**The Musical Aesthetics (‘such as it is’)[[1]](#endnote-1) of Arthur Symons (1865-1945)**

I do not understand the limitation by which so many writers on aesthetics choose to confine themselves to the study of artistic principles as they are seen in this or that separate form of art. Each art has its own law, its own capacities, its own limits; these it is the business of the critic jealously to distinguish. Yet, in the study of art as art, it should be his endeavour to master the universal science of beauty.[[2]](#endnote-2)

In his obituary notice for Aubrey Beardsley in the *Fortnightly Review* in May 1898 Arthur Symons commented on the innate musicality of the young artist’s decorative designs. ‘Using the puff-box, the toilet-table, the ostrich-feather hat, with a full consciousness of their suggestive quality […],’ Symons writes, [Beardsley]

put these things to beautiful uses, because he liked their forms, and because his space of white or black seemed to require some such arrangement of lines. They were the minims and crotchets by which he wrote down his music; they made the music but they were not the music.[[3]](#endnote-3)

Symons’s slightly cryptic assessment of Beardsley was high praise indeed for a controversial illustrator whose working life had begun only five years earlier and whose creative output in the previous year and a half had been restricted to limited-circulation publications.

For many artists and writers in the late nineteenth century, music was the aesthetic ideal, revered for what Hegel termed its ‘abstract subjectivity’,[[4]](#endnote-4) its detachment from the ‘objective’ world, its consummate expressiveness. Symons regarded music as the ideal art. In his critical writing from the late 1890s to 1908, he pondered the abstract and somewhat mysterious power of music, and claimed it as the ‘one absolutely disembodied art when it is heard, and no more than a proposition of Euclid, when it is written’.[[5]](#endnote-5)

The principal reference-points for aesthetes of the fin de siècle were, of course, ~~Walter~~ Pater and ~~James Abbott McNeill~~ Whistler. While Pater’s dictum that ‘all art constantly aspires towards the condition of music’[[6]](#endnote-6) was taken by many as an endorsement of the fusion of the arts and a signal to express the content of art *through* the ‘imaginative perception’ of form,[[7]](#endnote-7) Whistler (following Gautier’s lead)[[8]](#endnote-8) synthesised the practices of painting and music. His titles (arrangements, nocturnes, harmonies, etc.) effectively recalibrated the way in which the Victorian public looked at art, drawing attention away from representation and signification to the art of picture making itself.

Music might be ‘disembodied’ and abstract, a ‘language’, Symons maintained, ‘in which birds and other angels may talk’,[[9]](#endnote-9) but music was also for him a highly sensual (syn)aesthetic experience. Symons *saw* sounds. In his critical prose writings, he frequently invokes music in visual and tactile terms and *vice versa* describes the supremely affective quality of visual art in musical terms. In its sensuous[[10]](#endnote-10) appeal, autonomy and abstraction, Symons conceived music to have the potential—much like ‘an articulate perfume’[[11]](#endnote-11)— to stimulate the faculties of memory and ‘imaginative reason’[[12]](#endnote-12)—sometimes, as in his own case, to the point of madness~~—and to offer access to realms of suggestion and evocation.~~

In this paper, I consider Symons’s conceptualisation of music as both a sensuous and spiritual experience, and look at the fusion of music, perfume and memory in his early poetry— briefly. Moving on to his critical prose writing and with close reference to Symons’s appreciation of Beardsley’s ‘musicality’, I discuss Symons’s influence on the artist’s critical reception after 1898, and argue that while Symons’s music criticism was, as Nick Freeman has commented, ‘largely poetic appreciation’,[[13]](#endnote-13) his application of a musical metaphor to Beardsley’s art had far-reaching influence and prefigured some of the radical formulations of formalist critics like Roger Fry at the turn of the twentieth century.

**Symons’s conceptualisation of music**

To understand Symons’s use of the musical metaphor in Paterian and Whistlerian terms alone is to underplay Symons’s complex conceptualisation of music and his significant contribution to modern aesthetic criticism. By 1898, Symons had abandoned his earlier preoccupation with Decadence and embarked upon a series of essays on Symbolist writers. In March 1900 he brought out—with Leonard Smithers—*The Symbolist Movement in Literature*.

