PAUL VERLAINE AND ARTHUR SYMONS
A COMPARATIVE STUDY
OF THEIR VERSE

by

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PREFACE

In his Poets of the Younger Generation, William Archer, in speaking of Arthur Symons, says: "His poetical utterance has been shaped by two influences, the transitory influence of Robert Browning and the later and abiding influence of Verlaine."(1) This statement, the intense admiration which Symons voices for "le pauvre Lélian" in several magazine articles, and especially in The Symbolist Movement in Literature, together with the designation of Symons as a "leader" in the Symbolist movement,(2) have provoked this comparative study in which it is hoped that not only Verlaine's influence on Symons, but also the particular place of the two poets in the movement called Symbolist, may be in some degree investigated.

Both Verlaine and Symons were, in a sense, innovators. They were significant figures in their respective countries in a literary trend which was trying "to make amends for several decades of artistic monotony."(3) Thus, together with the degree of Verlaine's influence on Symons, is ever-present the parallel question of what part these poets had in the change away from Victorianism and Parnassianism. The most powerful manifestation of this change, called "Symbolism", since it does not admit definite creed or purpose

(1) Archer, William: Poets of the Younger Generation p. 409

(2) Untermeyer, Louis: Modern British Poetry p.101.

(3) Jackson, Holbrook: The Eighteen Nineties p. 11.

except in the most general of terms, can be studied in the case of the individual poets only by showing new emphasis or variation from the preceding generation. The difficulty is still great, for all true poets transcend in their work the narrow boundaries of a single creed. Who can say that Alfred de Vigny and Coleridge cannot justifiably be called Symbolist poets; that Wordsworth's thought was not often that of the Victorians; that, for example in "les Orientales", Hugo did not often show a love for exterior form which would seem to ally him with the Parnassian movement? Thus, in this study we should have great difficulty in maintaining that the work of Symons and Verlaine is truly Symbolist. Both are precursors and both represent new emphasis rather than change. We shall deal particularly with those elements in their verse which seem to break from the established poetic manner, and which appear to ally them with the future rather than the past.

Finally we are conscious that every poet is a creator. If he be in any sense of the word a great poet, his lyric outburst, coming from stimuli of love, of nature, of death, or of worship, is always in such measure personal that all dogmatic classification of creed or school must be subordinate to the splendid isolation of his genius.

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INTRODUCTION

The years 1885-1890 in France and the last decade of the nineteenth century in England are of extreme importance in the annals of letters, marking as they do, the emergence of new doctrimes of literary art. The vitality of the period is attested by the birth, and in most cases the death, of numerous aggressive literary reviews defending new artistic concepts. In France a whole army of publications appeared. Lutèce was followed by le Décadent, la Cravache, la Wallonie, le Banquet and la Plume. Le Mercure de France, first published in 1890, became a literary force; la Phalange enunciated new literary doctrines. In England the Yellow Book and the Savoy with their lesser brethern, the Parade, the Evergreen, the Pageant and the Rose Leaf, flourished for a space. This growth of new literary journals manifests at least one thing, artistic transition and evolution.

In the broad field of literature, poetry occupied a most important place in the last years of the century. And it had able men to represent it. The Rhymers' Club in London boasted such names as John Davidson, Ernest Dowson, Edwin Ellis, Richard le Gallienne, W. B. Yeats, and Lionel Johnson. Across the channel at the gatherings in the rue de Rome were grouped such distinguished poets as Henri de Régnier, Francis Viélé-Griffin, Stuart Merrill, Paul Valéry and Moréas. That these names can be included in what after all were but the literary cliques of the period is indubitable

proof of the poetic activity of the era.

The younger generation of poets in the late eighties and through the nineties was striving against tradition. On the continent the Parnassian was the established school; in England the Victorian. The new generation, however, was unwilling to accept the moralizing and eloquent poetry that characterized the cult of Tennyson, and the faultless and equally eloquent verse of Leconte de Lisle's "cénacle". Its revolt assumed in both countries the names of decadence and symbolism.

In France the term "décadence" was evidently an expression of the amused contempt in which the established school held the dissentients. Those enthusiastic young poets who vociferated their ideas in the Chat Noir and other Parisian cafés were looked upon as the renegades of the Parnasse. They were accused of scorning impeccability of form simply because they could not attain it. Yet they were not intimidated. They adopted Verlaine's celebrated line

"Je suis l'empire à la fin de la décadence"

as a cry of defiance, and continued to deride impassibility and faultless art on the one hand and the gross and mundane efforts of naturalism on the other.

It was just at the moment when the "décadents" were most flourishing in Paris, that is to say about 1890, that the Rhymers' Club began to meet in London. This group of young writers turned to France for inspiration. Symons, one of the members, admits this when he tells how

poets, then very young, recited their own verses to one another in a desperate and ineffectual attempt to get into key with the Latin quarter."(1)

Perhaps it was an "ineffectual attempt" on the part of most of the members of the Rhymers' Club, but there were two poets who certainly caught something of the fluidity and fragility of the French decadents. One was Symons and the other Ernest Dowson.(2) In the decades that have followed the "nineties" they have been labelled as "decadents" and "symbolists" with somewhat the connotation that Andrew Lang gave to them in a magazine article of 1900:(3)

"What is a 'decadent' in the literary sense of the word? I am apt to believe that he is an unwholesome young person who has read about 'ages of decadence' in his histories of literature, likes what he is told about them, and

(1) Fortnightly Review: vol. 73, p. 947

(2) The following stanza, so Verlainian in manner, may serve as an indication of how great was French influence on Dowson:

"Exceeding sorrow
Consumeth my sad heart!
Because to-morrow
We must depart
Now is exceeding sorrow
All my part."

(3) Critic: 37:171

tries to die down to it, with more or less of success."

The term "symbolist" in France has certainly a different meaning from this one, and the reason for it lies to some degree in the fact that "décadence" underwent an evolutionary development on the continent by which its dress was refined and its beauties brought to light. In England, as we shall see, decadence was affected by powerful outside forces which stifled its rather faint (its enemies said "sickly") music. Symons, in his Symbolist Movement in Literature appreciates the importance of the change from decadence to symbolism:

"It pleased some young men in various countries to call themselves Decadents with all the thrill of unsatisfied virtue masquerading as uncomprehended vice. As a matter of fact, the term is in its place only when applied to style, to that ingenious deformation of the language, in Mallarmé for instance, which can be compared with what we are accustomed to call the Greek and Latin of the Decadence. No doubt perversity of form and perversity of matter are often found together, and, among the lesser men especially, experiment was carried far, not only in the direction of style. But a movement which in this sense might be called Decadent could but have been a straying aside from the main road of literature.---The interlude, half a mock-interlude, of Decadence, diverted the attention of the critics while something more serious was in preparation. That something more serious has crystallized, for the time, under the form of

Symbolism, in which art returns to one pathway, leading through beautiful things to the eternal beauty."(1)

In any case, whether under the name of Symbolism or of Decadence, the new movement had in it the qualities which Symons ascribed to it in a published article of 1893:

"To fix the last fine shade, the quintessence of things; to fix it fleetingly; to be a disembodied voice, and yet the voice of a human soul: that is the ideal of Decadence, and it is what Paul Verlaine has achieved."(2)

In England, as a movement, decadence and symbolism were very short-lived and free from the bitter quarrels that signalized their early years in France. This was natural. The English are not quite so prone to fall into schools of writing as are the French. Besides, the movement in England was but the child of that in France, coming before a reading public wearied of the long reign of declamatory and pious verse that distinguished the Tennyson-Browning period. If, however, it drew its inspiration from France, it must also be said to be the outgrowth of the aesthete movement of the eighties. Pater, Swinburne and Wilde prepared the way for new emotional values in England somewhat as had Gautier and Baudelaire in France. Holbrook Jackson, admitting other determining forces, concludes:

(1) Symons, Arthur: The Symbolist Movement in Literature p. 17

(2) Harper's Magazine: vol. 87, p. 862.

"But the chief influences (of the English decadence) came from France, and partially for that reason the English decadents always remained spiritual foreigners in our midst; they were not the product of England but of cosmopolitan London. It is certain that Oscar Wilde (hounded out of England to die in Paris), Aubrey Beardsley (admittedly more at home in the brasseries of the Café Royale (sic) than elsewhere in London), and Ernest Dowson (who spent so much of his time in Soho) would each have felt more at home in Paris or Dieppe than, say, in Leeds or Margate."(1)

The shortness of the ascendancy of these "spiritual foreigners" is no doubt due, as Jackson suggests,(2) to the trial of Wilde in 1895, the publicity of which evidently discouraged all interest in the unusual, the artificial and the occult. One is tempted to ask whether this trial did not in truth prevent the transition from decadence to a purer form of Symbolism. Mysticism claimed some poets, but as a group the decadents disappeared from public notice. Individual art was lost and for it was substituted an interest more general and more vulgar: yellow journalism, jingoism, nationalism and imperialism.

"Bitten by an unseeing pride, expressing itself in a strangely inorganic patriotism, the nation forgot art and letters and social regeneration, in the indulgence of

(1) Jackson, Holbrook: The Eighteen-Nineties p. 58

(2) Ibid. p.53-54

blatant aspirations which reached their apotheosis in the orgy of Mafeking night."(1)

The roots of this short-lived English decadence lie deeper than mere revolt against Victorianism. They go to another expression of exasperation which had found utterance in France, where the impassibility and faultless coldness of the Parnassians were being assailed.

"Les Parnassiens crurent avoir fixé la poésie. C'était avouer qu'ils comptaient s'arrêter au soin du détail et que leur horizon ne dépassait guère leur table de travail. En réalité leur préoccupation secrète était de désespérer par leur perfection ceux qui viendraient après eux et de s'imposer à leurs successeurs comme des maîtres. En réalité il n'y avait plus rien à glaner dans leur voie. Ils forcèrent leurs successeurs à s'en ouvrir d'autres violemment."(2)

This decadent movement in France, albeit at first unconsciously, was also a protest against "l'art moyen". That powerful nineteenth century force, naturalism, had invaded the realm of poetry. M. E. Manuel in his Pages intimes, 1866, his Poèmes populaires, 1871, and his Pendant la guerre, 1872; François Coppée in his Les Humbles, 1872, attempted to create poetry from the trivial and commonplace happenings of life. Objective description ruled this verse and stifled personal emotion just as it had in the larger,

(1) Jackson, Holbrook: The Eighteen-Nineties p, 54

(2) Poizat, A.: Le Symbolisme p. 45

but impersonal poetry of the Parnassian leaders, Leconte de Lisle and Sully Prudhomme.

Moréas, that most zealous defender of the new movement before his founding of the "école romane",(1) and the man who takes to himself the credit of having baptized it "symbolisme", thus enumerates the qualities against which it was protesting. He calls symbolist poetry:

"Ennemie de l'enseignement, de la déclamation, de la fausse sensibilité, de la description objective."(2)

Meanwhile, in England, was rising a new generation as eager to protest against Victorian literary precepts as had the French against Parnassianism and naturalism. The decorum of Tennyson, the ceaseless moralizing that characterized all the Victorians seemed old-fashioned to the young poets.(3)

The new generation sought to shock rather than to emulate. It turned instinctively toward France for guidance as had Wilde when he took Dorian Grey from between the covers of "A Rebours".

A. J. A. Symonds was one of those who protested most vigorously against Victorian tradition in poetry.(4) He found the verse of the latter half of the century cramped,

(1) Vanier, Léon (editor): Les Premières Armes du Symbolisme p.33

(2) Ibid: p. 33

(3) Andrews and Percival: Poetry of the Nineties, p. 5 ff.

(4) Fortnightly Review: 51:55

without the needed wings of liberty on which it could rise to true lyric power. Verse would require new individuality and new lyricism if it was to apply the doctrine of innovation and of artistic freedom that had been suggested by the aesthete movement. The poetic change that took place in England was similar to the one that had immediately preceded it in France.

