



INTERDISCIPLINARY JOURNAL OF DECADENCE STUDIES

Issue 1

Spring 2018

---

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

**Bénédicte Coste**

---

**ISSN:** 2515-0073

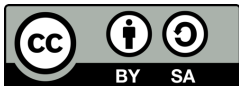
**Date of Acceptance:** 1 June 2018

**Date of Publication:** 21 June 2018

**Citation:** Bénédicte Coste, “‘A capital fellow, full of vivacity & good talk’”: Arthur Symons and Gabriel Sarrazin’, *Volupté: Interdisciplinary Journal of Decadence Studies*, 1 (2018), 19-34.

**volupte.gold.ac.uk**

---



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

**Goldsmiths**  
UNIVERSITY OF LONDON

‘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 Régnier 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 *Athenæum*) 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 Rossettis' 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.