Over the next few years Symons worked at an exhausting pace, writing drama and music reviews for various papers. In 1902 he wrote ‘Christian Trevalga’, a short story about a concert pianist (collected in *Spiritual Adventures*, 1905) followed by his first attempt to write for the stage, a verse tragedy in four acts, *Tristan and Iseult* (1902-3), inspired by a recent visit to Bayreuth.

In 1903 and 1906 two books dedicated to non-literary arts appeared: *Plays, Acting, and Music: A Book of Theory* and *Studies in Seven Arts*, alongside music reviews in various journals that intensify in 1907 and 1908 in regular contributions to the *Saturday Review ~~of Politics, Literature, Science and Art~~*. Symons’s ambition was to establish himself as a playwright, but he was repeatedly frustrated in that and beset by financial worries that grew with the demands of his marriage in 1901 to Rhoda Bowser, a music student and daughter of a wealthy ship-owner.

Symons was a passionate amateur of music, sensitive to the challenges of musical craftsmanship and performance and alert to the contemporary debates about ‘absolute’ and ‘programme’ music. According to the musicologist Sarah Collins in her fascinating essay on Symons’s ‘Theory of Musical Aesthetics’ (2014), ‘he was the only aesthetic critic to engage directly with the musical repertory, as opposed to an abstracted concept of music’,[[14]](#endnote-14) positioning himself against the tendencies of ‘modern music’.[[15]](#endnote-15)

Symons’s outlook was distinctly cosmopolitan. He looked abroad—as he did for most things—for musical and artistic greatness. His favourite composers were Wagner, Beethoven and Richard Strauss, and Chopin was his favourite composer for the piano. About contemporary English music he was fairly silent and he was positively disparaging about the English concert-goer. In a Letter to the Editor of the *Pall Mall Gazette* in 1890 entitled ‘Are the English People Musical?’ his exasperation is evident: ‘It proves, and proves finally,’ he barked, ‘that the nation which took naturally to Mendelssohn […] has, after all, no intelligent interest in music as music, […] It stamps us, in the face of musical Europe, a definitely non-musical nation.’[[16]](#endnote-16)

By all accounts, including those ventriloquized through Trevalga in *Spiritual Adventures* (1905), Symons himself was a decent pianist, able to sight-read and improvise. One of the first things he did when he moved into Fountain Court ~~in the Middle Temple~~ in 1891 was to have an upright piano hauled up several flights of stairs to his rooms. He was modest, however (and quasi-erotic) about his own musical ability: ‘I never acquired the technique to play a single piece correctly,’ he averred, ‘but I learned to touch the piano as if one were caressing a living being […] it answered me in an intimate and affectionate voice’.[[17]](#endnote-17)

The listening experience for Symons was visual, tactile and olfactory ~~(unsurprising when we consider that for most people at that time music was a loud, close-up live experience, despite musical recordings from the 1860s/phonograph cylinder 1877/gramophone disc 1881).~~ In *Plays, Acting, and Music*, he corresponds the senses with Baudelairean panache. He referred to himself as a ‘passionate spectator’ of music, listening to ‘Mozart in the Mirabell-Garden’, ‘with the full consent of my eyes’.[[18]](#endnote-18) ~~Of Eugène Ysaÿe’s performance of Beethoven’s Kreutzer Sonata on the violin, he writes ‘an invisible touch seemed to pass over it; […] the eyelids and the eyebrows began to move, as if the eyes saw the sound, and were drawing it in luxuriously, with a kind of sleepy ecstasy, as one draws in perfume out of a flower’.[[19]](#endnote-19)~~ In his essay on ‘Pachmann and the Piano’ (Vladimir de Pachmann was regarded by Symons as the ‘greatest living pianist’)[[20]](#endnote-20) he appends a sonnet, ‘The Chopin Player’, evoking the performance of the Russian-German pianist:

The sounds torture me: I see them in my brain;

They spin a flickering web of living threads,

Like butterflies upon the garden beds,

Nets of bright sound. I follow them: in vain.

