kindnesses,” alone in her rented room, engaged in a deliberative and sad facsimile of a woman readying herself before a mirror for a visit that is desired: “She stood there, lifting the hair back from her forehead with her two thin hands, and her eyes met their reflection in the glass, very seriously and meditatively” (2.160). Certainly T. S. Eliot owes a debt to Oliver Goldsmith for his last words on his typist home at teatime, but that image of her near the end of *The Waste Land*’s “The Fire Sermon” is straight from these powerful lines by a writer Eliot knew well, and much admired.

“Under the Hill” knocks out the somber notes struck by these brief pieces to reestablish, once again, a flamboyant and flagrantly decadent conclusion. The story’s continuation closes the April *Savoy*, and the singular humors of decadence, as Symons knew, were never lighter or brighter or more intensely memorable than in the hands of Beardsley. His first line is proof enough, and certainly jarred awake any readers bored by anything preceding in the magazine: “It is always delightful to wake up in a new bedroom” (2.187).

Symons’ editorial note to the July issue proudly announced *The Savoy*’s expansion into “a Monthly instead of a Quarterly” magazine (3.7). Symons was ambitious, but this expansion overly so. The main reason given for monthly publication was something that would never be fulfilled. Symons indicated in the note that “monthly publication will permit the issue of a serial, and arrangements are being made with Mr. George Moore for the serial publication

²⁶ Symons Collection, Box 14, *Pages from the Life of Muriel Broadbent* (ms). Symons indicates that he sought to make this story “quite a study of a courtesan as a very average human being” (Preface); he also acknowledges his debt to J.-K. Huysmans’ “crude” realism in *Marthe, histoire d’une fille* (1876).



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of his new novel, ‘Evelyn Innes’” (3.7). This sure-fire mid-Victorian mode of selling magazines was not to help *The Savoy*; neither Moore’s work, nor any other serialized novel, was forthcoming.

However, there is another reason for the move to monthly publication that has been overlooked and mattered more to Symons. Although Beardsley, overseas and ill, was of little editorial help, Symons had a great deal of encouragement and assistance, by summer 1896, from Yeats. Yeats, whose contributions to *The Savoy* had already been extensive, had begun revising Symons’ poetry, advising him on his prose writings, and had invited his former neighbor (Yeats had now moved to rooms where Olivia Shakespear could visit) to accompany him on his yearly summer vacation to Sligo and the homes of his mother’s relatives on Rosses Point. Many of Yeats’s surviving letters of the time are to *Savoy* contributors about their work, and full of references to Symons and the magazine.²⁷ The next few issues of the magazine would showcase not a lengthy serialization of a popular novelist’s latest work, but Yeats’s essays on William Blake and his art. Though Yeats was never listed as an editor, and was never apt to labor at anything if he did not expect to be paid for it one way or another, the availability of Yeats and his obvious interest in the magazine certainly presented him to Symons as someone who, as a contributor, adviser, and solicitor of contributions, would be key in a move to a monthly magazine. Unhappily, Symons was wrong about this. Immediately after their summer in Ireland, Yeats became ill, his affair with Shakespear fell to his obsession with Maud Gonne, and his relationship with Lady Gregory blossomed. Soon he would be spending more time at Coole Park and in Dublin than in London.²⁸

The July issue is mostly Yeats’s writing on Blake and magnificent reproductions of previously unpublished works by Blake. His “Vala,” or “The Four Zoas,” had been tracked down at the home of the Linnell family in 1889 by Yeats and E. J. Ellis, and the two had completed their edition of *The Works of William Blake* in 1893.²⁹ Yeats had continued to work with the illustrated manuscripts in the Linnells’ possession and obtained the family’s permission for publication of some drawings and watercolors in *The Savoy*.

²⁷ *Letters of W. B. Yeats*, pp. 255–66 (particularly WBY to Olivia Shakespear, W. T. Horton, Edmund Gosse, and William Sharp).

²⁸ Richard Ellmann, *Yeats: The Man and the Masks* (1948; rpt. New York, 1978), pp. 160–61.

