



Poetics of the City: Urban Characters and Images in Arthur Symons's Poems¹

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Abstract

This study dealt with the representations of the city along with characters and images in Arthur Symons's (1865-1945) selected poems. Symons was a significant poet of English fin de siècle period with his poems and literary works. He developed the inheritance he got from the Victorian verse and paved the way to modernism. Therefore, he became one of the key figures of modernism by means of his treatment of city life in his poems, for example, he employed certain places and locations from music halls to brothels, graveyards to prisons. As for the critical framework, Henri Lefebvre's space theory was applied in this paper because he explored space from a social perspective which rendered scholars to concentrate on the city with all its components as well. This paper aimed at revealing the relationship between the city and poetry by analysing the urban elements in Symons's poems with regard to Lefebvre's theory.

Keywords: Arthur Symons, Urban Space, City, Poetry, Fin de Siècle.

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Şehrin Poetikası: Arthur Symons Şiirlerinde Kentsel Karakterler ve İmgeler

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Öz

Bu çalışmada Arthur Symons (1865-1945)'ın seçili şiirlerinde karakterleri ve imgeleriyle şehrin temsili incelenmiştir. Symons şiirleriyle ve edebi çalışmalarıyla İngiliz fin de siècle döneminin önemli bir şairidir. Viktorya döneminin sonu ile Edwardiyân dönemi arasında kalan fin de siècle dönemi İngiliz tarihinde kendine özgü bir dönem olarak kabul edilebilir. Symons Viktorya dönemi şiirinde devraldığı mirasın üzerine koyarak Modernist edebiyata giden yolun önünü açmıştır. Dolayısıyla şiirlerindeki şehir hayatını ele alış biçimiyle Modernist edebiyatın kilit isimlerinden biri olmuştur, örneğin, müzikholden geneleve, mezarlıklardan hapishanelere kadar uzanan pek çok yeri ve mekânı şiirinde kullanmıştır. Kullandığı mekânsal imgeler bağlamında bakıldığında Symons fin de siècle döneminin şiirini biçimlendiren temel şairlerden biri olarak belirir. Çalışmanın teorik altyapısı için Henri Lefebvre'in mekân teorisi kullanılmıştır çünkü Lefebvre mekânı sosyal bir bakış açısından değerlendirmiştir; bu da pek çok akademisyenin şehri tüm elemanlarıyla incelemelerine olanak sağlamıştır. Bu çalışma, Lefebvre'nin mekân teorisini uygulayarak Symons'ın şiirlerindeki kentsel unsurları analiz ederek kent ve şiir arasındaki ilişkiyi ortaya koymayı amaçlamaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Arthur Symons, Kentsel Mekân, Şehir, Şiir, Fin de Siecle.

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Introduction

In 1837, Victoria became the Queen of the United Kingdom, which started a new period. Since the period between the second generation of Romantics and the Victorian poets is quite close, it becomes inevitable that Victorian poetry “developed in the context of Romanticism” (Christ, 2007, p.2). The main inheritance of the Victorian verse was lyricism, that is, “lyric voice” which was “autonomous,” “self-conscious,” “atemporal” and “male” (Slinn, 2014: 335). The Victorian poets not only embraced some aspects of Romanticism, but also questioned them, and this aspect of Victorian poetry can be considered as a political attitude.

The political tendencies during the Victorian Era also influenced the course of poetics. Slinn (2014, p.335) claims that “Victorian poetry is ... more politically, intellectually, and emotionally complex” revolving around various themes such as “public themes,” “social politics,” “gendered bodies,” “nation-building” and “private crisis.” The general tendency of the Victorian poets was utilitarianism, and they often preferred to write in accordance with the expectations of the dominant ideology. Nevertheless, several others rebelled against the dominant class by writing which can be regarded as an emotional resistance against the authority. The spiritual resistance is mostly formed under the influence of the ancient Greek poetics.