What did the new movement mean? In the first place it was, in a sense, a return to romanticism, the unfolding of individuality, of the "moi". But it refrained from the eloquence and amplification of personal confession that dominated the romanticists. Its leaders preached the music of verse. They resented smugness and tended toward shocking or mystifying the crowd. But most of all the movement was grounded on suggestion, on "Correspondances" in the sense in which it was used by Baudelaire, justly called the father of the symbolist movement.(1) Lanson speaks of this element of suggestion among the decadents and symbolists as follows:

"Dans les paysages, ils saisirent non la forme fixe, le contour précis, le volume massif des choses matérielles, mais le reflet fugitif de l'heure ou de la saison, du temps qui passe, mais le rythme incessant de la vie en travail,

(1) Vanier: Les Premières Armes du Symbolisme p. 27
Poizat: Le Symbolisme p. 45

la décomposition et la recomposition qui ne s'arrêtent pas."[1]

This doctrine of suggestion holds within it a very important trait of the new movement and one that persists in many modern poets: the tendency to present a mood, a thought, or a picture without undue moralizing or elaboration.[2] Thus, like the romanticists of the early part of the century, the symbolists were striving to shake off the shackles of tradition and particularly the heavy chain of "la raison raisonnante".

In France the new movement had shocked many. Paul Bourde in Le Temps (6 août, 1885) cries that the French language "a une horreur spéciale pour l'inachevé dans l'expression et n'est pas plus faite que le grand jour pour l'indécision et le flottant des rêves."[3] He speaks of "ce dédain des sentiments qui constituent le fond de la vie morale, ce névrosiaque besoin de s'isoler du reste des hommes, ces affectations de corruption et d'horreur."[4]

The new prosody was not such an object of concern in England as it had been in France. English poetry had never felt the stricture of rules as had French. It was more outraged decorum than outraged artistic sense that made

(1) Lanson, Gustave: Histoire de la Littérature Française p. 1130

(2) Andrews and Percival: Poetry of the Nineties p. 9

(3) Vanier: Premières Armes du Symbolisme p. 23

(4) Ibid. p. 24

itself heard. An echo of that offended attitude toward the decadent poetry of the nineties was felt as far as America. It was the same protesting note that had been heard in England. In the Critic (1900) we read concerning the third published volume of Arthur Symons this criticism:

"Images of Good and Evil will shock some people and amuse others. If the word 'desire' were stricken from the English language, these poems would have to be rewritten for no word of two syllables recurs in them so often." The paragraph concludes with the hope "that we shall hear less in the poet's next volume of his desires whether sated or unsatisfied."(1)

The apostles of change in both France and England who were striving to awaken a new concept of art in relation to life were perhaps a trifle anxious to shock the mass. Their efforts in this direction brought on their heads some truly merited satire, which no doubt they somewhat enjoyed. In 1884 was published Verlaine's Les Poètes Maudits. In the following year the poetry which Verlaine was defending was satirized in the celebrated "Les Déliquescences, poèmes décadents d'Adoré Floupette". In England in 1894 indignation against the beauty of artificiality, a canon of the aesthete movement which became associated with the English decadence, found expression in R. S. Hitchen's The Green Carnation. The humorous effect of this

(1) Critic: vol. 37, p. 470

volume was impaired by the Wilde trial in the following year which effectively silenced voices that might have upheld the new art.

In general then, the new poetic movement was working against such firmly-rooted standards as declamation, extensive moralizing, and objectivity. Symbolism was the enemy of poetry that strove to instruct. But if it was a protest against existing dogma, it had also new creeds to substitute, some constructive purpose. Its ardent defenders have left us definitions and explanations which may serve to clarify the general precepts of symbolist art.

First, there is the doctrine of suggestion enunciated by that magician in words who held his listeners spellbound during the celebrated "mardis" in the rue de Rome. Mallarmé says: "Nommer un objet, c'est supprimer les trois quarts de la jouissance du poème qui est faite du bonheur de deviner peu à peu; le suggérer, voilà le rêve. C'est le parfait usage de ce mystère qui constitue le symbole; évoquer petit à petit un objet pour montrer un état d'âme, ou, inversement, choisir un objet et en degager un état d'âme par une série de dechiffrements."(1)

Jean Moréas, who was the official spokesman for symbolism in the eighties, but who after 1891 chose as models the works of the middle ages and of the Pleiade and who still later elected to return to traditional rules of French

(1) Van Bever and Léautaud: Poètes d'aujourd'hui, vol. II, p. 361

poetry rather than to proceed on the contemporary paths of innovation, defines the aims of symbolism in his celebrated manifesto of September 18, 1886:

"--la poésie symboliste cherche à vêtir l'Idée d'une forme sensible qui, néanmoins, ne serait pas son but à elle-même, mais qui, tout en servant à exprimer l'idée demeurerait sujette. L'Idée, à son tour, ne doit point se laisser voir privée des analogies extérieures: car le caractère essentiel de l'art symbolique consiste à ne jamais aller jusqu'à la conception de l'Idée en soi."(1)

Vigié-Lecocq in his "la Poésie contemporaine" says of the movement:

"La poésie symboliste ne nous propose aucune solution définitive, elle se contente d'éveiller notre pensée, de guider nos songeries, de nous suggérer de mystérieux et subtils rapprochements."(2)

Thus the basis of the new art seems to have been suggestion, and the proof that symbolism is largely the fruit of the "art décadent", the "poésie maladive" of Baudelaire (or of Verlaine for that matter), lies in that very fact. For decadent poetry, treating as it did of the exceptional and of the inexplicable, tended away from realism and away from enunciation of the fact toward the dreamy world of the

(1) Vanier: Premières Armes du Symbolisme p. 33

(2) Vigié-Lecocq: la Poésie contemporaine 1884-96 p. 234

suggested image. That often-cited line of Baudelaire'

"Les parfums, les couleurs, et les sons se répondent"

does have tremendous significance in the poetic history of the nineties where one can call suggestion the mainspring of the then-current lyric art.

It was this agitation in the realm of poetic theory that won for Verlaine the important place that was his during the nineties, the very period when Symons met him and came under his spell. True, he had begun publishing as early as 1866, but it was not until after 1885 that he came to be regarded as a master. The Poèmes saturniens, Fêtes galantes (1869) and La Bonne Chanson had been received with utter indifference. Romances sans paroles was privately printed in 1874 when Verlaine was in complete disrepute, because of the Rimbaud scandal. Even Sagesse as late as 1881 was hawked from publisher to publisher by its author who had to place a sum of money (600 francs for an edition of 500 copies) with the "Société Générale de Librarie Catholique", which finally accepted it. Sagesse had very little success either. "For the devout it was too literary; for the literary it was too devout."(1)

Then, after a brief period in journalistic work (1881-1883) in which he learned how much easier it was to obtain money from prose than from poetry, Verlaine abruptly and inexplicably left Paris for a farming venture at Coulommes,

(1) Nicolson, Harold: Paul Verlaine p. 155

the second such attempt in his career. Thus it was not until 1885 that he returned to Paris. He brought with him a heterogeneous collection of verses, Jadis et Naguère, which found a publisher in Vanier. From this time until his death ten years later Verlaine was the picturesque and legendary figure of the Latin quarter, of the "hôpitaux", of the cafes. His mother had died soon after their return to Paris, leaving the son who had wasted her fortune quite penniless. So it was that Verlaine wrote, and wrote enormously, to secure money for absinthe and the several women who figured in his later life. New editions of his earlier and better work were published, the most important being those of Fêtes galantes,(1) of Romances sans paroles(2) and of Sagesse.(3) Meanwhile appeared new volumes, poetry of the "pot-boiler" variety and prose in which Verlaine capitalized on the cheap sensationalism of Mes Hôpitaux and Mes Prisons. He constantly sought to overcome the poor quality of his volumes of verse by inserting in them poems which he had written when his genius was at its height and which, because he was also at that time more discriminating, he had left unpublished.

It was in the nineties, in the last, dreary years of Verlaine's existence, that Symons came to know him personally

(1) 1886, 1891, 1896, 1899.

(2) 1887, 1891, 1899.

(3) 1889, 1893, 1896, 1899.

and to feel for him a very sincere sympathy. A sense of pity for an isolated personality was perhaps responsible for this feeling in the English poet, for Symons acknowledges that he himself has lived "as a solitary soul in the midst of the world."(1) He adds:"When I think of Baudelaire, and of Verlaine whom I knew, the same sinister sense creeps over me that these, also, were condemned to a kind of perpetual wandering."

Thus it was that in Verlaine Symons saw a spiritual comrade, a man isolated by his own genius. His compassion for "le pauvre Lélian" was the result of a profound conviction that genius cannot be judged by usual standards.

"The artist.....has no more part in society than a monk in domestic life: he cannot be judged by its rules, he can be neither praised nor blamed for his acceptance or rejection of its conventions. Social rules are made for normal people and the man of genius is fundamentally abnormal."(2)

The English poet first met Verlaine on the 29th of April, 1890.(3) Charles Morice brought about the introduction by taking Symons to the Café François where Verlaine was generally to be found drinking absinthe and entertai-

(1) Bookman: vol. 52: p. 481

(2) Ibid. p. 482

(3) North American Review: vol. 201; p. 743

ning a crowd of young and enthusiastic poets. There Symons immediately came under the spell of the "spiritual forehead", the "animal jaw", and the "shifting faun's eye".

Verlaine evidently liked Symons, for he asked him to come to see him in his lodgings at the Hôtel des Mines and proposed the next evening as the time for this visit. There Symons went, observed the shabby surroundings in which the poet lived, met Verlaine's friend, Fernand Langlois (the artist to whom Verlaine wrote the beautiful poem which begins "Vous vous êtes penché sur ma mélancolie"), and listened raptly to the poet's intimate and witty conversation.

During the next six years Symons saw Verlaine from time to time in the streets, cafés and hospitals of Paris. In November, 1893, he arranged a lecture for the French poet to be given in the Hall of St. Bernard's Inn.(1) Verlaine came to London, stayed at Symons's lodgings in Fountain Court, met Dowson, Lionel Johnson, and other English celebrities. His lecture was well received.

Symons continued his translations of Verlaine's poems, choosing selections mainly from Fêtes galantes, and his admiration of the French poet never ceased to grow.

"Daily I come to think him greater: a greater poet, a more wonderful man. I see now that what seemed trivial in him, or uncouth, or ignoble was a part of that simple and sincere nature to which choice among moods or convic-

(1) North American Review: vol. 202; p. 748.

tions after experience were equally impossible."[1]

Then on January 9, 1896, Symons received a telegram from Paris, "Verlaine est mort hier soir."[2]

The rather sordid aftermath of this friendship between the two poets was the arrival in the course of the year 1896 of several letters asking for money "au nom de votre grand ami". They were, of course, from Eugénie Krantz.

What then, in the poetic work of Symons, were the fruits of his friendship and admiration for Verlaine? Did he capture any secrets of the master's genius? Let us examine the work of the two poets from the chronological viewpoint, studying the evolution of their poetic powers.

(1) North American Review: vol. 201; p. 745

(2) Ibid: vol. 202; p. 753

CHAPTER I

Under Alien Banners

Both Symons and Verlaine began their poetic careers under the influence of the prevailing schools. That they should have done so is not strange, since they were both very young and since the element of objectivity, present in both Parnassian and Victorian poetry, was especially adapted to their brief experience. But the remarkable thing is that Symons, whose genius lies in re-dreaming a dream, whose "métier" is that of abstracting beauty from life, should have begun his poetic career as a realist, and a dramatic realist at that; that Verlaine, the musician in words, should have imagined he could paint better than sing, that he could depend upon labor rather than upon inspiration for the composition of his verse.

Can one then find in the poets' early work an indication of what their later verse was to become? Is there any hint of Verlaine's influence upon Symons? A detailed study of their first volumes is necessary in order to discover the particular trend of their genius.

Verlaine, as we have said, began his poetic career under a standard hardly compatible with his genius. The school of the Parnassians, strongly entrenched, with Leconte de Lisle as its leader, naturally attracted the young Verlaine, at that time not too eager to appear "un

original" and probably wishful of adapting himself to the tastes and wishes of the ruling generation, just as later, yielding to the popular demand, he was willing to play the role of derelict "bohémien". In Verlaine one is dealing with a volatile temperament; logic is not to be expected.