I must not brush the least dust from their wings:

They die of a touch; but I must capture them,

Or they will turn to a caressing flame,

And lick my soul up with their flutterings.

The sounds torture me: I count them with my eyes,

I feel them like a thirst between my lips;

Is it my body or my soul that cries

With little coloured mouths of sound, and drips

In these bright drops that turn to butterflies

Dying delicately at my fingertips?[[21]](#endnote-21)

Here Pachmann’s performance affects all the senses, particularly touch,[[22]](#endnote-22) but in its intensity and transience this musical experience hints tantalizingly at capturing a fugitive spiritual realm, like chasing butterflies with a net (‘Nets of bright sound’). The physical effects of the music dematerialize and leave the listener tortured by desire and loss (the ‘bright drops that turn to butterflies’)—familiar themes in Symons’s early poetry.

**Music, memory and perfume in Symons’s early poems**

Symons’s early verse (D&N, Silh, LN, AV, IGE) contains few unmediated references to musical works, but in the clusters of poems about dancers and dancing (the visual expression of music after all), ~~the London music-halls and the Parisian~~ *~~cafés-chantants~~* ~~(Silh and LN),~~ the swirling and hypnotic dance rhythms are evoked in the form of the poems. In ‘La Mélinite: Moulin Rouge’, for example, a poem singled out by Yeats as ‘one of the most perfect lyrics of our time’[[23]](#endnote-23) the restless movement of the poem suggests a ‘dance of shadows’.[[24]](#endnote-24) A single, twirling dancer narcissistically ‘dances for her own delight’[[25]](#endnote-25) in a dream-like succession of circles, roses, mirrors and shadows. >KH

Caught up in the word patterns and circuitous phrasings, repetitions and refrains, we are engaged in a multi-sensory spectacle. We watch from the stalls and loiter outside stage-doors where ‘Faces flicker and veer’ in expectant desire.[[26]](#endnote-26) However, in spite of the musicality of Symons’s poetic form, inspired by the poetry of Verlaine and to a lesser extent Mallarmé, the emphasis is on looking and seeing. Symons’s erotic lyrics are evocations of the metropolitan theatre-land as a sphere of longing, a space of countless looks and glances, both desirous and arousing desire.

Music, along with other vaporising phenomena like perfume and memory, is a recurrent trope embedded in the verse structures of Symons’s early poetry. Impossible to contain or fix, music represents the sensation of the fleeting moment and thereby intensifies the poet’s emotions.[[27]](#endnote-27) Like a remembered moment or the whiff of a particular perfume, the sensation of listening to music is a reminder of the impossibility of being able to possess that memory or that fragrance for longer than it lasts. Above all, in its all-encompassing affective power, music suggests the overwhelming insatiability of libidinal desire.

In an early Impressionist poem about music entitled ‘Music and Memory’ (Silh2), composed on 20 February 1891 and dedicated to ‘K. W.’, Katherine Willard, a young American woman studying singing in Berlin whom Symons befriended in 1890, Symons situates the remembrance of ‘K. W.’ in an intoxicatingly liquid realm of memory that, like the tide and the refrain of the poem itself (‘in the night’), comes and goes rhythmically and suggestively:

Across the tides of music, in the night,

Her magical face,

A light upon it as the happy light

Of dreams in some delicious place

Under the moonlight in the night.

Music, soft throbbing music in the night,

Her memory swims

Into the brain, a carol of delight;

The cup of music overbrims

With wine of memory, in the night.

Her face across the music, in the night,

Her face a refrain,

A light that sings along the waves of light,

A memory that returns again,

Music in music, in the night.

Symons derived his literary Impressionism from Paul Verlaine who he had met in Paris in 1890 on one of his trips across the Channel with his friend Havelock Ellis. Symons was immediately impressed. He admired Verlaine’s evocative verse, the ‘perfumed shadows’, the ‘hushed melodies’,[[28]](#endnote-28) and he applauded his unshackling of French versification from the [twelve-syllable] Alexandrine form and his sensitivity to the musical cadences of popular language. Not everyone shared his view. In England where the Continent was viewed by many as a hotbed of revolutionary idealism, such innovation was regarded as bordering on the dangerous. Verlaine’s musicality was regarded with great scepticism by conservative critics.