During the Victorian period, emotional resistance caused the development of the ideas about sexuality despite the implicit attitude toward eroticism. The attitude was tacit because of strict moralism and sexual repression. In this sense, Adams (2014, p.124) claims that the word “Victorian” is a “by-word” suggesting “a rigorous moralism centered on sexual repression.” Regarding the act of repressing the sexuality, Foucault entitles the first part of *The History of the Sexuality* as “We ‘The Other Victorians.’” In the Victorian era, “the other Victorians” (prostitutes, pimps, clients, psychiatrists, and hysterics) were those who were forced to live in certain places such as brothels and mental hospitals (Foucault, 1978, p.4-5). What happens if one speaks about sex when it is repressed? According to Foucault, “[i]f sex is repressed, that is, condemned to prohibition, nonexistence, and silence,” and speaking about it is closely associated with “the appearance of a deliberate transgression” (6). He expands his idea by further stating that “[a] person who holds forth in such language places himself to a certain extent outside the reach of

power; he upsets established law; he somehow anticipates the coming freedom" (6). From the point of Foucault's opinion, speaking about sexuality indicates a resistance against the suppression.

Fin de siècle in England was a distinct period of cultural transformation which is marked with the clash of hopefulness and despair. On the one hand, scientific and technological developments raised people's hope about the coming century. The telephone, wireless telegraphy, the gramophone, X-rays were the significant scientific inventions of the age. Also, studies in humanities provided new perspectives with the development of human sciences like sociology and psychology. On the other hand, a sense of an ending fell all over Europe concerning economics and politics. The Russian famine of the decade terribly affected not only Russia but also Europe (Laqueur, 1996: 5). In Britain, a gradual decline of the growth rate was influential, and British industry failed to keep up with the others. Especially Britain's economic power was challenged by the countries with rapid economic growth like Germany and America. Stephen Arata depicts the decline of Britain as a world power, according to Arata (1990, p.622), Victorian confidence was deteriorated by "the loss of overseas markets for British goods, the economic and political rise of Germany and the United States, the increasing unrest in British colonies and possessions, the growing domestic uneasiness over the morality of imperialism."

The spirit of the age was designated by a single term, *Fin de Siècle*. The French term "fin de siècle" means the end of the century, that is the end of the nineteenth century, but it carries some variety of secondary meaning as well. When the connotations of the phrase are considered, the fin de siècle indicates negative denotations such as decline, decadence and cultural pessimism. The idea of an ending attracted attention in the United States, too. In the first volume of an American journal, an article titled "What is Fin de Siècle?" was published to explain both the term and the cultural climate of the age. In this one-page article, the fin de siècle was claimed to be "lately suggestive of everything new and odd" and a kind of "label for all mental and artistic efforts of the coming years" (1893, p.9). The first impressions were rather pessimistic, but the gloomy atmosphere disappeared with the beginning of the twentieth century, and some new books were written about the literary, social and cultural condition of the English fin de siècle.

At the beginning of the twentieth century, poetry was not the leading genre because as Perkins (1977, p.12) wrote, prose fiction took over "tradi-

tional place" of poetry in the modern period. One of the reasons for the indifference towards poetry was the change of the taste of the readers who tended to read prose. The reading public of the Victorian age gave priority to fiction; thus, some poets like "Meredith and Hardy were driven from poetry to fiction" (Evans, 1966, p.15). The tendency to read prose can be traced in the numbers of books. At the end of the nineteenth century, people generally preferred to read prose, and "70 percent of the books borrowed from British public libraries were prose fiction, the rest were likely to be other varieties of prose" (Perkins, 1977, p.13). The decrease in the number of people reading poetry affected the publishing market; some periodicals allocated a little place for poetry. Another reason was economic; publishing houses made little money.