²⁹ *Letters of W. B. Yeats*, p. 145 n.1 (WBY to Katharine Tynan, December 1889).



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Yeats never admitted it, but one of these Blake drawings, and nothing by Beardsley, ruined *The Savoy*. The illustration for “Antaeus Setting Virgil and Dante upon the Verge of Coctyus” shows a very muscular and well-proportioned Antaeus nude, and a manager for the booksellers W. H. Smith & Son, who controlled the railway magazine stalls, among other massive markets, refused to allow the magazine. Symons realized immediately what this would mean to *The Savoy* and begged Smith to relent. When Symons pleaded that “Blake was considered ‘a very spiritual artist,’” the Smith manager replied, as Yeats recalled, “O, Mr. Symons, you must remember that we have an audience of young ladies as well as an audience of agnostics.”³⁰ *The Savoy* audience, already a small one, could never increase under the Smith ban, whether as a monthly or as a quarterly—and the former was both more expensive and time-consuming to compile and publish. From the issuance of its third number, *The Savoy* was terminal—and Symons, knowing it, published even more of what he liked best, decadence in its variety of forms.

Hubert Crackanthorpe, a good young writer of realistic and naturalistic stories, contributed “Anthony Garstin’s Courtship” to the July *Savoy*. For all its style, though, the story is about Symons subject matter: sex. A solid, stolid, middle-aged Scots shepherd falls for the parish’s “bad” girl, and marries her to legitimize another man’s baby. Crackanthorpe’s work would not appear in *The Savoy* again, although Symons initially accepted at least one other piece for printing. In October 1896, Crackanthorpe actually proposed to Grant Richards that they take over the dying *Savoy* as editor and publisher, making it a completely new magazine separate from “the Beardsley tradition,” as if that could ever have been possible, but Crackanthorpe died, an apparent suicide, only weeks later.³¹

In his work on Blake, Yeats gets an indulgence from Symons in claiming the *symboliste* tradition to be properly English, rather than French. Symons certainly disagreed, but was willing to cut his putative co-editor some room for debate. Based upon Blake’s drawings for *The Divine Comedy*, Yeats dubs Blake grandfather of all mystical, symbolic art from the pre-Raphaelites to the *fin-de-siècle*. “[T]he movement the French call *symboliste*,” consonant “with a change in the times”

³⁰ *Autobiography of WBY*, p. 216. Though Yeats’s autobiographies may be more fiction than fact in large patches, this anecdote seems worth citing—as does the bookseller’s further comment to a departing and dejected Symons that “If contrary to our expectations the *Savoy* should have a large sale, we should be very glad to see you again.” See also *Arthur Symons: A Life*, p. 142; *The Savoy: Nineties Experiment*, ed. Stanley Weintraub (University Park, Penn., and London, 1966), p. xxxv.

³¹ *Arthur Symons: A Life*, p. 151; 141.



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and influenced by the “romance, at once ecstatic and picturesque, in the works of M. Maeterlinck,” springs *not* from France but from England, from Blake, “certainly the first great symboliste of modern times, and the first of any time to preach the indissoluble marriage of all great art and symbol” (3.41; whether Maeterlinck and other French *symbolistes* knew Blake well enough to be influenced by him is not remotely adequately addressed). Yeats is also interested in the newly resurrected “Vala,” noting a special decadence in the female characters similar to that he shows in his own “Rosa Alchemica.” He describes the women of “Vala” as a “sweet pestilence,” whose “children weave webs to take the souls of men” (3.49).

Symons chose, strangely and interestingly, to publish his long piece in this issue anonymously. “Bertha at the Fair, A Sketch” reveals an extreme interest in a violently maimed, and (therefore?) almost mesmerizingly attractive, female body. After an odd and weary beginning dealing with the dissipated and rather dully decadent adventures of a young poet and his friends, Symons arrives at a Brussels fair. Bertha, “tall and lissom” with “strange, perverse, shifting eyes, the colour of burnt topazes, and thin painful lips,” has “tak[en] the place of the fat lady usually on exhibition” (3.87). Not only the narrator, but a “mild Flemish painter,” a “cynical publisher,” and his “fantastical friend, the poet” are “fascinated” by Bertha—and her horrible revealed wounds:

She was scarred on the cheek: a wicked Baron, she told us, had done that, with vitriol; one of her breasts was singularly mutilated; she had been shot in the back by an Englishman, when she was keeping a shooting-gallery at Antwerp. And she had the air of a dangerous martyr, who might bewitch one, with some of those sorceries that had turned, somehow, to her own hurt. We stayed a long time in the booth. I forget most of our conversation.