**Beardsley’s ‘minims and crotchets’**

In the 1890s, there was much confusion among English art critics about the terms of engagement for evaluating modern art. There was a sharp divide between the ‘Old Guard’ who championed verisimilitude and narrative and New Art critics who realised the insufficiency of describing art in representational terms alone. With Beardsley in the mix, debates about modern art became quite heated, because on the one hand his drawings had a recognizable and often grotesque subject matter and on the other they seemed to privilege the art of decoration for its own sake. The autonomy of his illustrations, in particular, created a storm in the art press, and it wasn’t until after his death in March 1898 that critics found an approximate language to describe his designs.

This shift in aesthetic thinking was inspired by Symons’s obituary tribute to Beardsley in the *Fortnightly Review*, which was published in book form in 1898 and followed by an expanded version in 1905 (published by J. M. Dent). He was the first critic to seriously assess Beardsley’s contribution to late-nineteenth century visual culture and the first to deploy the metaphor of music (the musical metaphor was not used about Beardsley during his lifetime).[[29]](#endnote-29) Robert Ross called the essay ‘the most sympathetic and introspective account of this strange artist’s work’,[[30]](#endnote-30) and believed that ‘it will always remain the terminal essay’. Symons ‘approaches Beardsley’, Ross went on, ‘ as he would John Bunyan or Aquinas. Art, literature and life are all to this engaging writer a scholiast’s pilgrim’s progress. Beside him Walter Pater, from whom he derives, seems almost flippant—and to have dallied too long in the streets of Vanity Fair.’[[31]](#endnote-31)

It is not surprising that Symons was drawn to the genius of Beardsley. They were both tuned in to a cosmopolitan bohemianism and shared many passions, including for contemporary French art and music. Beardsley was a musical prodigy, who, ‘before he was twelve months old […] used to beat with a brick to his mother’s playing of a Beethoven sonata’,[[32]](#endnote-32) ~~and in his draft for~~ *~~Who’s Who~~* ~~he described himself as having taken up music first as a profession~~. In his obituary, Symons describes Beardsley in terms that might be applied to himself. He writes ‘he seemed to know more, and was a sounder critic, of books than of pictures; with perhaps a deeper feeling for music than for either’.[[33]](#endnote-33)

Symons’s obituary is more than an account of the artist’s life and work. It is a singularly poetic piece of writing in which Symons meditates on Beardsley’s ‘intensely spiritual art’ (‘sin transfigured by beauty’),[[34]](#endnote-34) particularly the primacy of form in his drawings and his line. ‘[A]fter all,’ he writes, ‘the secret of Beardsley is there; in the line itself rather than in anything, intellectually realised, which the line is intended to express. With Beardsley everything was a question of form.’[[35]](#endnote-35)

Symons described the work of other artists and writers in musical terms—Verlaine, Mallarmé, Adolphe Monticelli[[36]](#endnote-36)—favouring Whistler in particular for his visual Impressionism and his ability to go ‘clear through outward things to their essence’,[[37]](#endnote-37) but his appreciation of Beardsley was two-pronged. Beardsley’s lines, his ‘minims and crotchets’, were not only evocative and suggestive in the same way as Whistler’s ghostly paintings or Verlaine’s visual poetry, but signified great art, *fine* art. For Symons, Beardsley was more than a lowly illustrator in service to the written word; he was an artist genius composing his own visions, who used the musical language of line to express both the sensuous and the spiritual realms.[[38]](#endnote-38)

**Symons’s influence on Beardsley’s critical reception**

Symons’s obituary remains a keynote essay in Beardsley’s critical reception. After 1900, critics on both sides of the Channel borrowed his musical analogy to describe Beardsley’s art. In France, the painter and student of Renoir, Jacques-Emile Blanche and aesthete and dandy, Robert de Montesquiou~~—habitués of the bohemian scene in Paris and Dieppe—~~both took up Symons’s musical baton. They referred to the English artist’s ability to create pure and bizarre harmonies and likened his genius to that of Mozart.[[39]](#endnote-39) Closer to home, W. G. Blaikie Murdoch enthused over the first *Savoy* title-page and maintained that the ‘whole is full of rhythm and melody equal to anything in Mozart’,[[40]](#endnote-40) while Haldane MacFall continued in the same vein as Symons, asserting (in a typically long-winded way) that Beardsley was ‘wholly concerned with decorative schemes as a musician might create impressions in sound as stirred in his imagination by the suggestion of the play’.[[41]](#endnote-41)