After all, poetry attracted attention among the literary circles, especially in periodicals, journals and anthologies such as *The Yellow Book*, *The Savoy*, and *The Century Guild Hobby Horse*. Regarding the literary circles, the Rhymers' Club was a significant group of poets who came together, read and discussed their poems at the Cheshire Cheese, a pub in the city centre of London. The members of the club included Yeats, Ernest Rhys, Ernest Dowson and Lionel Johnson. Although the Rhymers were "the most celebrated group of poets in the 1890s," they were not a unified and identical group; what held them together was the passion for attacking "the sentimentality and didacticism in Victorian verse" (Beckson, 1992, p.72). The Rhymers were against the Victorian verse because they "were alienated from the prevailing bourgeois Victorian culture;" therefore, the Rhymers wanted to "establish a cultivated island of their own" (73). Despite their enthusiasm, the unity did not last long; only two volumes of anthologies were published in 1892 and 1894, then the club broke up, some of them affiliated themselves with *The Yellow Book*.

The Yellow Book despised the English middle-class audience, and so did the poetry of the nineties. Thain (2007, p.223) carries Arata's claim one step further and declares that the fin de siècle authors were "frequently middle-class Victorians," yet the poetry of the eighteen-nineties was both "anti-Victorian and anti-bourgeois." As a result of such an opposing attitude, Victorian poetry gradually expired during the period of the fin de siècle whereas a new kind of poetry developed. The poetry of the nineties rejected the form of Victorian verse; for example, poets composed short lyric poems as a reaction to the long lyric poems in the form of dramatic monologue and verse narrative. Symons (1919, p.8) also mentions the break with the traditions of the previous era and wrote in his *The Symbolist Movement in Literature*, "[i]t is all an attempt

to spiritualize literature, to evade the old bondage of rhetoric, the old bondage of exteriority." His statement affirms the detachment from the Victorian poetic form emphasising the spirit of the poetry in the nineties. Regarding this poetic separation, Symons paved the way to Modernist literature with his poems that deal with city life. The relationship between the city and Modernist literature can be traced in the history of English poetry as well.

In the progress of literature, writers always maintained their contact with the city in general by employing it either as setting or a subject matter, and the city particularly became an inseparable element of modern literature. In his *Dionysus and The City*, Monroe Spears (1970, p.71) claims that the "city is the literal environment and scene, and hence a part of the subject, of most modern literature; it is the background which produces the typical modern man." The similar tendency can be followed in English poetry as well, for example, in the first half of the eighteenth century, which is called the Augustan age, several good examples of urban poetry were produced (74). However, this brilliant blooming of urban poetry did not continue in the following years. According to Spears, "English poetry since the mid-eighteenth century offered few examples of successful rendering of the City" except Blake's "London" and Wordsworth's "Westminster Bridge" (74). It is simply because the Romantics' interest in natural landscape did not allow the city to be seen in the romantic poems, yet again the city was not at the centre of attention during the Victorian era. The poet-Laurette of Victorian England, Alfred Lord Tennyson's cities are not of diverse kinds; they are mostly medieval. Browning did not represent a different image of the city in his poetry; his poems were generally set in Renaissance Italy. Thus, the poets of the nineteenth century were not concerned with the city. In the twentieth century, the Modernist poets such as T.S. Eliot and Ezra Pound began to deal with the city explicitly. By the same token, Yeats was not included in the group of Modernist poets because, for Peter Barry (2000, p.5), Yeats was not "conspicuously urbanist" while the others were so. Accordingly, Barry's argument indicates that the city, once again, was remarkably handled in Modernist English poetry. However, towards the end of the nineteenth century, the leading poets of the English fin de siècle poetry such as Ernest Dowson and Arthur Symons employed the images of the city. Among the theoreticians dealing with space, Henri Lefebvre (1901 – 1991) becomes one of the most prominent figures because he constructs his theory by viewing space from a social perspective which is related to a political framework.