The narrator is entirely obsessed with this defaced, “snake-like creature, with long cool hands” (3.88).³²

Though he ran his own violently bizarre story, Symons put Beardsley’s “The Ballad of a Barber” through many revisions before he would let it in the number. Beardsley was very frustrated that Symons had initially found it “poor,” and he

³² Symons was fascinated with snakes as well as gypsies. Generally, women are described as snaky in his papers, and vice versa, in a very *Lamia* fashion. “The Symphony of Snakes” is most chilling where it describes a massive boa constrictor in ladylike terms, with its “caressing cat-like way of resting its head on its coils—like a woman resting her cheek on her arm—a charming gesture that surprised” (Symons Collection, Box 20, “The Symphony of Snakes” [ms.]).



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complained to Smithers, in language showing what he thought of Symons' own contrived anonymity, "I had no idea it was 'poor'. For goodness' sake print the poem under a pseudonym and separately from *Under the Hill* . . . What do you think of 'Symons' as a *nom de plume*?"³³ When the poem was published, it appeared with Beardsley's illustrations and under his name. His Sweeney Todd, with the name of the great Parisian arch and plaza, "Carrousel," is a barber to the stars:

The King, and the Queen, and all the Court,
To no one else would trust their hair,
And reigning belles of every sort
Owed their successes to his care. (3.91)

The sly comment on the ambiguously mixed sex of his clientele in "reigning belles of *every sort*" is echoed in the barber's own character; in his fine shop on "Meridien" Street, Carrousel is middle-of-the-road and casual about those whom he serves: "nobody had seen him show/ A preference for either sex" (3.92). Beardsley gives in to Symons' particular preoccupation, though, by including a little girl to ruin the artist. The Princess is "a pretty child,/ Thirteen years old, or thereabout" and Carrousel cannot manage her hair or her presence. What remedy? The one adopted by Porphyria's lover—Browning may have been a romantic, and then a Victorian, but he was also one of the first decadents as much as Yeats's Blake was one of the first *symbolistes*. The barber shatters a cologne bottle and cuts the Princess's throat: "The Princess gave a little scream,/ Carrousel's cut was sharp and deep;/ He left her softly as a dream/ That leaves a sleeper to his sleep" (3.93). Beardsley's madman is not permitted to remain a dream, or nightmare, as is Browning's. Carrousel's smiling delight in the murder is swiftly followed by his hanging, and Beardsley ends the poem with the Eros-and-death silhouette of an earthbound, walking cherub, bearing a gallows and noose upon one plump, winged shoulder (3.93).

This dismal view of days to come is followed by Symons' "Literary Cause-rie," extolling—who else?—French writers including Mallarmé, Goncourt, Zola, and particularly Huysmans. Symons praises Huysmans' *En Route*, just translated into English, as "a new Pilgrim's Progress through all the devious and perilous pathways of the soul" (3.101). "Even in England, where ideas penetrate slowly," Symons insists that writers like Huysmans and Thomas Hardy, "vivid thinker[s]"

³³ *Arthur Symons: A Life*, p. 135.



on life,” must be appreciated as the authors of “great book[s]” (3.102). The linking of an English writer known for his fictional realism and naturalism to the king of literary decadence—the author of *Jude the Obscure* set beside that of *A Rebours*—would be odd from anyone other than Symons. That he found such likeness in Hardy and Huysmans is one of the more telling indications of his own preference for the decadent style, and his ability to find it, appreciate it, and publish what he found “decadent” in any variety of writings.