The prologue and epilogue of Poèmes saturniens were the manifestos which the poet gave to his first volume. In them he proclaims his isolation from the crowd, his fealty to the beautiful and his devotion to absolute Art. All of these were doctrines of the Parnassian school. Perhaps the strangest lines in all of Verlaine's poetry, when one contemplates his life and work, are these:

"Libre à nos inspirés, œoeurs qu'une œillade enflamme,
D'abandonner leur être aux vents comme un bouleau:
Pauvres gens! l'Art n'est pas d'éparpiller son âme:
Est-elle en marbre, ou non, la Vénus de Milo?" (1)

Verlaine commiserating those who yield to the moment's inspiration! Verlaine chiseling carefully-wrought verses from Parian marble! Verlaine, of whom Symons was able to write that his genius lay "in bringing verse to the song of a bird", worshipping at the shrine of dominating Art!

To one who has read La Bonne Chanson, Romances sans paroles, and Sagesse, Verlaine's credo in this volume would seem but affectation, the epitome of insincerity.

(1) Verlaine, Paul: Œuvres complètes, Tome I, p. 78

But critics have been impressed by the contents of the Poèmes saturniens in different ways, and the degree of Verlaine's sincerity is lost in the question of the degree to which he succeeded in being Parnassian. Pierre Martino feels strongly the influence of Leconte de Lisle.

"Ce qui, à la lecture des Poèmes saturniens, donne le plus fréquemment dans la vue, c'est, sans conteste, l'inspiration parnassienne."(1)

He also discovers the complete series of Parnassian themes: "le désespoir à froid, le renoncement à l'amour, à la religion, au plaisir de jouir des beautés de la nature, à tout ce qui n'est pas éternel'."(2)

Charpentier finds an entirely different emphasis.

"Verlaine, en tout cas, quand il croit faire oeuvre parnassienne, en publiant en 1866 les Poèmes saturniens, rompt, le premier, avec le matérialisme ou le positivisme des disciples de Leconte de Lisle. Ses poèmes, d'une inspiration tout ensemble individualiste et idéaliste, démentent la profession de foi en faveur de l'impassibilité olympienne qu'il croit devoir faire, par orthodoxie, en tête de son recueil, et ses accents à cause de ce qu'ils ont de fluide ou d'aérien, déjà paraissent grêles et

(1) Revue des Cours et Conférences: 24e année (2e série) No. 13, p. 1160

(2) Ibid: p, 1162

démodés au public."[1]

There is much to support Charpentier's contention. Many poems in the volume do seem to belie the poet's intention as given in the prologue and epilogue. The very title appears a mockery, in manner that of Leconte de Lisle, in wording that of Baudelaire, but holding within the word "saturniens" the key of the heart--the personal sorrow of the ill-starred. Despite the apparent objectivity in such study of the unfortunate, the fact remains that the eight poems included under the first division, Melancholia, are as personal, as intuitive as those of the Romantic era. We may grant that poetry is "l'univers vu à travers un tempérament",[2] but certainly there are more objective ways of presenting a subject than in these eight sonnets. Verlaine's love of novelty may be seen in the very first of these, for this poem is inverted, the tercets preceding the quatrains.

Doubtless Verlaine tried to be Parnassian. His failure to be so does not necessarily imply insincerity of purpose. His expressed intentions do suggest the divergent points of departure of the two poets, Verlaine and Symons. The latter, as we shall see, proclaims reality as a basis of art, while Verlaine, following the doctrine of Olympian impassibility, insists upon the poet's withdrawal from

(1) Charpentier, John: le Symbolisme, p. 12

(2) Vigié-Lecocq: la Poésie contemporaine, p. 167

trivial actuality. The poet's eyes, he says--

"Ne sauraient s'abaisser une heure seulement
Sur le honteux conflit des besognes vulgaires,
Et sur vos vanités plates; ----"(1)

These lines seem almost as violent as those voicing Leconte de Lisle's contempt for the "plèbe carnassière"; yet their author was destined to yield to the public the intimate secrets of his heart, at first with a certain delicacy, and later with crass frankness.

The volume, as Verlaine states in the dedicatory verses, is to deal with melancholy--with the fate of those born under the malign influence of Saturn, the unfortunates who will have "bonne part de malheur et bonne part de bile."(2)

In the first division of the book, entitled Melancholia, are eight sonnets in which is already present the spectacle of an unusual emotional life; an intense sensitivity, (a quality we shall see in Symons), and a paradoxical interplay of naiveté and sophistication, unknown to the English poet. Irony, in Verlaine, follows the most touching and delicate of moods:

"Mets ton front sur mon front et ta main dans ma main
Et fais-moi des serments que tu rompras demain."(3)

Sometimes the irony takes a more happy form as in

(1) Verlaine: Œuvres complètes, Tome I, p. 6

(2) Ibid: I, p. 1

(3) Ibid: I, p.14

A une femme:

"Et les soucis que vous pouvez avoir sont comme
Des hirondelles sur un ciel d'après-midi,
Chère,---par un beau ciel de septembre attiédi." (1)

These lines are interesting not only by reason of the unusual pauses which are a secret of Verlaine's musical art, but also by their simplicity of utterance, the gentle and hesitant music not often heard among the Parnassians. Symons seems to have felt this projection of Verlaine's art, for again and again his muse speaks just as naturally and with the same delicacy.

"All has been ours that we desired,
And now we are a little tired
Of the eternal carnival." (2)

One characteristic of Verlaine's work in its entirety, visible in the Poèmes saturniens, has given rise to several different opinions concerning the poet's personality.. There is in all the poetic work of Verlaine, a simplicity and naïveté which have made some see in him the artlessness of a child (Lepelletier), others the joyous volatile temperament of a faun (A. France), and still others the incarnation of mediaeval superstition (Charpentier). But all feel, and justly, that Verlaine's simplicity as revealed in his poems, results from the facility of his

(1) Verlaine: Œuvres complètes, Tome I, p. 16
(2) Ibid: I, p. 46

genius. Accomplished lyrist that he was, endowed with a profound sense of rhythms, he improvised, and improvising, sought constantly for the new and original in his art. Yet so subtle is his artistry, that his amazing effects seem natural, his conscious efforts spontaneous.

In one of the sonnets of the group Melancholia there is a suggestion of a procédé which will be common in Verlaine's best work, and which is one of the most important bonds uniting him with the movement called "symbolist". It is also a point of kinship between him and Symons. What name to give this characteristic is a question not easy to answer. "Suggestion" seems hardly adequate. Baudelaire had its fundamental sense in the word "correspondances". But, be what may the name of the phenomenon, a great part of the beauty of Symbolist poetry lies in the fusion, the blending of color, sound, connotation and rhythm into a mood. The bringing together of these constituents effects musical and poetic magic. The image which the poet is striving to realize loses the harshness of its form. In other words the "art plastique" of the Parnassians disappears, and for it are substituted outlines richer in suggestion, more mysterious to the senses, more alluring to the imagination. It is the sort of effect that one finds in Night and Wind in Symons's first volume where that one poem alone possesses this particular kind of lyric charm. On the other hand, Verlaine gives promise of an alluring suggestive power at the very beginning of his poetic career. Notice this delicious fusion:

"Souvenir, souvenir, que me veux-tu? L'automne
Faisait voler la grive à travers l'air atone
Et le soleil dardait un rayon monotone
Sur le bois jaunissant où la bise détone." (1)

Here is painting, surely; but painting with a magic addition of music, a fusion of light and sound which creates an impression rather than a picture, the spiritual rather than the material.

This impressionism is not dominant in the next group of the Poèmes saturniens. These are entitled Eaux-fortes and suggest that their author intends to be mindful of objective detail, the "monde exterieur" of Gautier. Perhaps in these Verlaine is more concerned with the detail of his pictures than the music of his lines, but his artistry is quite different from that of the author of Emaux et Camées. Gautier fills in his picture, blocks his areas; Verlaine, the etcher, chooses rather to suggest masses and contour by lines. In this he is to an astonishing degree successful, for image and atmosphere are created with remarkable clarity, be it the horror of night, so realistically sketched in Effet de Nuit, or the mission of death in Cauchemar. A significant poem in this group is Les Grotesques which helps one to understand Verlaine's conception of the Poètes Maudits and the meaning of the

(1) Verlaine: Œuvres complètes, Tome I, p. 11

word "décadent".

"Donc, allez, vagabonds sans trèves,
Errez, funestes et maudits,
Le long des gouffres et des grèves,
Sous l'œil fermé des paradis!" (1)

The theme of melancholy is pursued in the third group of the volume. This sequence, Paysages tristes, contains poems of twilight and autumnal sadness, where one discovers Verlaine, the impressionist, using all the magic of light, sound, and connotation as the pattern for his mood.

"Une aube affaiblie
Verse par les champs
La mélancolie
Des soleils couchants" (2)

"Le Souvenir avec le Crépuscule
Rougeoie et tremble à l'ardent horizon
De l'espérance en flamme qui recule---." (3)

"Les sanglots longs
Des violons
De l'automne
Blessent mon coeur
D'une langueur
Monotone." (4)

(1) Verlaine: Œuvres complètes, Tome I, p. 24
(2) Ibid: I, p. 26
(3) Ibid: I, p. 28 (4) Ibid: I, p. 33

This little group of impressionist pictures, as we shall see, is important as a bond between Symons and Verlaine, for in these poems outlines are blurred, mood is suggested, and the lines have that "frisson" which is the magic of the best of the two poets' work.

Following these are five poems entitled "Caprices" in which Verlaine, the ironist, stands clearly revealed. These are far more objective than the Paysages tristes, although Verlaine's own bitterness of mood is integrant with the descriptive detail. From Femme et Chatte (a poem which might well have been the work of Baudelaire) to M. Prudhomme are pictured with great clarity types which seem far too real to be mere fabrications.

The remainder of the volume, although a mélange, is largely objective and the influence of the Parnassian school is visible in many of the poems, particularly in Çavatri, Nocturne parisien, César Borgia and La Mort de Philippe II. In the first of these there is a suggestion of Leconte de Lisle's stoicism, a quality which Verlaine, unfortunately, was never able to put into practice.

"Que nous cerne l'Oubli; noir et morne assassin,
Ou que l'Envie aux traits amers nous ait pour cibles,
Ainsi que Çavatri faisons-nous impassibles,
Mais, comme elle, dans l'âme ayons un haut dessein." (1)

(1) Verlaine: Œuvres complètes, Tome I, p. 46

Then there are, scattered through the volume, sonorous names of remote places and persons which seem almost like childish imitation of the Poèmes barbares. Raghu, Kchatrya, Héliogabale, Vyaça, the Guadalquivir, the Guadarrama, even the Meschascébé are all inserted in the lines. Whether this was for the sake of their romantic, far-off sound, or simply by imitation, the fact remains that whereas in some Parnassians, notably Leconte de Lisle and Hérédia, such usage is graceful and seemingly appropriate, Verlaine succeeded only in giving a rigid artificiality to his verses when he affected unusual and sonorous proper nouns.

One distinct mark of Parnassian influence is in the purely objective kind of painting, the accumulation of physical detail that one finds in César Borgia (with the significant subtitle Portrait en pied), in La Mort de Philippe II, or in certain passages of the Nocturne parisien. Here the musician's touch, so beautifully dominant in the Paysages tristes, has given way to the skill of the painter. The result of this artistic change is not poetically successful, for Verlaine has a facility of making description (per se) sound remarkably like exposition.

"Les portes d'acajou tournent sans bruit,
Leurs serrures étant, comme leurs gonds, huilées." (1)

(1) Verlaine: Œuvres complètes, Tome I, p. 68

Fortunately, Verlaine's turn of genius did not permit sustained craftsmanship of this kind; he easily escapes into a more suitable manner. But from time to time the imitation of Parnassian objectivity, seemingly treason to Verlaine's genius, dominates his verse in a forced and superficial way.