In his *Right to the City*, Lefebvre (2000: 157) claims that “[a]s much the science of the city, art and the history of art are part of a meditation on the urban which wants to make efficient the images which proclaim it.” Lefebvre’s assertion has two distinct points, on the one hand, art has equal importance with the science of the city in terms of thinking on the issue of urban. On the other hand, art has the power to turn the plain images into productive representations. Therefore, the power of art can produce vivid urban images that announce the presence of the city. Similarly, Lefebvre’s idea provides an opportunity to analyse the city as an artwork. In his “Space and the State” Lefebvre (2009, p.229) states that it is possible to “analyze the urban (the city) as a *subject* (conscience and consciousness, degrees of consciousness, the activities of groups).” At the same time, the city can be analysed as “an *object* (the location and the site, flows); as a work (monuments and institutions)” (229). Lefebvre carries on his argument by comparing the city to “a language” and suggesting to evaluate it from three different dimensions, the “*paradigmatic*,” the “*syntagmatic*,” and the “*symbolic*” (230). The symbolic is significant since it allows us to study “the meaning of monuments, special places” to analyse the city (230). The theoretical framework for such a study, however, can be found in Lefebvre’s *The Production of Space* in which he introduces his “spatial triad.”

The first element of Lefebvre’s spatial triad is “spatial practice” that contains “production” and “reproduction” and ensures “continuity” and “cohesion” (1991, p.33). The second element is “representations of space” which is the conceptualised space. It is the space of “scientists, planners, urbanists, technocratic subdividers and social engineers” (38). To Lefebvre, it is “conceived” space, that is, “the dominant space in any society” (38-9). The last one is “representational spaces” which is the “lived” space with images and symbols. Lefebvre (39) holds that it is the space of “inhabitants,” “users” and of “some artists,” as well as “writers” and “philosophers.” Thus, writers, especially poets produce their representational spaces by means of symbols, metaphors and images to escape from the everyday reality and the power embodied in representations of space. Therefore, this study explores the connection between the city as a social construct and literature, especially the poetry of Symons through Lefebvre’s theory of space. From this perspective, this study deals with the connection between the city and Symons’s poetry and aims to determine how the city is depicted in his poems.

“Flashing eyes of the streets:” City and Urban Images in Symons’s Poetics

Lefebvre (2003, p.2) conceptualises the situation of society as “urban” and uses the term “urban society.” Regarding urban society, one of the key elements of urban life is the street where people come together and socialise. Lefebvre evaluates the function of the street and claims that “[t]he street is a place to play and learn. The street is disorder. All the elements of urban life, which are fixed and redundant elsewhere, are free to fill the streets and through the streets flow to the centers, where they meet and interact, torn from their fixed abode. This disorder is alive. It informs. It surprises” (18-19). From the point of Lefebvre’s argument, the street may epitomise elements of urban life. Accordingly, it is possible to analyse Symons’s poems through the representation of urban space.

As a poet of London, Symons represents the images from the city life; for example, his poem “In the Train” contains vivid urban images. The speaker depicts an unnamed town while travelling on the train, that is, he does not depict the train but the city. The portrayal of the city is an aspect of Symons’s style as a decadent poet; he represents city life through its basic elements to signify the artifice of the city. The streets of the town are depicted as dynamic; “Lights, red, yellow, and brown, / From curtain and window-pane, / The flashing eyes of the streets” (1896, p.81). The scene Symons draws in the first stanza of “In the Train” is highly colourful, but there is also “a blackness broken in twain / By the sudden finger of streets” (81). In the second stanza of the poem, Symons deepens the contrasting images of the streets,

*Night, and the rush of the train,
A cloud of smoke through the town,
Scaring the life of the streets;
And the leap of the heart again,
Out into the night, and down
The dazzling vista of streets! (1896, p.81)*

In the quoted lines, two different images of the city are juxtaposed to each other, one is the cloud of smoke over the city, and the other is the colourful streets. The origin of the smoky cloud is not stated, but it can be estimated that industrialisation might have caused smoke over the city. Now, the smoke affects citizens by “scaring the life” on the streets — the speaker states that his heart begins to beat quickly when one goes into the city at night due to the contradictions of the bright lights and the smoky cloud. In the last line, the

speaker underlines urban space by stating that the distant view of the town is dazzling, that is, it is attractive and impressive.