Symons was not in London to experience firsthand the lukewarm reaction to the late-summer issues of *The Savoy*. He had accepted Yeats’s invitation and gone to Ireland with him, where they enjoyed the hospitality of Yeats’s relatives, Lady Gregory (whom Symons disliked), and the owners of Tillyra Castle, County Galway.³⁴ Yeats concentrated upon getting a fresh infusion of Celticism and relaxing at Coole Park, and Symons diligently drafted accounts of their trip for the magazine. The August *Savoy*, left rather untended, feels like a sort of dustbin of what was lying around for inclusion at the time—though all are clearly Symons’ selections. More formerly unpublished Blake watercolors accompany Yeats’s continuing Blake series; there are also drawings by Horton, Ellis’ concluding article on Nietzsche (which merely reiterates his initial point that Nietzsche was a man of genius, but insane), and poems and prose by Dowson and Symons. Most of the stories, from George Morley’s “Two Foolish Hearts” to Dowson’s “The Dying of Francis Donne,” deal with disappointment in love and/or death. Symons’ poem “Stella Maligna” is a tastily morbid mix of decadent sentiment and symbol. A woman’s song to the “little slave” who is her poisoned, drunken lover (“Yet shalt thou live by that delicious death/ Thou hast drunken from my breath,/ Thou didst with my kisses eat”), it ends with the passionate and rather unexpected, but entirely Yeatsian, release of “The secret light that in the lily glows,/ The miracle of the secret rose” (4.64–65).

Symons’ “Causerie” is on Dowson, the (unnamed) young poet with “the face of a demoralized Keats,” whose “delicate, mournful, almost colourless, but very fragrant verses” are steeped in the strong essence of decadence (4.91–92).

³⁴The most notable incident on their trip came at Tillyra, where, according to Yeats, both he and Symons had visions on the same night. Yeats’s was of “a naked woman of incredible beauty, standing upon a pedestal and shooting an arrow at a star.” Symons’ woman “was clothed and had not a bow and arrow.” The volumes that this speaks about both dreamers is completely lost on Yeats, who wondered abstractly, “Had some great event taken place in some world where myth is reality and had we seen some portion of it?” (*Autobiography of WBY* 248).



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The poet's initial grace and delicacy, in his work and life, has sunk to depths that he purportedly dislikes but cannot escape, and from which he makes no real effort to do so: "That curious love of the sordid, so common an affectation of the modern decadent, and with him so expressively genuine, grew upon him, and dragged him into yet more sorry corners of a life which was never exactly 'gay' to him. And now, indifferent to most things, in the shipwrecked quietude of a sort of self-exile, he is living, I believe, somewhere on a remote foreign sea-coast" (4.93). By summer 1896, Dowson was living in French and Belgian seaside towns and drinking heavily; he would, sadly appropriately, be dead by the actual *fin-de-siècle*. Symons would mourn, but still always admire, the "suicidal energy of genius"—"morbid and neurotic," yet "lacking in vitality"—that had caused Dowson's "inevitable ruin" (*The Savoy* [August 1896]: 93).³⁵

A piece solicited and edited by Yeats, Olivia Shakespear's "Beauty's Hour," fills much of the August and September issues of *The Savoy*. Shakespear had published the novels *Love on a Mortal Lease* in 1894 and *The Journey of High Honour* in 1895 and had been working on "Beauty's Hour" during those same years. Yeats read it in summer 1894 and offered suggestions about it; Shakespear took some of them, including his changes to her hero.³⁶ Shakespear's story, never reprinted in book form, translates the evil duality in human nature explored by Robert Louis Stevenson in his popular story of 1886, *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr.*

³⁵ See also, Symons Collection, Box 1, "Untitled MS (2)," p. 9. This typewritten draft of Symons' "appreciation" of Dowson also relates the famous anecdote about Dowson that Yeats, according to Symons, got wrong in *The Autobiography of William Butler Yeats*: "Yeats made a mistake in forgetting something I told him, 'A rhymist had seen Dowson in some café in Dieppe with a particularly common harlot, and as he passed, Dowson, half-drunk, caught him by the sleeve and whispered: 'She writes poetry, It is like Browning and Mrs Browning.'" The scene took place in an awful café in Antwerp, in a disreputable street near the harbour. The harlot was just as drunk as Dowson; and, for the life of me, one could conceive of her relinquishing her profession rather than writing one line of verse" (9). For Yeats's account of Dowson in full, see Yeats, *Autobiography*, p. 219.