In the greater part of the volume there is promise, but not attainment of true lyric grace. Declamation often sacrifices delicacy and beauty; eloquence often renders emotion a trifle ridiculous.

"Sonore et gracieux Baiser, divin Baiser!
Volupté non pareille, ivresse inénarrable!
Salut! L'homme penché sur ta coupe adorable
S'y grise d'un bonheur qu'il ne sait épuiser." (1)

This verse may possess a certain grandeur by reason of its force, it may explain how the author of Romances sans paroles could also have written certain poems of Sagesse, Parallèlement and Invectives, but in comparison with his less sonorous and more intuitive poems it resembles bombast more than art.

Verlaine thus began his poetic career beneath the aegis of the Parnassians. Symons, likewise, shows in his first work the poetic standards of the ruling generation. Days and Nights, published in 1889, has about it a distinct flavor of Browning, the Browning of the dramatic monologues,

(1) Verlaine: Œuvres complètes Tome I, p. 54

and the moral tone of the volume is quite Victorian, and far from the manner that was to place Symons among the "decadents".

"These things are life;
And life, they say, is worthy of the Muse."

Such is the title-page dedication, taken from Meredith's Modern Love, and giving a hint of the realistic note which the volume was to take. How far this trend was from the essential genius of the poet who was to write:

"And the only world is the world of my dreams", (1)

is easily discernible in the later books, where Symons is revealed musing over the vagaries of his own heart.

Naturally the objectivity of Days and Nights cannot have been entirely the result of Victorian influence. A young poet is either somewhat lacking in the actual experiences of emotional life, or, more probably, he has not the needed perspective to see them clearly. Naturally his material of self-expression he finds in the lives of others and his own impression of those lives. Very probably the poetry of the Victorian age was exactly suited to the immature genius of young Symons, who by studying others, was learning to know himself.

There is, however, an essential difference between the moralizing of Symons and, for example, that of the Victorian of Victorians, Tennyson. There is with the

(1) Symons: Poems, vol. II, p. 191

laureate a zeal of the reformer which is totally lacking in Symons.

In the Prologue to Days and Nights, the poet himself gives some clue to his artistic opinions. He speaks of Art, whom many have imaged as a lonely goddess, reigning on a far Olympus, and serenely oblivious of actuality.

"Seek her not there; but go where cities pour
Their turbid human stream through street and mart,
A dark stream flowing onward evermore
Down to an unknown ocean;---there is Art.

She stands amid the tumult and is calm;
She reads the hearts self-closed against the light;
She probes an ancient wound, yet brings no balm;
She is ruthless, yet she doeth all things right." (1)

If we are reading Symons's meaning correctly, there are two essential ideas in this, his first poetic creed. The material of poetry may be realistic, analytical and penetrating, but its object is not in the nature of effecting reform.

"She probes an ancient wound: yet brings no balm." (2)

In the Prologue one finds also the note which is to dominate the volume, the sad pathetic chord which will distinguish not only this, but all subsequent collections of his verse.

(1) Symons: Days and Nights, p. 15

(2) Ibid: p. 15

"Yet since of man with trouble born to death
She sings, her song is less of Days than Nights." (1)

There are, if one chooses to make an arbitrary division, four types of poetry in the volume: first, the dramatic pieces in which one seems to hear the voice of Browning; secondly, pictures of the poor and sinful (the pathological poems); thirdly, certain poems and translations clearly literary exercises and largely under French influence; and lastly the personal poems, few enough here, which serve as a foretaste of his mature poetic manner.

Symons's genius is not truly dramatic. He lacks that dynamic quality of Browning, which enabled the author of the Dramatic Monologues to give words a vital glow and action. With Symons there is a certain monotony of realization incompatible with dramatic crisis. Sometimes, however, his lines sound a note as vibrant with human emotion as one can find in the best of the great Victorian's poems. Such a one is A Brother of the Battuti (reminiscent of the Soliloquy in a Spanish Cloister) and The Temptation of Saint Anthony, suggested by a design of Félicien Rops.

There are other poems in the volume more than faintly suggestive of Browning. A Revenge, in its matter and form, (blank verse, more terse than is usual with Symons and with pronounced enjambement) recalls My Last Duchess. "He" and "She" in A Bridal Eve are much the same as their

(1) Symons: Days and Nights, p. 17

counterparts of In a Gondola. But Symons's poem is far less successful than Browning's. He has not that vibrant power of the spoken word which makes In a Gondola a real life-crisis, a building-up for a terrible climax, superbly realized. The dreamer in Symons is likely to speak, does speak unless his thought current be forced into unnatural channels. Then there is Renunciation, slightly reminiscent of Fra Lippo Lippi, sweet in its resignation, but lacking that sharp edge of despair which gives a touch of greatness to Browning's poem.

But others of the dramatic pieces seem either grotesque, unconvincing, or too heavily sentimental. It is difficult to know how severely to judge these poems, since what is designated as exquisite sentiment in one age will be condemned as bathos in another. It is to be noted that Symons cast out all the markedly sentimental poems of Days and Nights when he published the collection entitled Poems in 1902.

Certainly many of these verses are possessed of no distinction in beauty, in rhythm or in thought. Red Bredbury's End, The Return, A Café-Singer, The Justice of the King, Margery of the Fens and An Interruption in Court, while making a display of dynamic realism, in very few lines rise above melodramatic mediocrity. Verse like the following, from Red Bredbury's End, could not, it would seem, be called great in any age:

"'Joe,' the old man maundered as he lay his length in the bed,

'Joe, God bless you, my son, but your dad's no better than dead.'"(1)

T. Earle Welby is unwilling to attribute verse of this quality to the inspiration of Browning.

"Yet, perhaps, it is less Browning than some nameless editor of a 'Complete Reciter' who must be blamed for Red Bredbury's End, The Knife Thrower, Margery of the Fens, and only the fact that Wilde's boyish melodrama, Vera, was then unpublished holds me from suspecting that it had something to do with the origin of An Episode under the Nihilists."(2)

Of better taste, but at times a trifle maudlin are those pictures of the poor, the desolate and the fallen, which again ally Symons with the Victorian age, the age when the social background made itself heard in a voice sometimes more stridant than that of art. Still, it is rarely, as in Of Charity,(3) that Symons, forgetting his original creed that art observes injustice and suffering "but brings no balm", condemns existing social ills with the voice of a reformer. Usually his pictures, and they are pictures, give a vivid presentation of a being in misery. His A Village Mariana(4) has in it more grace, more art than

(1) Symons: Days and Nights, p. 18

(2) Welby, T. Earle: Arthur Symons, p. 20

(3) Symons: op. cit., p. 47

(4) Ibid: p. 36

many a similar theme in Wordsworth. Symons's emotion finds its way into the lines. His soul cries with the soul of his creation as in the sonnet called The Nun:

"Earth slumbers. When shall slumber seal her eyes,
Who, crying with lamentations infinite,
'Heaven, Heaven!' yet, ineradicably deep,
Hides in her heart an alien Paradise?" (1)

Symons has indeed gone to the "street and mart" for the material of these pictures of suffering. Sonnets like The Street Singer, A Winter Night, and The Abandoned demonstrate the fascination which the terrible city, the tentacular city of Verhaeren, holds for him. This was a point of affinity between him and Verlaine.

"Londres fume et crie. O quelle ville de la Bible!" (2)

"La 'grande ville'! Un tas criard de pierres blanches
Où rage le soleil comme en pays conquis." (3)

One of the loveliest poems in these pictures of sorrow has, not the horror of the city, but the breath of the sea about it. It is called The Fisher's Widow, and its fortunate metrical scheme gives the effect of the monotonous sadness of the tides.

"The boats go out and the boats come in
Under the wintry sky:

(1) Symons: Days and Nights, p. 108
(2) Verlaine: Œuvres complètes, Tome I, p. 308
(3) Ibid: I, p. 286

And the rain and foam are white in the wind
And the white gulls cry."(1)

That there are some unfortunate poems (By an Empty Gate, Magdalene on the Threshold) in these realistic sketches is not strange: realism is adjusted only with difficulty to the exigencies of verse. Symons often succeeds in infusing a complement of beauty into the petty drabness of reality by those lines which open the way from the particular to the universal, those expanding lines which are the windows of infinity. This is perhaps the fruit of that innate tendency that is Symons's, that will to dream, to transcend actuality. The Opium-Smoker seems almost a revelation of his nature.

"I drain a million ages of delight,
I hold the future in my memory."(2)

Besides the dramatic pieces and those poems in which Symons, like many of his Victorian brethren, invaded a little the field of sociology, there are in the volume certain verses in which the author goes to foreign soil for his inspiration. And since Paris was becoming the literary capital of England, it is natural that France should furnish it to him.

Some of the poems are merely translations. There is one from Leconte de Lisle,(3) one from Villiers de l'Isle-

(1) Symons: Days and Nights, p. 120

(2) Ibid: p. 26

(3) Ibid: p. 49

Adam,[1] one from Gautier,[2] one from Du Bellay,[3] and lastly a Bohemian folk song from the French. One sweet pathetic verse stands out from the last poem.

"It came with the rain fast falling
Through the dead leaves again,
Because that over a dead love
The heart must weep like rain."[4]

These translations, while excellent, are but a foretaste of the mastery which Symons attains in those from Verlaine, and of the high artistic beauty of those from Mallarmé.

In three poems, under the collective title of Scènes de la vie de Bohème there is a Verlainian quality, the Verlaine of Fêtes galantes. Whether or not Symons drew his inspiration from the French poet, there is at least in these poems a point of contact with him. One finds in them even a trace of the ironic humor so common in Verlaine and rare with Symons.

"They sauntered arm in arm, these two; the smiles
Grew chilly as the best evenings do.

Both were polite and neither cared to say
The word that mars a perfect night of May."[5]

(1) Symons: Days and Nights; p. 137
(2) Ibid: p. 18
(3) Ibid: p. 138
(4) Ibid: p. 57
(5) Ibid: p. 86

The most marked departure from actualities in the volume is perhaps in Wood-Notes, which bears the subtitle, A Pastoral Interlude. These poems hold some suggestion of the Greek Bucolic poets, but this is probably not a direct heritage as one of the pieces is from Leconte de Lisle.

The translation of a Heine ballad and a dialogue, non-dramatic in nature, between Helena and Faustus are poems of German inspiration.

Lastly one finds a certain group of verses in which the very young soul of the poet speaks, cautiously and rather unconvincingly. But the reader can already perceive that sensitive spirit which was to spell suffering for its possessor by reason of its very delicacy. Symons is bound to suffer, for not only is he an incurable idealist, but he is constantly analytical. Thus, made aware of the transitory quality of human emotions, Symons refuses to accept the rebuke to his dreams, and probes the grief of his heart. Verlaine, very much alive to his own sensations, never examines them too minutely. He counts the impulse for its momentary worth. He certainly never brooded with the intensity of Symons even during the months in the "meilleur des châteaux" at Mons. His is not the exasperation of the idealist.

A series of fourteen sonnets, entitled A Lover's Progress, is the chief clue to Symons's idealism. But these verses are not particularly well-wrought and appear utterly colorless beside the Amoris Victima of 1897. One poem

alone in the volume gives promise of Symons's ability to reveal his soul subtly and delicately.

"I hear the voice of the wind,
The voice of the wind in the night
Cry and sob and weep,
As the voice of one that hath sinned
Moaning aloud in its might
In the night when he cannot sleep." (1)

From the entire volume this poem, and the group of three called Scenes de la vie de Bohème seem alone to approach the manner of Verlaine; the former because the mood has become integrant with the wind just as it is with the rain in Romances sans paroles (2), and the latter because:

"Two and two, to and fro
They dance to the strains of Manolo." (3)

seems to have some of the delicacy of Fêtes galantes.

(1) Symons: Days and Nights, p. 42

(2) Verlaine: Œuvres complètes, Tome I, p. 155

(3) Symons: op. cit., p. 89

CHAPTER II

Common Ground

It is with Silhouettes (1892) of Symons and Fêtes galantes (1869) of Verlaine (in each case the second published poetic collection of these authors), that we have the true manifestation of the parallel paths which the two writers were destined to take in their lyric evolution. Symons here frees himself from the dramatic monologue influence of Robert Browning, from Victorian realism and social concern; Verlaine from the shackles of Parnassian tradition. Escaping from realism, from externals, each in his own way substitutes a new doctrine, one of suggestion, perhaps the keystone of the symbolist movement.