During periods of revived interest in Beardsley’s work—in the 1940s, 60s through to the 90s—critics continued to refer to the musicality of his line. In 1946 Robin Ironside commented on the ‘melodious fulfilment, of some linear rhythm or from the tonal or atonal harmonies that may be produced by the painstaking disposition and variation of darks and lights’; Annette Lavers, in 1967, declared of Beardsley’s illustrations for *The Rape of the Lock* that the ‘variation in thickness of line’ was ‘equivalent to musical *pianissimo* and *fortissimo*’; Brigid Brophy maintained that like all great tunes Beardsley’s lines went up and down in beautiful places; and Simon Wilson in 1983 described his designs as ‘musical structures’.[[42]](#endnote-42) (I could go on.)

Of all Beardsley’s critics perhaps the one who comes closest to Symons’s evaluation of the young artist’s work is the painter Roger Fry, who attempted to articulate what he termed in 1909 as ‘aesthetic emotion’. Influenced by his study of Tolstoy’s expressive theory of art (*What is Art*? 1898) and Bernard Berenson’s *The Florentine Painters of the Renaissance* (1896), Fry came to believe that the function of art was expressive, that the emotions of the artist’s imaginative life were communicated by formal means—by the manipulation of rhythm and mass, space, chiaroscuro and colour (‘significant form’)—which evoked physical responses in the viewer.

Writing about Beardsley in 1904, Fry claimed that he expressed his ‘diabolism’ through a ‘*mesquinerie* [meanness] of line, this littleness and intricacy of the mere decorator’ and as a result the sensation produced by seeing a Beardsley drawing was ‘expressive of muscular tension and virile force’. He proposed that Beardsley’s line could even deliver a sense of colour: ‘each tone produces the sensation of something as distinct from the others as do flat washes of different tints. The Frontispiece to *Salome* is an excellent example of this.’[[43]](#endnote-43)

The confluence between Symons’s musical analogy as applied to Beardsley’s art—his ongoing preoccupation with the artist’s line in particular[[44]](#endnote-44)—and Fry’s aesthetic theorising in the early years of the twentieth century is thought provoking, especially as there appears to have been little connection between Symons and the Bloomsbury Group. ~~As Karl Beckson notes in his biography, Symons ‘seemed to take no interest in the newer artistic developments. […] there are no references in his essays or letters to such figures as D. H. Lawrence, Virginia Woolf, E. M. Forster or T. S. Eliot, despite the latter’s praise.’[[45]](#endnote-45)~~

Symons was perhaps too cosmopolitan in outlook to bother much about the English avant-garde, but his critical writings on art and music reveal unmapped common ground, not only between him and formalist critics like Fry and Clive Bell, but other journalist-critics like Haldane MacFall (not mentioned in the literature on Symons, but who corresponded with Symons in the 1920s about Beardsley and the 1890s).[[46]](#endnote-46) These critics were pushing at the boundaries between low and high art. Symons’s use of a musical analogy pioneered a vision of Beardsley’s designs that underscored the young artist’s mastery of rhythm and line, and consequently elevated the status of the decorative and applied arts. It was a vision shared by Fry struggling in the early 1900s to articulate the effects of visual (not musical) form on the senses.

**Conclusion**

In the Preface of *Plays, Acting, and Music* Symons described his aim as ‘working my way towards the concrete expression of a theory, or system of aesthetics, of all the arts’. ‘System of aesthetics’ or ‘musical aesthetics’: these terms may be too definitive for a music amateur such as Symons, (Collins refers to his ‘“musical aesthetics”, such as it is’, 45), who according to the leading British music critic Ernest Newman lacked a ‘musical brain’.[[47]](#endnote-47) But his reflections on the ‘interpenetration of substance and form’[[48]](#endnote-48) and his concern with what he called the ‘universal science of beauty’[[49]](#endnote-49) represent a new direction in modern aesthetics.