³⁶ Yeats suggested that a character virtually his own antithesis, the hero Gerald, was ill-defined, and wondered, "Might he not be one of those vigorous fair-haired, boating or cricket playing young men, who are very positive, and what is called manly, in external activities and energies and wholly passive and plastic in emotions and intellectual things?" (*Letters of W. B. Yeats* 233–34). Shakespear agreed; here is Gerald in her story: "With him, as with many finely bred, finely tempered Englishmen, sport was a passion; more, a religion. He put into his hunting, his shooting, his cricket, all the ardour, all the sincerity that are necessary to achievement: I respected this in him, even while it moved me to a kind of pity; for I felt instinctively that though he might have skill and courage to overcome physical difficulties or danger, he was totally unfitted to cope with the more subtle side of life; and would be helpless in the face of an emotional difficulty" (*Savoy* 4.16).



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Hyde, into the dilemma of an unattractive woman who wishes for beauty, and her definitions of beauty are at once couched in stock Paterian artistic terms that trail away into a sort of *Middlemarch* ending, when the ugly Mary Gower looks into her mirror to kiss “the wonderful reflected face of Mary Hatherley, and wis[h] her a long good-bye.” With the face of her dreams gone, her hour of beauty is over, and Mary Gower wishes only to “decline into the lesser ways of life,” where not beauty, but peace, may be found (5.27). This extraordinary story of self-willed female transformation, triumph, and denial is like nothing else that appeared in *The Savoy*, and Symons includes a conscious tailpiece to it that redeems some of its Stevensonian, decadent notes for himself. His poem “The Old Women” is the sad saga of women once beautiful who are no more—women who once spun before male audiences in the scent of patchouli and musk, dancers whose “ruinous bod[ies]” once “moved/ The heart of man’s desire” but never will again (5.55–56).

Symons’ concluding “Causerie” turns again to French decadence, in the prose and also in the form of Edmond de Goncourt, with his “fine sweep of white hair” and house full of “rose-coloured rooms, with their embroidered ceilings” (5.85). De Goncourt and his brother exhibit for Symons his favorite sort of literary “reality,” an “exaggerated sense of the truth of things; such a sense as diseased nerves inflict upon one” (5.86). As is customary in his “Causeries,” Symons yokes French decadent authors to English ones. He compares the Goncourts to Pater, and concludes that, like himself, “they [all] prefer indeed a certain perversity in their relations with language, which they would have not merely a passionate and sensuous thing, but complex with all the curiosities of a delicately depraved instinct” (5.87).

Even as *The Savoy* dwindled into its last numbers, Symons had a surprise or two left for its readers. Joseph Conrad, a young writer whom Symons would not meet until 1911, submitted a dark and violent story called “The Idiots” to *The Savoy* after it had been rejected by *Cornhill Magazine*. Symons recognized his talent and paid him the very good sum of forty guineas for it, which *The Savoy* could ill afford at the time. He then used Conrad’s story to lead off the October issue.³⁷ “The idiots” are children of a Breton farmer, being raised by their grandmother since both parents are dead. They haunt the narrator as he explores the county; like some of the damaged souls defacing Hardy’s wild weald, the idiots

³⁷ *Nineties Experiment*, p. xxxix.



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are “an offence to the sunshine, a reproach to empty heaven, a blight on the concentrated and purposeful vigour of the wild landscape” (6.12). Slowly, through his narrator, Conrad pieces together from local farmers “a tale formidable and simple” about their births and history (6.15). The tale, indeed formidable and simple, is that of a farmer and his wife on a rich Breton farm. All four of their children seem lovely and normal, at first, but as they age their condition becomes apparent to the horrified parents: “Simple! . . . Never any use!” (6.15). The farmer, Jean-Pierre, takes to drink and beats his wife Susan cruelly, until she stabs him with her scissors and runs to her mother’s house to confess. “You miserable madwoman . . . they will cut your neck,” shouts her mother as comfort, and she promptly flees to the sea-cliffs and jumps, despite her intense and eloquently written fear of drowning (“This place was too big and too empty to die in” 6.27–30).