Paul Elmer More, in speaking of Silhouettes in his Shelburne Essays, says:

"The world is seen through a haze of abstraction, glimmeringly as a landscape looms misty and vague through the falling, fluttering veil of the rain."(1)

Olivero, discussing the poetry of Verlaine, feels that same indecision of outline in the French poet.

"Beside the glaring colors and hard outlines of the Parnassians, the poetical world of Verlaine appears wrapt in misty lights and blue transparent shadows."(2)

(1) More, Paul Elmer: Shelburne Essays (first series), p. 129

(2) Poet Lore: Vol. 31, p. 268

How far Symons was affected by Verlaine in this "volte-face" on tradition is a matter admitting of no definite measurement. He was profoundly interested in French poetry; his first work contains some translations of French verse; his extensive writings on "le pauvre Lélian" after his meeting with Verlaine in person (1890) ring with admiration and understanding;(1) seven years after the appearance of Silhouettes, he published a volume concerning the French symbolists in which he speaks as if their language was his own, their thoughts his; he attended the Tuesday gatherings in the rue de Rome.(2) In his translations of poems he has chosen three authors in particular, Verlaine, Mallarmé, and Catullus. These details might lead to definite assumptions and certainly admit of the general one that Symons felt the projection of French poetic ideas, those ideas which had as bases the music, not the strict sense of words; the suggestion, not the exposition of ideas; the penetration, not the revelation of self.

"Nommer suggérer, voilà le rêve," writes Mallarmé.(3)

Conscious as any romantic poet of their individuality, the symbolist poets uncovered their souls in a manner infinitely more subtle, more delicate. Here Verlaine often falls short of the true symbolist manner, for he is not in his later work at all subtle, revealing his emotions with

(1) North American Review: vol. 201, p. 743

(2) Lewisohn, Ludwig: Poets of Modern France, p. 18

(3) See page 12

undisguised frankness and asking pardon with the repentance of an inebriate. His early work, however, is free of this realistic amplification and points the way for poets such as Verhaeren and Henri de Régnier to suggest their moods.

Symons, no less keen to sensations, but better able to envisage them in retrospect, could, by his detachment from the moment, give the key to his mood without the amplification which would rob his thought of all mystery and delight. This is of supreme importance in the later work of the poets, but in the early volumes there are more original, more important characteristics, one being a music of the ear, a throbbing, delicate cadence, and the other a music of the soul, an indefinable melody, induced by the subtle blending of color, light, sound, and connotation into impressionistic loveliness. Music, that is surely the prime source of loveliness in symbolist poetry.

"De la musique avant toute chose," advises Verlaine in his Art poétique. Paul Valéry, in a preface to Fabre's Connaissance de la déesse, states "Ce qui fut baptisé: le Symbolisme se résume très simplement dans l'intention de plusieurs familles de poètes (d'ailleurs ennemies entre elles) 'de reprendre à la musique, leur bien'."(1)

Fêtes galantes and Silhouettes are both objective in a sense, but only in the way in which any poem may be called

(1) Fabre, Lucien: Connaissance de la déesse, p. 13

objective, presenting "new perceptions, not only of the exterior universe but of human experience as well."(1) Close reading reveals that this objectivity has but one function: to give a setting to the author's mood. Here are no eloquence, no harsh lines of reality, no invasion of moral concern. The volumes contain but the series of impressionistic pictures informed with the soul of their writers. Thus we have a double beauty: that of words forming or rather suggesting the outlines of a picture, that of rhythm and thought adding to the picture a subtle music of the emotions.

Notice the first line of Fêtes galantes:

"Votre âme est un paysage choisi--"(2)

Here we have the keynote of the volume, for beneath the descriptive detail of these little poems, fragile and suggestive as water-colors, lies the essence of Verlaine, an ironic, whimsical, sophisticated Verlaine with that yearning after melancholy which was his life's strongest emotion. Fêtes galantes may be no more than the evocation of a fanciful world by an employee of the Hôtel de ville, but it is the projection of his most sensitive and gentle imaginings. To realize how subjective are these XVIIIth century water-colors one has only to compare them with La fête chez Thérèse of Hugo, where one easily sees that the great romanticist was merely interested in the detail of a picturesque epoch.

(1) Grattan, W.: The Critique of Humanism p. 301

(2) Verlaine: Œuvres complètes, tome I, p. 83

Verlaine was creating a dream-world away from reality.

Similarly Symons is revealed in his second volume, a poet exceedingly sensitive to the stimuli of the senses, like Verlaine "half in love with sadness" but without Verlaine's paradoxical sense of humor which, running parallel to his sadness, gives lightness to tragedy and saves introspection from becoming bathos. Symons's great difficulty in seeing the dawn ahead of night lies in his long brooding. He looks backward, not forward. His is a land of dreams.

"In one respect the substance of these successive books (Days and Nights to The Loom of Dreams) is the same; from beginning to end we are in a land of dreams."(1)

Verlaine, on the other hand seized the moment for all its worth, saw its drama, its humor, its emotional appeal. He was able to capitalize on the many facets of human emotion; Symons can only analyze them and despair. This lack of spark in Symons drew the attention of critics. "He writes with too little humor or humanity to be a poet of great distinction,"(2) wrote a critic in 1898.

William Archer says that he finds "Symons's verse lacking in that barb, that sting, which is the sign of true inspiration."(3)

(1) More: Shelburne Essays (first series), p. 130

(2) Academy: vol. 53, p. 377

(3) Archer: Poets of the Younger Generation, p. 409

Such are the temperaments of the two poets as evidenced in their early verse, and this fundamental difference of nature is of course a hindrance in the drawing of comparisons. There is, nevertheless, in Silhouettes and to some degree in London Nights of Symons sufficient similarity in manner and treatment with the early volumes of Verlaine (Fêtes galantes, La Bonne Chanson, Romances sans paroles, and, with modifications, Sagesse) to maintain the argument that the English poet felt the influence of the French lyrist whom he so much admired.

Let us then examine Symons's Silhouettes and point out some characteristics which parallel those of Verlaine and are most easily traceable to his influence.

The most remarkable similarity in the early work of the poets is perhaps to be found in their tone-pictures where no eloquence, superficial ornament, or starkness of contour invade the picture and take away its fundamental grace. A suggestion of detail, not detail itself, brought to their verse a delicate and indirect imagery. This, combined with a haunting music of words, was the alchemy of their early verse.

Take for example the following verses where perhaps the similarity of subject will make apparent the identical treatment.

"Ses yeux qui sont les yeux d'un ange
Savent pourtant, sans y penser,
Éveiller le désir étrange

D'un immatériel baiser."(1)

"Under the heaven of her brow's
Unclouded noon of peace, there lies
A leafy heaven of hazel boughs
In the seclusion of her eyes."(2)

In their suggestive force, in the music of their mood, lines like these seem almost to bridge the forbidding gulf of language. Notice too how the diction is away from the concrete toward the purely evocative. This does much to give the faintness of outline which is the paramount element in Fêtes galantes, Romances sans paroles, Silhouettes and London Nights. Perhaps the importance of the words themselves is better shown in the following tercet and quatrain.

"Si pâle, à l'horizon lointain
Luisait un faible espoir d'aurore.
Votre regard fut le matin."(3)

"Her fleeting colors are as those
That from an April sky withdrawn
Fade in a fragrant mist of tears away
When weeping noon leads on the altered day."(4)

(1) Verlaine: Œuvres complètes, Tome I, p. 120

(2) Symons: Poems, vol. I, p. 22

(3) Verlaine: op. cit., I, p. 147

(4) Symons: op. cit., I, p. 24

"Pâle", "l'horizon lointain", "luisait", "faible espoir" by connotative power give much of the magic to these verses. Symons, likewise, choosing such words as "fleeting", "fade", "fragrant mist", and "weeping noon", prevents his lines from having other than delicate nuance. Here we have the antithesis of marmorean and declamatory poetry.

"Many of the pieces are very slight, some only just exist: a faint dust of colour, a mere breath of music issuing reluctantly from silence and swooning back into it."(1)

Lepelletier finds the same characteristic in Fêtes galantes of which he notes the "nuance imprécise et l'indécision du contour."(2)

The value of words both in their sound and their sense, is brought to exquisite use in these verses of quiet:

"Calmes dans le demi-jour
Que les branches hautes font,
Pénétrons bien notre amour
De ce silence profond."(3)

"Here there is peace, cool peace,
Upon these heights, beneath these trees;
Almost the peace of sleep or death

(1) Welby: Arthur Symons, p. 22

(2) Lepelletier: Paul Verlaine, p. 151

(3) Verlaine: Œuvres complètes, I, p. 112

To wearying brain, to labouring breath."(1)

It is by contrasting such verses as these with such a poem as Leconte de Lisle's Midi that one perceives the true depth of Verlaine's art. The Parnassian's lines are likely to appear violent and pompous in their majesty after those of Verlaine. Conversely, after steeping himself in the mood of Midi, the reader quite possibly will think En Sourdine lovely but not significant.

This absence of declamation, this love of music for its own sake, sometimes leads to a slightly different type of poetry, beautiful for its simplicity, artistic mainly by reason of its spontaneity. So it is that some of Symons's, many of Verlaine's poems are sung simply for the joy of singing. And in each case the poet's muse takes up a strain approved in his own national literature. Thus:

"Under the almond tree
Room for my love and me--"(2)

or

"Her eyes say Yes, her lips say No.
Ah, tell me, Love, when she denies
Shall I believe the lips or eyes?
Bid eyes no more dissemble,
Or lips to tremble
The way her heart would go!"(3)

(1) Symons: Poems, I, p. 69

(2) Ibid: I, p. 42 (3) Ibid: I, p. 154

are in the strain of Elizabethan madrigals, while

"J'ai peur d'un baiser
Comme d'une abeille--"(1)

has the flavor of the pastourelle and

"O triste, triste était mon âme
A cause, à cause d'une femme."(2)

seems descended from old troubadour lines.

It is truly startling to find in poem after poem identical effects produced by what is after all the same device, the music of suggestion. Autumn brings forth a long, pathetic note.

"Les sanglots longs
Des violons
De l'automne
Blessent mon coeur
D'une langueur
Monotone."(3)

"Frail autumn lights upon the leaves
Beacon the ending of the year;
The windy rains are here,
Wet nights, and blowing wind about the eaves."(4)

(1) Verlaine: op. cit., I, p. 189

(2) Ibid: I, p. 161

(3) Ibid: I, p. 33

(4) Symons: op. cit., I, p. 73.

Likewise the closing poem of Silhouettes is arresting. It is entitled For a Picture of Watteau. That the painter who probably inspired the whole volume of Fêtes galantes[1] should be also admired by Symons is merely interesting. That Symons's lyre should evoke a melody that is so closely the motif of Verlaine in En Sourdine is truly noteworthy.

"Here the vague winds have rest;
The forest breathes in sleep,
Lifting a quiet breast;
It is the hour of rest."[2]

Comparing this with "Calmes dans le demi-jour"[3], quoted above, one is again amazed at the similarity of the impressions created.

Another Watteauesque poem of Symons entitled Pierrot in half Mourning has in it almost a trace of sly wit. Pierrot, sighing for the unattainable Columbine, but finishing his musing with

"I follow, I forget
All, but she'll love me yet, she'll love me yet."[4]

has about him something of the ironic humor which prompted Verlaine in Les Indolents.

(1) Lepelletier: Verlaine, p. 161

(2) Symons: op. cit., I. p. 76

(3) See page 48

(4) Symons: op. cit., I, p. 75

"Hi! hi! hi! les amants bizarres!" (1)

Nowhere is better revealed that mingling of descriptive detail and mood, in the use of which Verlaine was an accomplished artist and Symons almost as adept, than in the series of sea pictures which bear the title At Dieppe.