It was a direction, however, that Symons found difficult to follow. In the summer of 1908, while in Italy, he suffered a mental breakdown—‘an illness that he partly attributed to (Wagner’s) music’[[50]](#endnote-50)—and ceased writing about music. Of all the arts, however, music was for Symons both the supreme expression of the imaginative life and a ‘divine hallucination’, full of foreignness and mystery. I leave the last words to Symons, who wrote:

Music speaks no language known to us, has nothing of ourselves to tell us, but is shy, alien, and speaks a language which we do not know. It comes to us as a divine hallucination, chills us a little with its ‘airs from heaven’ or elsewhere, and breaks down for an instant the too solid walls of the world, showing us the gulf.[[51]](#endnote-51)

1. This is Sarah Collins’s qualification. See ‘Absolute Music and Ideal Content: Autonomy, Sensation and Experience in Arthur Symons’s “Theory of Musical Aesthetics”’, *Australasian Journal of Victorian Studies*, 19, 1 (2014), 45-66: 45. [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. Symons, Preface (written July 1903), *Plays, Acting, and Music* (1903) [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
3. Arthur Symons, ‘Aubrey Beardsley’, *Fortnightly Review*, 63 (May 1898), 752-61: 760. [↑](#endnote-ref-3)
4. Hegel, *Aesthetics: Lectures on Fine Art (1835-8)*, trans. T. M. Knox, 2 vols. (Oxford: OUP?, 1975), ii. 891. [↑](#endnote-ref-4)
5. Symons, ‘On Writing about Music’, in *Plays, Acting, and Music* (91) [↑](#endnote-ref-5)
6. Walter Pater, ‘The School of Giorgione’, in [↑](#endnote-ref-6)
7. Patricia Herzog, ‘“The Condition to Which All Art Aspires”: Reflections on Pater on Music’, *British Journal of Aesthetics*, 36, 2 (April 1996), 122-34. Herzog is insistent on the ‘negative and positive interpretation of Pater’s thesis’: ‘The ideal matter of music or any other art is revealed not *as* form but *through* form, or more precisely, through the *imaginative perception* of form’ (p. 130). [↑](#endnote-ref-7)
8. See Théophile Gautier’s *Emaux et camées* (1852, enlarged in 1872) and his ‘Symphonie en blanc majeur’ (1849). [↑](#endnote-ref-8)
9. Symons, ‘On Writing about Music’, in *Plays, Acting, and Music* (91) [↑](#endnote-ref-9)
10. ‘Sensuous’ first used by Milton 1641 to refer to relating to the senses, without a sexual connotation—sensual has a sexual undertone. [↑](#endnote-ref-10)
11. Symons, ‘Beethoven’, in *Studies in Seven Arts* (London: Constable, 1907), p. 197. [↑](#endnote-ref-11)
12. Pater’s term in ‘The School of Giorgione’ (see Herzog, p. 123). [↑](#endnote-ref-12)
13. Nick Freeman, ‘“Mad music rising”: Chopin, Sex, and Secret Language in Arthur Symons’s *Christian Trevalga’*, *Victoriographies*, 1,2 (2011), 157-76:160. In ‘Mr. Arthur Symons on Richard Strauss’, *The Speaker: The Liberal Review* (11 April 1903), 35-6, Ernest Newman referred to the way that Symons made musical criticism ‘a really readable performance’ (35). [↑](#endnote-ref-13)
14. Collins, ‘Absolute Music and Ideal Content’, 46. [↑](#endnote-ref-14)
15. Collins, ‘Absolute Music and Ideal Content’, 50. [↑](#endnote-ref-15)
16. Symons, ‘Are the English People Musical?’, Letter to the Editor, *Pall Mall Gazette* (15 December 1890), p. 2. [↑](#endnote-ref-16)
17. Symons, *Spiritual Adventures* (London: Constable, 1905), p. 27. [↑](#endnote-ref-17)
18. Symons, ‘Mozart in the Mirabell-Garden’, in *Plays, Acting, and Music* (London: Duckworth, 1903), p.190. [↑](#endnote-ref-18)