According to Lefebvre's theory, streets are the embodiment of chaos and disorder, and his idea can be followed in Symons's poem "In the Train." In "In the Train," Symons uses the vivid image of the town as the representation of urban space through the image of the vivid streets. From the standpoint of Lefebvre's theory of space, the street is disorder; it is possible to perceive his idea in Symons's poem. In the depiction of the town, Symons represents disorder by employing the clashing image of the cloud and the colours of the streets. Moreover, in the last line, the speaker reveals that the vista of the town streets embellished with colourful lights bewilders its beholders. In this light, it can be claimed that Symons produces Decadent image of urban space in "In the Train" and he does not make any comment about the situation of urban space.

The disordered streets influence the life of its strollers, and its consequences sometimes might be harmful. In "The Metropolis and Mental Life," Simmel claims that "[t]he psychological basis of the metropolitan type of individuality consists in the *intensification of nervous stimulation* which results from the swift and uninterrupted change of outer and inner stimuli" (italics original) (1950, p.409-10). Simmel's argument highlights the urban individual's nervous breakdown which results from the chaos of urban space. Such adverse psychological effects noted in Simmel are evident in "London: Midnight."

In "London: Midnight," Symons draws attention to the function of both space and time. It is midnight in London, and the speaker says, "I hear, in my watch ticking, the vast noise / Of Time's hurrying and indifferent and inarticulate voice" (1913, p.54). The speaker is a metropolitan man with a watch obsessed by the notion of time. According to Symons, time is "hurrying," "indifferent" and "articulate." At midnight, he also hears the noise of "the passing of innumerable feet" which indicates the crowd of wanderers within the city (54). In the middle of the poem, Symons gives a depiction of both the city and the world,

*And the immeasurable patience and the infinite
Weariness of the world's sorrow rise and cry
Out of the silence up to the silent sky
In that low voice of the city,
So passionately and so intolerably crying for pity,
That I wonder at the voice of Time, indifferent, apart,*

And at the lonely and sorrowful and indifferent voice of my heart. (1913, p.54)

In the quoted lines, Symons represents the disordered city which can be described as the outer change noted by Simmel. Moreover, this outer change causes nervous stimulation, and in "London: Midnight," the world is represented as a "weary" and "sorrowful" place, and the city cries for pity. In the last two lines, the speaker repeats that time is "indifferent" and states that his heart is "lonely," "sorrowful" and "indifferent," which is caused by the internal stimuli of the speaker. Accordingly, Symons constitutes the image of the estranged individual in the metropolis through the portrayal of the lonely stroller. Once again, he exemplifies the estranged individual in urban space, yet the reason for the alienation is not revealed throughout the poem. Therefore, it can be claimed that Symons's recognition of urban space might be considered as an implicit interpretation of city life during the period of the fin de siècle.

Symons, furthermore, employs a different illustration of urban space in some of his poems as a recurring theme. In "The Barrel-Organ" from *Amoris Victima*, he represents urban space as a weary place while discussing the theme of separation from his lover. A barrel organ is a musical instrument which is performed by an organ player through a clockwork mechanism. The speaker characterises the wires of the organ as "troubled" and their voice as "enigmatical" and "tremulous" (Symons, 1917, p.44). His past desires which are not disclosed in the poem cry loudly to him in a sorrowful way; he asks,

*What remembering desires
Wail to me, wandering thus
Up through the night with a cry,
Inarticulate, insane,
Out of the night of the street and the rain
Into the rain and the night of the sky? (1917, p.44)*

In the quotation above, Symons defines the time of the poem as night and space as the streets of the city, but he does not reveal whether his disclosed desires have been fulfilled or not. Interestingly, he does not identify what his desires are, yet again his unidentified desires ramble aimlessly through the night by uttering a cry that is "inarticulate" and "insane" (44). Moreover, the picture Symons draws is quite gloomy; the weather is rainy, and the streets can be wet at night, and the speaker is not sure about what "remembering desires" will show grief. The city image of wet streets embodies disorder, and the speaker in this depiction is portrayed as someone who is alienated due to

a love affair. In the second stanza of "The Barrel-Organ," he clarifies his psychological status:

*Inarticulate voice of my heart,
Rusty, a worn-out thing,
Harsh with a broken string,
Mended, and pulled apart,
All the old tunes played through,
Fretted by hands that have played,
Tremulous voice that cries to me out of the shade,
The voice of my heart is crying in you. (1917, p.44)*

As Symons indicates above, the speaker's heart is drawn as "rusty" and "worn-out," and because of the inarticulate cry, his heart's voice becomes "inarticulate" (44). The end of the stanza reveals that the crying voice belongs to a nameless other. Symons concludes "The Barrel-organ" by explaining the cause of his sorrow as an unknown beloved, and the subject of disordered urban space turns into a major theme in the poem. Consequently, Symons expresses the situation of the estranged individual in urban space by his deliberate use of musical imagery; thus, abstract space, employed in his poetry, represents the situation of the alienated modern man. As the following section explores, Symons also offers space of sanctuary while evaluating the theme of escape in his poems.

"My Life is like a Music-hall:" Urban Space and Characters in Symons's Poems

Decadence cannot be separated from urban life because it is established in the city; hence, the poets of the Rhymers' Club often come together at the Cheshire Cheese in London and discuss their pieces. However, the city is not usually represented in a developing state; the dark side of the city is also depicted in the fin de siècle literature. Thus, it is possible to witness various images of prostitutes in Symons's verse. In this sense, Symons who depicts the city-dwellers with their problems in a vivid city setting with various sceneries is, perhaps, the most urban poet of the eighteen-nineties. With the poems about prostitutes, Symons's first poetry book *London Nights* differs from his other books. Beckson (1992, p.67) claims that *London Nights* is regarded as Symons's most Decadent work. Jan B. Gordon (1971, p.430) recognises *London Nights* as the representative of "the darkness of the soul's knowledge." In the collection,

he writes about prostitution which was a significant theme in the nineteenth-century literature.

Prostitution is a phenomenon, probably as old as the history of humanity, yet the relation between harlotry and social problems differ in each period. In the nineteenth century, the Industrial Revolution, which began in the eighteenth century, reached its peak in Victorian England and engendered many technological developments that changed the condition of daily life. These developments changed the structure of social life; it gave rise to the middle class, on the other hand, the lower class got poorer, for example, child labour was widespread and long working hours became commonplace. Furthermore, industrialisation also resulted in prostitution; "the low rate of wages that the female industrial classes of [London] receive" caused the woman to look for alternative income ideas to make money (Mayhew, 1862, p.213). Consequently, prostitution became a reality in the Victorian age; as Henry Mayhew reported in *London Labour and the London Poor*, a police magistrate asserted that there were 50000 prostitutes about the year 1793, and later the Bishop of Exeter claimed that there were approximately 80000 prostitutes in London during the mid-nineteenth century (211). Since prostitution became a social problem, the intellectuals of the nineties reflected the problem in their texts.

Regarding the problem of prostitutes, Mayhew (1862, p.213) states that there were three types of prostitutes; "[f]irst, those women who are kept by men of independent means; secondly, those women who live in apartments, and maintain themselves by the produce of their vagrant amours; and thirdly, those who dwell in brothels." In terms of the English fin de siècle literature, Symons is the prominent figure who treats the theme of prostitution most in his poetry. Symons usually gives voice to the third type prostitutes from the lower class. Concerning the theme of space of prostitutes, one of the most remarkable poems in Symons's *London Nights* is "Idealism" which is a sonnet. In the first four lines, he describes the situation of a prostitute; according to him, the woman does not have a soul but flesh,

*I know the woman has no soul, I know
The woman has no possibilities
Of soul or mind or heart, but merely is
The masterpiece of flesh: well, be it so.
It is her flesh that I adore; I go
Thirsting afresh to drain her empty kiss. (1895, p.43)*

In the quoted lines above, Symons does not adore the soul or heart; the only thing he cares for is the flesh of the woman. Symons views her body as an outstanding artistic work; he devalues her body to the level of an object. In this sense, Symons coins a distinctive metaphor of his age through “masterpiece of flesh;” that is, a woman is brightly illuminated in the poem apart from her soul or mind. This emphasis on the body and flesh is also one of the significant aspects of the eighteen-nineties.