Loneliness is not described in the elaborate romanticist manner, but appears as a symbol:

"The sickle moon and one gold star
Look down upon the sea." (2)

This is the same simplicity that is Verlaine's in:

"Voix de notre desespoir,
Le rossignol chantera." (3)

Symons begins an impressionistic picture with the details of a grey sky, a ghostly sea, a rising tide, then finds open expression for his mood in his poem's closing lines.

"I cannot think or dream; the grey
Unending waste of sea and night,
Dull, impotently infinite,
Blots out the very hope of day." (4)

Verlaine chooses rather as the background for his regret the calm of the sky, the peaceful sound of a church bell in the distance, and the quiet notes of a bird. But

(1) Verlaine: op. cit., I, p. 108

(2) Symons: op. cit., I, p. 17

(3) Verlaine: op. cit., I, p. 113

(4) Symons: op. cit., I, p. 16

after the lines establishing a setting for his mood, he gives expression to his thoughts in a throbbing final stanza:

----"Qu'as-tu fait, ô toi que voilà
Pleurant sans cesse,
Dis, qu'as-tu fait, toi que voilà
De ta jeunesse?"(1)

Mist and night give a sense of mystery and expectancy to Rain on the Down:

"And only the night and the rain were there
As she came to me out of the rain."(2)

Verlaine uses spring as a background for his hopes:

"Le ciel bleu prolonge, exhausse, et couronne
L'immuable azur où rit mon amour."(3)

Again in Before the Squall there is but the symbol of the heart's unrest. And, as is usual, the last lines subtly make of the poem a pattern for the mood rather than a description of the mood.

"Grey in the offing I devine
The sails that fly before the squall."(4)

The imagination is left free to expand a few details into a whole drama of the soul: impassioned seeking after

(1) Verlaine: op. cit., I, p. 273
(2) Symons: op. cit., I, p. 17
(3) Verlaine: op. cit., I, p. 148
(4) Symons: op. cit., I, p. 18

peace, ever-looming tumult, unbidden but pursuing.

The same expansion is possible from the brief couplets of the Colloque sentimental:

"Dans le vieux parc solitaire et glacé
Deux spectres ont évoqué le passé."(1)

These couplets, crisp, cold and concise, express all the finality of dead hopes and lost sensations.

One of the most beautiful mood-pictures of the series, At Dieppe, is that in which a half-veiled sun, the strange mingling of shadow and light that presages a storm, and the limitless, ageless sea are used to evoke a memory.

"I gaze across the sea, remembering her.
I watch the white sun walk across the sea
This pallid afternoon
With feet that tread as whitely as the moon,
And in his fleet and shining feet I see
The footsteps of another voyager."(2)

Verlaine's remembrances receive like stimuli from "le piano que baise une main frêle."

"Qu'as-tu voulu, fin refrain incertain,
Qui vas tantôt mourir vers la fenêtre
Ouverte un peu sur le petit jardin."(3)

The last poem of the series At Dieppe sums up the

(1) Verlaine: op. cit., I, p. 114

(2) Symons: op. cit., I, p. 19

(3) Verlaine: op. cit., I, p. 158

group with its suggestion of the mysterious power of the sea as memory-evoker and as comforter.

"O is it life or death,
O is it hope or memory
That quiets all things with this breath
Of the eternal sea?" (1)

Verlaine felt the same occult force in the ocean's majesty, but sings it with more fervor, with a touch of the eloquence which is characteristic of much of Sagesse.

"Un souffle ami hante
La vague et nous chante:
'Vous sans espérance,
Mourez sans souffrance!'" (2)

Many other poems in Silhouettes are entirely dependent for their artistry upon the blending of physical detail with emotion. At Fontainebleau with its evocation of the charm and beauty of the forest, On the Heath, with its suggestion of abandon and magnitude, are striking examples. Music in the night brings its memories, a portrait forces actuality into the shadows and makes of the past the only reality. Beneath the musicians' touch of the two poets, despair and moonlight are harmonized to a single theme.

"Le ciel est de cuivre
Sans lueur aucune,

(1) Symons: op. cit., I, p. 20

(2) Verlaine: op. cit., I, p. 284

On croirait voir vivre
Et mourir la lune."(1)

"The gardens to the weeping moon
Sigh back the breath of tears.
O the refrain of years on years
'Neath the weeping moon!"(2)

Thus the two poets sought to avoid the bluntness and brutality of the material world, not by calm reason, but by fragile yet lovely creations of their own spirit. Verlaine walks through muddy streets to Paradise; Symons dreams of Heaven on the Embankment. Their devices, as we have seen in the mood-pictures just described, are those of impressionism; removal of harsh outlines by choice of words rich in connotation and sound; economy of detail so that the imagination is left free to build and interpret; constant avoidance of the concrete image.

"Car nous voulons de la Nuance encore,
Pas la Couleur, rien que la Nuance."(3)

But there was another and important facet in their art. Diction was in large part responsible for the effect of their poetic creations, but simple acoustic touches also played their part. By unexpected pauses, vowel values and

(1) Verlaine: op. cit., I, p. 163

(2) Symons: op. cit., I, p. 67

(3) Verlaine: op. cit., I, p. 314

consonant sounds Verlaine and Symons were able to break the line, give it an interior music, relieve its rigidity, make it a trembling song. Thus their verse became:

"Plus vague et plus soluble dans l'air,
Sans rien en lui qui pèse ou pose."(1)

In the poems of short lines, so common in their early work, this aethereal music is almost always present. The short line gives a quality of breathlessness, of indetermination, of half-expressed thought.

"Mystiques barcarolles,
Romances sans paroles,
Chère, puisque tes yeux,
Couleur des cieux,

"Puisque ta voix étrange,
Vision qui dérange
Et trouble l'horizon
De ma raison,---"(2)

"White girl, your flesh is lilies
Under a frozen moon,
So still is
The rapture of your swoon
Of whiteness, snow, or lilies."(3)

(1) Verlaine: op. cit., I, p. 314

(2) Ibid: I, p. 103

(3) Symons: op. cit., I, p. 23

It was the true musician's ear, a divine gift possessed by both Verlaine and Symons that guided them safely in the channels of rhythm.

"Le ciel si pâle et les arbres si grêles
Semblent sourire à nos costumes clairs
Qui vont flottant légers avec des airs
De nonchalance et des mouvements d'ailes."(1)

Undoubtedly the recurrence of the "l", probably the fruit of instinct rather than intention, does much to give the faint and dream-like quality to these lines. Indeed one could hardly find a word more suited to the tone of the poem than "grêle". In like manner the same letter, but with a heavier English sound, and aided by the lengthening "m", gives an air of lassitude to this verse of Symons:

"But here, where dead leaves fall
Upon the grass, what strains
Languidly musical
Mournfully rise and fall?"(2)

If any word could be used to describe the early work of Symons and Verlaine, it would probably be "ethereal". The following lines from Sagesse well illustrate how Verlaine put into practice the maxim of the Art poétique which forbids the burdening and anchoring of verse.

(1) Verlaine: op. cit., I, p. 87

(2) Symons: op. cit., I, p. 76

"Écoutez la chanson bien douce,
Qui ne pleure que pour vous plaire--"(1)

"Les chères mains qui furent miennes,--"(2)

"Pourquoi triste, ô mon âme--"(3)

"Je ne veux plus aimer que ma mère Marie"(4)

and the famous Chant de Gaspard Hauser:

"Je suis venu, calme orphelin,
Riche de mes seuls yeux tranquilles--"(5)

There is a certain trembling quality in these lines, a graceful indecision which was to change in the poet's later works to a more expository tone. But certainly in Sagesse the vibrant delicacy is still there, giving a delicious music to the poems.

"Le son du cor s'afflige vers les bois
D'une douleur on veut croire orpheline
Qui vient mourir au bas de la colline
Parmi la bise errant en courts abois."(6)

Likewise London Nights (1895) preserves many of the

(1) Verlaine: op. cit., I, p. 228
(2) Ibid: I, p.,230
(3) Ibid: I, p. 238
(4) Ibid: I, p. 249
(5) Ibid: I, p. 270
(6) Ibid: I, p. 277

characteristics which signalize the volume Silhouettes and ally it to the poetry of Verlaine. The delicacy of tone picture appears, not so much in those glimpses of stage color which fill the first part of the volume as in the seven poems entitled Intermezzo: Pastoral, or that other Intermezzo entitled Venetian Nights. In many, very many of the poems, the delicacy of rhythm which rises, flutters, and wavers with the nuances of the poet's mind is ever-present.

"A flower's caprice, a bird's command
Of all the airy ways that lie
In light along the wonder land,
The wonder-haunted loneliness of sky:" (1)

"Child, in those gravely smiling eyes,
What memory sits apart and hears
A litany of low replies,
Love's music in a lover's ears?" (2)

"The piteousness of passing things
Haunts her beseeching eyes--------" (3)

"My Paris is a land where twilight days
Merge into violent nights of black and gold." (4)

As long as the delicacy of these imaginative flights

(1) Symons: op. cit., I, p. 96

(2) Ibid: I, p. 135

(3) Ibid: I, p. 167

(4) Ibid: I, p. 157

persists, there is strong kinship in the verse of Verlaine and Symons, but there are in Sagesse and in London Nights (the volume that Symons dedicated to Verlaine) certain poems which seem to admit of no affinity between their authors, and which are important because they, and not those of slight and subtle music, point the way to the poets' later work.

Symons turns from expressing the intimacies of the human heart to plumbing its depths, searching out its vagaries, lamenting its paradoxes. He seems rather a weary dreamer, a tired Catullus, grieving over constant disillusion.

"On the light illusion, the shimmering web of dreams that spun themselves almost of their own accord, begins to fall the lengthening shadows of the actual world."(1)

Symons's music was changing. His song was becoming a monotonous chant of melancholy, still in a minor key, but one of sadness rather than delicacy.

A group of poems (of the same lineage as A Lover's Progress in Symons's first volume of verse) in the later part of London Nights shows clearly this change of tone. Its title, Variations Upon Love, is significant, for this is to be the theme of almost all his later work; love is the ground tone upon which he paints the vicissitudes of the heart.

"For God's sake, let me love you and give over
Thes tedious protestations of a lover;--"(2)

(1) More: Shelburne Essays (first series), p. 133

(2) Symons: op. cit., I, p. 148

"I know your lips are bought like any fruit;
I know your love and of your love the root;--"(1)

Sometimes, in contrast to this finality of expression, the old melodies are heard, but in pattern with the new mood and in number fewer and fewer.

"For the silence of the night
Swims about me like a stream,
And your eyes have caught the light
Of a moon-enchanted dream,
And your arms glide about me,
And I fade into a dream."(2)

Verlaine, too, loses the lightness of his musical touch in many poems of Sagesse, particularly those of confession. Not that the volume is not one of the highest artistry. Gregh says:

"Les Fêtes galantes sont le chef-d'œuvre de Verlaine; mais l'œuvre la plus rare, la plus profonde aussi, où il mit le plus de lui, partant d'humanité, est Sagesse."(3)

But the cadence is often not that of "un frisson d'eau sur la mousse". It is more deeply vibrant, more rounded. Sometimes a straightforward simplicity replaces the subtler music of the sense. Verlaine in his preface to Sagesse calls his early verses "tristement légers". Here are

(1) Symons: op. cit., I, p. 150

(2) Ibid: I, p. 156

(3) Revue de Paris: Février, 1896, p. 665

examples of the new tone:

"Bon chevalier masqué qui chevauche en silence,
Le malheur a percé mon vieux cœur de sa lance." (1)

"Il ne faut pas être dupe en ce farceur du monde--" (2)

"La vie humble aux travaux ennuyeux et faciles
Est une œuvre de choix qui veut beaucoup d'amour." (3)

Yet, with Symons, in spite of the dominance of the new poetic art which was his, the old manner is not altogether lost. He is still an impressionistic worshipper of Nature and his senses remain ever alert to catch those stimuli which fire his sensitive soul. Thus in the meditative verses that form the body of the volume Amoris Victima, one finds again and again poems quickened with the impressionistic touch which raises them from the rank of the ordinary.