Poems by Symons and Dowson, and a drawing by Beardsley, round out the October issue. His “The Three Witches” is Dowson at his very worst: “We the children of Astarte,/ Dear abortions of the Moon,/ In a gay and silent party/ We are riding to you soon” (6.75). Symons’ “Causerie,” written at Tillyra, is not surprisingly captivated by the rugged Galway landscape, which he not surprisingly aestheticizes into something decadent. With a lovely eye for detail, he finds in the grays and greens of the “endless tracts of harsh meadow-land, marked into squares by the stone hedges” a “fantastical” quality, “so ancient a reality and so essential a dream, I feel myself to be in some danger of loosening the tightness of my hold upon external things” (6.93–95). Yet the enduring moment in the October issue Symons left to Beardsley. As the young artist’s health had declined sharply, first his prose contributions had ceased, and now his art contributions had become nearly limited to the covers. Symons knew that his friend was dying, and that *The Savoy’s* days were also nearly done. “The Death of Pierrot” is the first of Beardsley’s sad and beautiful farewells for the magazine, showing already the coming end for the smiling clown who had ridden so proudly on Pegasus across *The Savoy’s* initial prospectus and inner title pages. Symons saw the connection and would later, quoting Verlaine, insist that Beardsley, with his sad pale face, his laughing mockery, and his ability to show “masquerading humanity,” was, “more than any Parisian . . . ‘Pierrot gamin.’”³⁸ The drawing of a small and

³⁸ *The Memoirs of Arthur Symons: Life and Art in the 1890s*, ed. Karl Beckson (University Park, Penn., 1977), p. 175 et seq. (“Aubrey Beardsley”).



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wasted Pierrot huddled in his bed, with his comedian friends tiptoeing in to carry his body away, speaks more to the disappointment of the coming end of *The Savoy* than does Symons' official announcement of its demise in the next issue.

The editorial note for the November number begins: "I have to announce that with the next number, completing a year's existence, the present issue of 'THE SAVOY' will come to an end." Symons thanks "those newspaper critics who have had the honesty and the courtesy to allow their prejudices to be conquered," but admits freely that *The Savoy* "has not conquered the general public, and, without the florins of a general public," no magazine without advertisements "can expect to pay its way" (7.7). Symons had gone without pay for most of his pieces and much of his work, and Smithers had raised money to keep publishing *The Savoy* with his furniture as security, but expenses could no longer be met.³⁹

There was no money to afford writers, except for friends and the young who needed Symons' help. Symons and Yeats wrote most of the next-to-last issue themselves, save a windswept Highland tale of love and death, "Morag of the Glen," by Fiona Macleod. Symons' poem "The Unloved" (about nuns who have been passed over by "[t]he blown and painted leaves of Beauty"), his essay on Rosses Point and Glencar Lake, his "Causerie" on Verlaine, and a lovely, if self-serving, reproduction of Jacques-Emile Blanche's portrait of Symons occupy most of the issue. Two short Yeats poems and a story to which he would return for images (the mask, the bird) in so many later works, "The Tables of the Law," essentially complete the number. Other contributions are by friends. Ellis' essay on Casanova is classic Ellis: he attributes Casanova's "perverse" behavior to a mix of Spanish and Venetian blood (7.43–45). Dowson's "Epilogue" is his own sad goodbye to *The Savoy*, and Beardsley continues his farewells, translated from the famous passage by Catullus. Coupled with the verse of a young man bidding his dying brother "hail and farewell" is a drawing that remains one of Beardsley's better-known: a handsome youth, his laurelled head bowed, frowns as he salutes.