19. Symons, ‘???’, in *Plays, Acting, and Music* (234-5) [↑](#endnote-ref-19)
20. Freeman, ‘“Mad music rising”’, 162. [↑](#endnote-ref-20)
21. ‘Have you ever tried to catch a butterfly without brushing the dust off its wings?’ Trevalga notes in ‘Christian Trevalga’ (1902-3). Symons, *Plays, Acting, and Music* (p. 71), and collected in *The Fool of the World and Other Poems* (1906). [↑](#endnote-ref-21)
22. ‘In the interpretation of music all action of the brain which does not translate itself perfectly in touch is useless’ (Symons, *Plays, Acting, and Music*, p. 70). [↑](#endnote-ref-22)
23. W. B. Yeats, *Uncollected Prose, Volume II: Later Reviews, Articles and Other Miscellaneous Prose 1897-1939*, ed. John P. Frayne and Colton Johnson (London: Macmillan. 1975), p. 40. [↑](#endnote-ref-23)
24. W. B. Yeats, *The Collected Works of W. B. Yeats.* Vol. 9, *Uncollected Articles and Reviews: Uncollected Articles and Reviews Written between 1886 and 1900*, ed. by J. P. Frayne and M. Marchaterre (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2013), p. 334. [↑](#endnote-ref-24)
25. Arthur Symons, *London Nights*, 2nd edn., (London: John Lane, 1897), p. 24. [↑](#endnote-ref-25)
26. ‘At the stage-door’, *LN2*, 1897, p. 16. [↑](#endnote-ref-26)
27. ‘Music can prolong, reiterate, and delicately vary the ecstasy itself: and its voice is all the while speaking to us out of our own hearts’ (Symons, ‘Beethoven’, in *Studies in Seven Arts* (London: Constable, 1907), p. 196). [↑](#endnote-ref-27)
28. Symons, ‘Notes on Paris and Paul Verlaine’, in *Colour Studies in Paris* (London: Chapman & Hall; New York: E. P. Dutton), p. 200. [↑](#endnote-ref-28)
29. Symons was not the first critic to describe modern art in musical terms. The metaphor of music had been circulating in art journals and magazines since the mid nineteenth century. The editor of *Portfolio* and an authority on etching, Philip Gilbert Hamerton (1834-94), spent many years trying to understand and articulate the primacy of form in contemporary French art, and in his popular review columns he frequently experimented with a musical analogy. In his book, *Contemporary French Painters* (1868), he described form as ‘the visible melodies and harmonies,—a kind of visible music,—meaning as much and narrating as much as the music which is heard in the ears, and nothing whatever more’. Hamerton focused on French artists’ preoccupation with ‘organic form’, and recalling Whistler’s aestheticism, he claimed: ‘when they paint a woman they do not take the slightest interest in her personally, she is merely, for them, a certain beautiful and fortunate arrangement of forms, an impersonal harmony and melody, melody in harmony, seen instead of being heard’ (P. G. Hamerton, *Contemporary French Painters* (London: ?? 1868), p. 37). [↑](#endnote-ref-29)
30. Robert Ross, ‘Aubrey Beardsley’, *Academy and Literature*, 70 (1906), 95. [↑](#endnote-ref-30)
31. Ross, ‘Aubrey Beardsley’, 96. [↑](#endnote-ref-31)
32. R. A. Walker, ed., *A Beardsley Miscellany* (London: Bodley Head, 1949), p. 75. [↑](#endnote-ref-32)
33. Symons, ‘Aubrey Beardsley’, 752. [↑](#endnote-ref-33)
34. Symons, ‘Aubrey Beardsley’, ?? [↑](#endnote-ref-34)
35. Symons, ‘Aubrey Beardsley’, ?? [↑](#endnote-ref-35)
36. John Munro, *Arthur Symons* (New York: Twayne, 1969), pp. 91-2. [↑](#endnote-ref-36)
37. Symons, ‘Impressionistic Writing’ (1923), in *Dramatis Personae* (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1923), pp. 343-56, p. 345. [↑](#endnote-ref-37)