"I watch the moon rise over the sea, a ghost
Of burning noontides, pallid with spent desire." (4)

"And darkness coming softly down
Rustles across the fading sand
And folds its arms around the town." (5)

(1) Verlaine: op. cit., I, p. 197

(2) Ibid: I, p. 205

(3) Ibid: I, p. 213

(4) Symons: op. cit., II, p. 17

(5) Ibid: II, p. 24

This is the same distinct but indirect imagery that one can find here and there in Sagesse and which is almost lost in Verlaine's subsequent volumes. It is still present, however, in:

"Mouette à l'essor mélancolique,
Elle suit la vague, ma pensée, ----" (1)

or in

"La cloche dans le ciel qu'on voit
Doucement tinte,
Un oiseau sur l'arbre qu'on voit
Chante sa plainte." (2)

And this is the astonishing thing: when one discovers in Symons's later poems those small, impressionistic pictures, most often their counterpart exists in poems of Romances sans paroles or Sagesse. Thus:

"That, in these unfamiliar lands,
After the exile and the change,
You might but soothe me with the strange
Familiar comfort of your hands." (3)

Verlaine expresses the same thought with like delicacy and beauty.

"Remords si cher, peine très bonne,
Rêves bénits, mains consacrées,

(1) Verlaine: op. cit., I, p. 274

(2) Ibid: I, p. 273

(3) Symons: op. cit., II, p. 21

O ces mains, ses mains vénérées,
Faites le geste qui pardonne!"(1)

A gentle finality pervades these lines of quiet simplicity:

"I have laid sorrow to sleep,
Love sleeps.
She who oft made me weep
Now weeps."(2)

"Un grand sommeil noir
Tombe sur ma vie.
Dormez, tout espoir,
Dormez, toute envie."(3)

The poetic pattern is exactly the same in the following stanzas:

"What's this joy in the air?
Musical as the leaves,
When the white winds are there
Faint joy breathes in the air."(4)

"O bruit doux de la pluie
Par terre et sur les toits!
Pour un cœur qui s'ennuie,
O le chant de la pluie."(5)

(1) Verlaine: op. cit., I, p. 231
(2) Symons: op. cit., II, p. 23 (3) Verlaine: op.cit. I,p.272
(4) Symons: op. cit., II, p. 149 (5) Verlaine: op.cit. I,p.155

CHAPTER III

Diverging Currents

In Silhouettes and London Nights, as we have shown, the poetry of Symons bears strong kinship to that of Verlaine in Fêtes galantes, La Bonne Chanson, and Romances sans paroles. In the later volumes of the poets, however, there is much divergence. Sagesse marks the beginning of a change for Verlaine, the religious hymns of the penitent superseding the delicate lyrics of the poet-musician. Symons's muse, too, assumes a more sonorous rhythm, but becomes the grave strain of a disillusioned dreamer rather than the ardor of a sinner or penitent. His verse remains rather stubbornly analytical, even when his subject is the same as that which fired Catullus.

Lewisohn thus characterizes this tendency of Symons: "Symons, like the modern continentals, has sought to intellectualize the life of the senses and not to discard it from literature."(1) In this word "intellectualize" one has the key to the essential difference in the tone of Verlaine's work as contrasted with that of Symons, for Verlaine does not permit his mental processes to intrude in the domain of his emotion. His verse betrays his irresolute temperament,

(1) Bookman: vol. 48, p. 555

for his song sometimes rises to the heights of religious fervor, then subsides suddenly to the simplicity of La Bonne Chanson, or sinks to the gross level of capitulation to fleshly desire. This mutability of the poet has been expressed by Rémy de Gourmont, in words which are, fortunately, neither apotheosis nor condemnation:

--"il fut le petit enfant qui récite pieusement sa prière et le faune qui rôde pareil à l'ogre; il fut sainte Thérèse, ivre d'amour divin et aussi Sapho qui n'aimait que ses pareilles; il fut le rêveur attendri des tombées de nuit d'automne qui frissonne à l'écharpe fuyante comme à la tournoyante feuille, et il fut aussi le mauvais galant qui s'endort dans les tavernes."(1)

Of this paradoxical and complex temperament, Symons, more sedate and logical, could understand only a small part. He caught only the finer and more delicate moods of the "rêveur attendri des tombées de nuit" in the refraction of Verlaine's genius. He could not follow the French poet into the emotional state of religious ardor with its attendant conception of sin, nor would his reasonable and analytical mind allow him to profess candid simplicity. Verlaine's poetry held him by its grace, its subjective charm, its delicacy of line. As long as their province was that of the beauty of words and the picture of their moods, the two poets had a common ground, but when Symons

(1) de Gourmont, Rémy: Promenades littéraires (4e série), p. 21

begins a subtle analysis of love's casuistry and Verlaine alternates between Liturgies intimes and Odes en son honneur, their poetic affinity completely disappears. Verlaine sings a kind of antiphonary hymn with the spirit and the flesh alternately bearing the burden of the theme: Symons, who cannot veer naïvely from the carnal to the divine, remains in the limbo between the two, the limbo of a dreamer conversant with reality. And, seemingly oblivious to the pangs of conscience, Symons's poetry takes as its theme, not the expression of repentance or shame, but the analysis and vicissitudes of passion. Yet Symons must have longed for the ecstasy of religious fervor. He makes some attempt to attain it in the group of poems called Souls in The Balance, but seemingly he was all too conscious of his inability to reach that emotional ardor.

"Here in the shadowy chapel, where I stand,
An alien at the door, and see within
Bent head and benedictions of the hand,
And may not, though I long to, enter in.

.....

I have believed in Love, and Love's untrue:
Bid me believe and bring me to your saint,
Woman! and let me come and kneel with you
But I should see only the wax and paint." (1)

This inability of Symons to quit the circumscribed

(1) Symons: Poems, vol. II, p. 30

world of his senses and of his thought for the more vast realm of the divine, precludes any close resemblance between his poetic work and the religious hymns of Verlaine. The poet who could write such lines as:

"Bon chevalier masqué qui chevauche en silence" (1)

or

"O Dieu, vous m'avez blessé d'amour"; (2)

the mind which could phrase the very simple and candid Prière du matin and could sing the chants of Liturgies intimes has very little in common with Symons, deceived and tired of reality, disillusioned by the dream-world of his poetic mind. Symons is indeed a Mundis Victima, a Fool of the World, unable to utilize his one possible avenue of deliverance, the vision of immortality.

But the greater portion of Verlaine's later work is on a carnal plane and not in the exalted realm of pious enthusiasm, grandiloquent or humble. What, then, of those later volumes in which Verlaine discusses the temptations of the flesh, his emotional life with Philomèle or Eugénie? Here on the plane of reality, with the common theme of passion, do the French and English poets show a similarity in manner?

Again the answer is "no", for despite a certain resemblance of theme, Verlaine and Symons have little in

(1) Verlaine: Œuvres complètes, Tome I, p. 197

(2) Ibid: I, p. 246

common in those poems of which love is the inspiration. Verlaine's verses are filled with a direct spontaneity and hardy realism which are almost never characteristic of Symons. The French poet's realism is, in large part, induced by the use of cant words, arranged in a bantering, conversational tone, the very antithesis of Symons's art. Symons is ever the careful craftsman, conscious of the effect of the written word; but there is an even more important reason why he should not give the realistic touch to his verse. This lies in a phenomenon constantly discernible in his poems, an interest in actualities only as they relate to the past or the future.

"It is not only that he looks back on old experience, actual or imaginary. When the present, one would suppose, would be most absorbing, he is found projecting himself years forward in order to be able to gaze back at it."(1)

Thus, being as he is, the poet of love remembered, Symons produces a quite different effect from Verlaine, even when their subject matter is the same. The very similarity of sense is lost by the realistic detail on the one hand and by the enveloping vesture of dreams on the other. Symons expresses truly his own character in the following lines:

"I have loved colours and not flowers;
Their motion, not the swallow's wings;

(1) Welby: Arthur Symons, p. 37

And wasted more than half my mortal hours
Without the comradeship of things."(1)

Verlaine's avowal is much more robust:

"Beauté des corps et des yeux,
Parfums, régals, les ivresses,
Les caresses, les paresses,
Barraient seuls la route aux cieux."(2)

In the love poems, moreover, there is an essential difference between Verlaine and Symons in the depth of thought. Endowed though he is with an emotional verve far greater than that of Symons, Verlaine can record only superficial sensations and exceedingly intimate detail. Symons, by his will to dream, occasionally transcends the barrier of personal emotion. He is able to envelop the whole world within his pity.

"Beloved, there is a sorrow in the world
Too aged to remember its own birth,
A grey, old, weary, and immortal sorrow--"(3)

One instantly perceives a turn of thought infinitely more profound than any Verlaine could express, for even in his most exalted moments, Verlaine reveals a fundamental puerility of mind, which, perhaps without sacrilegious intent, enabled him to envisage the Virgin in one of his

(1) Symons: The Fool of the World, p. 27

(2) Verlaine: op. cit., II, p. 281

(3) Symons: Poems, II, p. 120

"chères amies", and, perhaps in all sincerity, permitted him to write both Sagesse and Parallèlement.

This depth of perception, in the case of Symons, takes often a tormented and perverse turn. His hatred of realities naturally led him to the remote, the artificial, and the unusual. Probably for that reason Catullus appealed to him, and indeed, many of his poems reflect the "odi et amo" theme. Symons was not at all concerned with the natural and apparent. In his preface to the second edition of Silhouettes he spoke in favor of the artificial:

"Why should art not concern itself with the artificially charming? All art, surely, is a form of artifice. Is there 'any reason in nature' why we should write exclusively about the natural blush, if the delicately acquired blush of rouge has any attraction for us?"(1)

Verlaine was not so consciously interested in the unusual and artificial. In fact he was rather eager to appear a "coeur simple", a child of moods. Verlaine's individuality sought for help and guidance, as from his wife:

"J'allais par des chemins perfides
Douloureusement incertain.
Vos chères mains furent mes guides."(2)

At other times he seeks divine aid:

"Aplanissez-moi le chemin,

(1) See Welby: Arthur Symons, p. 52

(2) Verlaine: op. cit., I, p. 147

Venez me prendre par la main,
Soyez mes guides dans la gloire
Ou bien plutôt,--Seigneur vengeur!
Priez pour un pauvre pécheur,
Indigne encore du Purgatoire."(1)

Thus during all his life Verlaine strove to rest on others,--his wife, Rimbaud, Lucien Létinois, his friends, his editor, and, human means failing, on God. Symons does not pray for guidance, but simply isolates his personality from an unfriendly world:

"I have lived in vain, I have loved in vain, I have lost
In the game of fate and silently I retire;
I watch the moon rise over the sea, a ghost
Of burning noontides, pallid with spent desire."(2)

With the general background of these fundamental differences in the poets' temperaments, let us examine more specifically their later verse. What are the characteristics that make utter aliens of these erstwhile kindred spirits?

Perhaps the most salient point of variation is to be found in the sobriety of Symons's verse in contrast with the half-bantering, half-tragic verve of Verlaine. The English poet speaks his grief with sorrowful bitterness,

(1) Verlaine: op. cit., II, p. 119

(2) Symons: Poems, II, p. 17

but "le pauvre Lélian" masks (taking care, however, not to hide) his pain with a kind of droll mockery. This has, of course, its effect on the speed of their verse, for calm resignation strengthens and fills out Symons's lines and in the verse of Verlaine bold directness generally hastens the meter.

Welby says of Symons's later verse:"A certain aloofness from humanity remains. Love, reconciling him to himself, cannot bring him into any close relation with mankind. There remains, too, a certain coldness, as it may seem, of temperament."(1)

This it is, this detached and thoughtful melancholy which isolates itself from others, that makes Symons's verse the very antithesis of Verlaine's. Brooding grief is the ever-present theme of the English poet:

"For what you are, I know you now,
For what it means I know your kiss;
Yet, knowing, need one wonder how,
Beneath your kisses, how it is
Knowing you, I believe you now."(2)

Verlaine prefers to take an intimate tone, usually a rather jocose one, in which he can be seen hiding his sorrow from the world. Symons isolates himself from the crowd; Verlaine tries in every way to awaken the crowd's

(1) Welby: Arthur Symons, p. 51

(2) Symons: Poems, II, p. 35

sympathies.