Symons took his own forum entirely as *The Savoy* ended. The literary contents of the last issue are entirely his, and the art is all Beardsley's, including one final goodbye. "Et in Arcadia Ego" shows a figure Beardsley would never live to be—the aged dandy, still in spats and a flowing coat, kid gloves and thin cane clutched in one hand, but balding and wrinkled now. He steps delicately towards

³⁹ *Nineties Experiment*, p. xliii.



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a funeral urn, which bears on its pedestal Vergil's lines, rehabilitated from their sentimentalized Victorian translation to the original chilling meaning—I, *Death*, am in Arcadia too.⁴⁰

Symons' idea of goodbye was to demonstrate his own virtuosity in prose. "The Childhood of Lucy Newcome" shows, in prequel fashion, his precocious and lovely blonde with a sickly mother (who dies when Lucy is at the pivotal age of thirteen) and an impractical father (who dies shortly thereafter, his face smashed by a horse's hoofs). Lucy dreams over the poetry of "Mrs. Hemans" and rejects her rich relatives who offer to care for her (8.55; 61). That Lucy ended up with an illegitimate child because she read lady poets speaks volumes to the misogyny underlying much of male decadence.⁴¹ A brief piece on the Aran Islands, presaging Synge and beautifully done, concludes Symons' obligation to any vicissitudes of realism. The rest of his writing in the issue is purely what Gosse called "symbolo-decadent," that *metier* in which Symons was most comfortable and found most interesting.

"Mundi Victima" is an extremely long poem that tracks Symons' breakup with "Lydia," his most recent mistress.⁴² Symons' obsession with the unidentified dancer would continue all his life; *Amoris Victima*, the last of his many chronicles of their affair, was published privately just before his death fifty years later. In "Mundi Victima," the narrator complains, Miltonically, of having been "hurled/ From the fixed paradise of . . . content/ Into an outer world of banishment" (8.13). His "passionate and perverse horoscope" marks him for love in "strange affinities"—none stranger, he insists, than the now lost love they experienced (8.14). With her love gone, he begs to be taken up by the "powers/ Of evil,

⁴⁰In a famous essay of the middle 1930s, Erwin Panofsky chronicles the sentimental "togetherness" encompassed in the phrase in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries (loosely, "I [your beloved] am here in Arcadia with you"), and insists flatly, "The original [place] . . . of this celebrated phrase . . . is a tomb." Panofsky, "Et in Arcadia ego: On the Conception of Transience in Poussin and Watteau," in *Philosophy and History: Essays Presented to Ernst Cassirer*, ed. Raymond Klibansky and H. J. Paton (New York and London, 1963), p. 223. Book I of *Brideshead Revisited* bears this title; Waugh, after Beardsley, emphasizes the aspect of Death above that of Arcadia. Charles Ryder recalls his aesthetically lavish Oxford rooms of the Edwardian twilight, boasting a "human skull lately purchased from the School of Medicine, which, resting in a bowl of roses, formed, at the moment, the chief decoration of my table. It bore the motto *Et in Arcadia ego* inscribed on its forehead." Evelyn Waugh, *Brideshead Revisited: The Sacred and Profane Memories of Captain Charles Ryder* (1945; rpt. Boston, 1973).

⁴¹ See, e.g., Elaine Showalter, *Sexual Anarchy: Gender and Culture at the Fin de Siècle* (New York, 1990), pp. 169-77.

⁴² *Arthur Symons: A Life*, p. 154-55.



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powers of the world's abysmal hours," that can drive his soul into a shipwrecked state of "self-oblivion" (8.26–27). This poem begins the number and is followed by Symons' essay on Pater; Symons finds in Pater's prose the same decaying and decadent "exotic odour . . . a savour . . . of French soil" that clings to D. G. Rossetti's art (8.34). Drawing links between his London world and Paris, between art and writing, were constants for Symons.