38. Nick Freeman makes a similar observation in ‘“Mad Music Rising”’ (2011): ‘In writing on art, Symons invariably works around these polarities; the ability to create is valued alongside but ultimately above the ability to enact’ (169). [↑](#endnote-ref-38)
39. Jacques-Emile Blanche, ‘Aubrey Beardsley’, *Antée*, (1 April 1907), 1103-22 : 1105 ; Robert de Montesquiou, ‘Beardsley en Raccourci, *Assemblée de Notables* (Paris, 1909), 17-27: 20. [↑](#endnote-ref-39)
40. W. G. Blaikie Murdoch, *The Renaissance of the Nineties* (London: Alexander Moring, 1911), p.11. [↑](#endnote-ref-40)
41. Haldane MacFall, *Aubrey Beardsley. The Man and His Work* (London: John Lane, 1928), p. 49. [↑](#endnote-ref-41)
42. Robin Ironside, ‘Aubrey Beardsley’, *Horizon*, 14 (September 1946), 190-202: 198; Annette Lavers, ‘Aubrey Beardsley: Man of Letters’, in *Romantic Mythologies*, ed. Ian Fletcher (London: Routledge, 1967), pp. 243-70: 256; Brigid Brophy, *Black and White* (London, 1968), p. 11; Simon Wilson, *Beardsley* (Oxford: Phaidon, 1983), p. 9. For more detail see my ‘The Musical Analogy in Beardsley Criticism 1898-1914’, *Journal of Pre-Raphaelite Studies*, 6 (Spring 1997), 64-90. [↑](#endnote-ref-42)
43. Roger Fry, 'Aubrey Beardsley's Drawings', *Athenæum* (November 5, 1904), 628. [↑](#endnote-ref-43)
44. In ‘Christian Trevalga’ (1902-3), Trevalga experiences his own playing of Chopin in visual terms: ‘something in the curve of the music, which he had always seen as a wavy line, going on indefinably in space, spreading itself out elastically, but without ever forming a pattern, seemed to become almost externally visible, just above the level of the strings on the open top of the piano’ (Spiritual Adventures, Martin Secker, 1924, p. 69). [↑](#endnote-ref-44)
45. Karl Beckson, *Arthur Symons: A Life* (Oxford: OUP, 1987), p. 2. [↑](#endnote-ref-45)
46. See the correspondence of MacFall to Symons in the Canaday Library at Bryn Mawr College, Pennsylvania. [↑](#endnote-ref-46)
47. See Collins, ‘Absolute Music and Ideal Content’, 63. [↑](#endnote-ref-47)
48. Symons, ‘What is Poetry?’, in *Studies in Prose and Verse* (London: J. M. Dent), p. 194. [↑](#endnote-ref-48)
49. Preface to *Plays, Acting, and Music* (1903). [↑](#endnote-ref-49)
50. Stoddard Martin, *Wagner to ‘The Waste Land’: A Study of the Relationship of Wagner to English Literature* (London: Macmillan, 1982), pp. 74-6, cited in Emma Sutton, *Aubrey Beardsley and British Wagnerism in the 1890s* (New York: Oxford UP, 2002), p. 78, cited in Collins, ‘Absolute Music and Ideal Content’, 47. In *Confessions, a Study in Pathology* (1930), Symons recalls the torment of music in Venice:

    The gondoliers’ hoarse shouting comes violently through the music. Two or three phrases, poignant and piercing, monotonous and profound, rise suddenly out of the luminous night of waters. It was this cry that Wagner heard from the balcony on that fortunate night when he found the melody for his shepherd’s pipe. Inspiring, disconnected scraps of song, harsh expressive voices, abrupt pauses and repetitions, but with a strange fantastic beauty; songs that decorate and illumine the night, cries out of the depth of the secret heart of Venice, songs instinctive and remote, melancholy and passionate, what strange and obscure secrets you conceal! (pp. 7-8) [↑](#endnote-ref-50)
51. Symons, *Plays, Acting, and Music* (**New York: E. P. Dutton, 1903**), pp. 240-1. [↑](#endnote-ref-51)