"Ils me disent que tu me trompes.
D'abord, qu'est-ce que ça leur fait,
Chère frivole, que tu rompes
Un serment que tu n'as pas fait?" (1)

It is in this spirit, in this quick, light strain, that Verlaine wrote most of the volumes to Philomène and to Eugénie. Often, even in more serious verse, his tone seems a kind of alcoholic excitation. Thus one finds the short, rapid line in several poems of Bonheur.

"Quelque chaleur va luire
Pour le cœur fatigué,
La vie enfin sourire
A cet homme trop gai:" (2)

Even when he does use a longer line, sonority is lost by reason of caesuras, unusual pauses, and directness of utterance.

"Le 'sort' fantastique qui me gâte à sa manière
M'a logé cette fois, peut-être la dernière
Et la dernière, c'est la bonne---à l'hôpital!" (3)

Symons, however, turns more and more to the longer line, and in doing so, seeks to utilize all rich vowel sounds and heavy consonant groupings which will lengthen

(1) Verlaine: op. cit., II, p. 438

(2) Ibid: II, p. 213

(3) Ibid: II, p. 231

and fill out his verse.

"Henceforth for each of us remains the world.
The gates have closed behind us, we are hurled
From the fixed paradise of our content
Into an outer world of banishment,--"(1)

Thus, even in the music of the line, are to be found the poets' artistic goals--in the case of Verlaine a direct and hardy simplicity, in Symons a thoughtful sophistication. And that they are quite utterly different in their concepts and ideas, appears again and again in their verse.

"Who said the world is but a mood
In the eternal thought of God?
I know it; real though it may seem,
The phantom of a hashish dream
In that insomnia which is God."(2)

"O Seigneur, exaucez et dictez ma prière,
Vous la pleine Sagesse et la toute Bonté,
Vous sans cesse anxieux de mon heure derniere
Et qui m'avez aime de toute eternite."(3)

Besides this difference in mood, as revealed metrically and in the thought, there is a difference in manner in the two poets. One finds in Symons a reticence and

(1) Symons: Poems, II, p. 50

(2) Ibid: II, p. 174

(3) Verlaine: op. cit., II, p. 3

intentional omission of detail, in Verlaine a coarse directness. When he named one of his volumes Chair, the French poet chose a title which indicates the crudity and boldness of the love poems. They are most often biological and a few first lines from Odes en son honneur will show to what degree this is true.

"L'écartement des bras---"(1)

"Cuisses grosses, mais fuselées---"(2)

"Riche ventre----"(3)

The animal flavor which permeates these poems is totally lacking in the analytic verses of Symons. The English poet uses sensation to describe some particular mood, some specific psychological state; Verlaine simply describes sensation for its own sake.

"Je suis riche de tes beaux yeux,
De ta poitrine,
Nid follement voluptueux,
Couche ivoirine,
Ou mon désir, las d'autre part
Se ravigore
Et pour d'autres ébats repart
Plus brave encore."(4)

(1) Verlaine: op. cit., II, p. 403

(2) Ibid: II, p. 413

(3) Ibid: II, p. 421 (4) Ibid: II, p. 315

Symons uses physical details merely for their psychological implications.

"When your eyes fawned against my eyes,
With beaten hunger, and with cries,
In bitter pride's humility,
Love, wholly mine, had come to be
Hatred of love for loving me."(1)

In dealing with the physical, he has the ability to soften its crudeness with a background of thought and to temper its brutality with refinement of expression.

"But I shall never kiss your lips again,
Nor hold your hand, nor feel your arms enchain
Body and soul in one extreme embrace,
Nor find again the kingdom of your face."(2)

In this poem, as in almost all of Symons's later verses, the reader feels the importance of the statement that Symons is the poet of remembered love, not of actual passion. It is, therefore, only natural that his poems should give an entirely different impression from those of Verlaine. The latter's verse is emphatically on the theme "Baste! aimons-nous",(3) his heroine cries, "Dieu, qu'il fait chaud! Patron, à boire!",(4) his lines are concerned with alternating

(1) Symons: Poems, II, p. 159

(2) Ibid: II, p. 50

(3) Verlaine: op. cit., III, p.431

(4) Ibid: III, p. 2

blows and caresses, and over them is the aura of alcoholic fumes, giving the verse a bizarre and tormented turn.

To appreciate the importance of these two manners of approach, Symons's interest in the past and Verlaine's preoccupation with the present, the reader has but to examine the book Amour. This is the last volume in which Verlaine envisages love in retrospect, and this point of view gives his poems a calm, a sobriety, a melancholy beauty which are quite near the qualities that characterize Symons's work, early and late. The tone of

"O mes morts tristement nombreux
Qui me faites un dôme ombreux--",(1)

and of

"Vous vous êtes penché sur ma mélancolie,"(2)

would seem to indicate a temperament like that of Symons, musing, sad, and deliberate. This is, of course, but another proof of Verlaine's art: in the entire volume he was writing a kind of threnody for Lucien Létinois, and his lyre yielded to a softer touch and spoke in a minor key. But in the volumes which followed Amour, this tone is no longer to be found, but an impetuous, rapid strain, that of

"Hélas! tu n'es pas vierge ni
Moi non plus. Surtout tu n'es pas

(1) Verlaine: op. cit., II, p. 118

(2) Ibid: II, p. 47

La Vierge Marie et mes pas
Marchent très peu vers l'infini--"[1]

The lack of beauty in Verlaine's later volumes has been felt by many. Jean Rameau wrote in La Plume (février, 1896)

"Les meilleurs vers de P. Verlaine, mon cher confrère! Oserai-je dire que ce sont ceux qu'il écrivit, il y a vingt-cinq ans, au temps où personne ne parlait de lui? Depuis lors--heureusement pour sa gloire--il en a fait beaucoup de mauvais, et c'est pourquoi on va lui dresser quelques statues."[2]

These differences, that of meter, that of content, and that of manner of approach, serve to indicate that Symons and Verlaine are utterly dissimilar in their later verse. What then of that chief element that had bound them together and that allies them with symbolism, the element of suggestion? After all, T. Earle Welby was able to describe Symons's early verses as:

"Certain effects of colour, which might have been brushed off a moth's wings and which the first breath will scatter; certain movements, of a dancer seen perhaps from the wings; certain notes of just audible music; certain moods which flutter through the mind and are gone--."[3]

(1) Verlaine: op. cit., III, p. 49

(2) See Mendès, Catulle: le Mouvement poétique français de 1867 à 1900, p. 298

(3) Welby: Arthur Symons, p. 22

Verhaeren, in the Revue blanche (15 avril, 1897) could say that often Verlaine's lines seemed to him:

--"à peine un remuement dans l'air, un son de flûte dans l'ombre, au clair de lune; une fuite de robe soyeuse dans le vent; un frisson de verres et de cristaux sur une étagère."(1)

In Verlaine, whether from choice or necessity, suggestion was on the wane in Sagesse and was a lost art in the volumes published after Amour. Given over to the idea of confessing, rather than of intimating, he no longer produced those fragile but veritable masterpieces in which a single descriptive detail or a particular sound effect serves to excite all the imaginative forces of the mind.

The last important traces of suggestive power are to be found in Jadis et Naguère, famous as the book which contains the Art poétique. Since, however, the volume is really an anthology of verse written between 1870 and 1886, many of the poems which are remarkable for their evocative magic probably date back to the period of Romances sans paroles. In any case one can still find the hesitant and and charming note of Verlaine's early years in:

"Ah! vraiment c'est triste, ah! vraiment ça finit trop mal!
Il n'est pas permis d'être à ce point infortuné."(2)

(1) See Mendès, Catulle: op. cit., p. 299

(2) Verlaine: op. cit., I, p. 308

Certain stanzas still show that calm and serenity which henceforth were to be almost utterly banished from his poems.

"Et nous voilà très doux à la bêtise humaine,
Lui pardonnant vraiment et même un peu touchés
De sa candeur extrême et des torts très légers." (1)

"L'alouette au matin, lasse, n'a pas chanté.
Pas un nuage, pas un souffle, rien qui plisse
Ou ride cet azur implacablement lisse
Où le silence bout dans l'immobilité." (2)

The fragility of Fêtes galantes is that of:

"La nuit rêveuse, bleue et bonne,
Pâlit, scintille et fond dans l'air,
Et l'ouest dans l'ombre qui frissonne
Se teinte au bord de rose clair." (3)

The simple gentleness of La Bonne Chanson appears in:

"Donne ta main, retiens ton souffle, asseyons-nous
Sous cet arbre géant où vient mourir la brise
En soupirs inégaux sous la ramure grise
Que caresse le clair de lune blême et doux." (4)

(1) Verlaine: op. cit., I, p. 312

(2) Ibid: I, p. 314

(3) Ibid: I, p. 371

(4) Ibid: I, p. 318

The volume also contains Vendanges, one of the most beautiful of Verlaine's poems.

"Les choses qui chantent dans la tête
Alors que la musique est absente.
Écoutez! c'est notre sang qui chante...
O musique lointaine et discrète." (1)

These are, as we have said, almost the last vestiges of Verlaine's sustained suggestive art. "La musique lointaine et discrète" was not to appear in the amatory and religious volumes that followed Jadis et Naguère.

Symons, on the other hand, never broke with the past. Often, of course, "the notes of just audible music" became definite tones. But, even though more sonorous in their music, the poems still contain the impressionistic detail which softens the harsh lines of reality.

"The broad and liberal flood of day
Ebbs to thin twilight and night soon
Out of the wells of dark fills up
The valley like a brimming cup
With silver waters of the moon." (2)

Often the strain is even lengthier and more solemn:

"Do you remember that long twilight? Grey
Unending sand, a low grey sky, a wall

(1) Verlaine: op. cit., I, p. 321

(2) Symons: The Fool of the World p. 40

Of grey low cliffs, the sea against the sand
Flat, coloured like the sand, white at the edge." (1)

Here, certainly, is little fragility and lyric grace. The music is almost prosaic in its heaviness. But Symons always felt the importance of creating an impression, and his choice of detail consequently gives his poems their suggestive beauty. And, occasionally, among the deeper, more thoughtful verses, he continued to place lines of rare subtlety, filled with the charm of half-silence.

"Swallows flying across the moon,
The trees darken, the fields grow white;
Day is over, and night comes soon:
The wings are all gone into the night." (2)

Thus lived on in the disciple certain remembrances of the master's voice, the voice which had said--

"Et l'air a l'air d'être un soupir d'automne,
Tant il fait doux par ce soir monotone
Où se dorlote un paysage lent." (3)

(1) Symons: op. cit., p. 94

(2) Ibid: p. 34

(3) Verlaine: op. cit., p. 277

CONCLUSION

We have seen how Verlaine and Symons, beginning their poetic careers under influences which were not suited to their kind of genius, quickly discovered their true lyric manner. We have noticed how that delicate, throbbing cadence, discovered, one might almost say, by Verlaine, was utilized by Symons, and how the device of suggestion was used so effectively by both poets.

This similarity of manner, as we have shown, did not endure. The verse that Verlaine composed during his years of declining genius lacks altogether the suggestive charm which is perhaps the element of greatest beauty in his early books. Frankness replaces reticence, coarseness vanquishes beauty, and facility does its best to atone for failing talent. Symons, on the other hand, loses nothing of the past. True, the music of his verse changes, the thought deepens, but he usually keeps that vagueness of contour and that economy of impressionistic detail which characterize his early verse.

Verlaine's influence is certainly discernible in Symons's poetry. It seems entirely probable that Fêtes galantes and Romances sans paroles taught the Englishman the secret of blending details gracefully into a mood, and quite probably from these same books he learned the fascination of the half-expressed and the loveliness of the hesitant, trembling line.

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