In his last words, "By Way of Epilogue," Symons recounts once more with feeling the history of the magazine's inception—how Smithers came to him and how he in turn went to Beardsley, "the most individual and expressive draughtsman of our time," for assistance (8.91). Symons admits, tellingly, something already evident in the regularity of contributions by particular writers. He did not just select, but carefully *solicited*, the literary contents: "I then got together some of the writers, especially the younger writers, whose work seemed to me most personal and accomplished Out of the immense quantity of unsolicited material which came to me, very little was of any value" (8.91). He refers coolly to the "horrified outcry—the outcry for no reason in the world but the human necessity of making a noise—with which we were first greeted" and lightly commends those papers now encouraging *The Savoy* to continue themselves (8.91). The reasons he gives for the magazine's failure are largely, but not entirely, financial; he refers to the low price, the mistake of publishing monthly, and the W. H. Smith & Son ban. Yet Symons counts as the most serious reason of all an aesthetic one: "worst of all, we assumed that there were very many people in the world who really cared for art, and really for art's sake Comparatively very few people care for art at all, and most of these care for it because they mistake it for something else" (8.92). Pater was right, Symons sighs, and all the Philistines are wrong, but there are more of Them than there are of Us, and They would not buy *The Savoy*. Ah well, we will show Them next time:

[I]n our next venture we are going to make no attempt to be popular. We shall make our appearance twice only in the year; our volumes will be larger in size, better produced, and they will cost more. In this way we shall be able to appeal to that limited public which cares for the things we care for; which cares for art, really for art's sake. (8.92)

It was a brave ending for such a financial failure—not a whimper but a bang—but the noise had no substance, for that promised magazine for the truly artistically inclined never appeared. As the decade closed, the older and more established *Yellow Book* struggled on, but only into 1897. Aubrey Beardsley died at



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twenty-five, right after the demise of the two magazines best remembered today for his work. Leonard Smithers, continuing his career of publishing the un-touchable, brought out Wilde's *The Ballad of Reading Gaol* in 1898 and died in poverty in London nine years later. And Arthur Symons turned his energies to prose and criticism—the areas in which he had shown the most talent and increasing interest, once he had realized that, despite his beloved Verlaine and Baudelaire, poetry was not the only nor even the best medium for decadence. He finished the book for which he is now best remembered, advertised in the last *Savoy* as *The Decadent Movement in Literature*, just as the century ended (*The Savoy* 8, inside advertisement).



What exquisite indecency,
 Select, supreme, severe, an art!
 The art of knowing how to be
 Part lewd, aesthetical in part,
 And *fin-de-siècle* essentially.

—*The Maenad of the Decadence* (Paris, May 1897)

Arthur Symons

“The latest movement in European literature,” wrote Symons in 1893, “has been called by many names, none of them quite exact or comprehensive—Decadence, Symbolism, Impressionism, for instance.” One term, though, ultimately encompasses for him all the others: “Taken frankly as epithets which express their own meaning, both Impressionism and Symbolism convey some notion of that new kind of literature, which is perhaps more broadly characterized by the word Decadence.”⁴³

The epithet “impressionism” would come to be applied generally to art, and “symbolism” to literature, by critics looking back at the *fin-de-siècle* from a comfortable distance in the next century—even Symons himself would substitute, by 1899, “symbolist” for “decadent” in the title of his book. Yet the most exact and comprehensive term to describe the little magazine he edited in 1896 is “decadent.” The literary and stylistic course of *The Savoy*, never smooth and often varied, may be most broadly, and yet most aptly, characterized by that word. In *The Savoy* there is a generous openness, due to Symons alone, to other

⁴³ *A Critical Biography*, p. 99 (quoting *Harper's Monthly Magazine*, European ed. [November 1893]: 858 et seq.).



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contemporary literary styles of the 1890s, but there is, finally and conclusively, an inability to give up the symbol, the impression or sensation, and indeed a continued and increasing reaffirmation of that very decadence that the magazine sought, initially, to deny. The critical image that remains, after an overview of all the issues is complete, is one of a rich and varied publication in which the contents, in art and literature, are overwhelmingly decadent. The black and white Beardsley drawings, the criticism insisting upon and reveling in authors' tormented mental states, the poems and stories of dancers, gypsy girls, dissipated painters or writers, and artifice as perfect art—images of unnatural beauty more beautiful than that of nature—are *The Savoy's* character.