Referring to the fin de siècle literature, Thain (2007, p.227) states that “[f]inding beauty and sensory intensity through narcotics and illicit sexual desire were, similarly, particularly common strategies for the Decadents.” Through the “masterpiece of flesh,” Symons praises the beauty of the female body in such an illicit sexual relationship. Furthermore, Symons (1895: 43) states that he eagerly desires “Her splendid body” and compares the body of the prostitute to “Earth’s most eloquent / Music, divinest human harmony.” Then, her body is compared to an instrument which will wake beneath the touch of the speaker and play some melodies that he has never known but always fancied.

The body of the prostitute becomes an instrument which will take the speaker to an unknown place. According to Foucault (1978, p.6), when sex is repressed through prohibition and silence, the “expression” of sex becomes “the appearance of a deliberate transgression.” When analysed from Foucault’s perspective, Symons transgresses the established norms of the Victorian society; he expresses his admiration towards prostitutes, especially the title, “Idealism” supports his appreciation. Moreover, the number of prostitutes in England increased much during the Victorian era as a result of the capitalist system. Accordingly, it can be inferred that Symons points out the representation of urban space which is corrupted by industrialism by praising the body of a harlot. While highlighting abstract space, Symons unsettles the norms of society and transgresses them.

The issue of morality is evident in Symons’s other poems as well since morality is one of the major problems of the age. Jackson (1922, p.29) contends that “[t]he intellectual, imaginative and spiritual activities of the Eighteen Nineties are concerned mainly with the idea of social life or, if you will, of culture.” Therefore, morality becomes one of the most important characteristics of the age, especially among the intellectuals. Accordingly, the problem of prostitution should be understood under these circumstances. Concerning prostitution, Paglia (2001, p.26) argues that “prostitutes, the world’s oldest profession, stand as a rebuke to sexual morality” In order to portray the

fraudulent morality of the fin de siècle society, Symons employs those characters in his verses.

Symons's poetic sensitivity about the issue of morality can also be observed in "To One in Alienation." The poem consists of two parts; in the first one Symons depicts the situation of a harlot who dresses to meet someone stranger, and the speaker does not sleep with the woman. A man comes and takes her; all night the speaker dreams of her. He says, "You in his arms, awake for joy, and I / Awake for misery / Cursing a sleepless brain" (1895, p.63). Because of his love, he cannot sleep that night, and at dawn, her vision comes again to his "unrested" and "recurrent" brain; he thinks "[her] body, warm and white, / Lay in his arms all night" (63). At the end of the first part, he expresses, "I who adore you, he who finds in you / (Poor child!) a half-forgotten point of view" (63). At this point, Symons underlines the state of a childlike prostitute, but he never gives any details about her; that is, the reader is not informed about how and why she has fallen.

In the second part of "To One in Alienation," Symons begins with a noticeable opening; "... I lay on the stranger's bed, / And clasped the stranger-woman I had hired" (1895, p.64). It is revealed that he has lost the connection with the prostitute, yet he cannot forget her. Even lying with other women, he still remembers her, and he says,

*For I lay in her arms awake,
Awake such a solitude of shame,
That when I kissed her, for your sake,
My lips were sobbing on your name. (1895, p.64)*

Symons bravely depicts a scene from sexual intercourse. However, his representation refers to the relationship between art and morality. In this context, Paglia (2001, p.29) argues that "[a]rt has nothing to do with morality. Moral themes may be present, but they are incidental, simply grounding an art work in a particular time and place" Her idea of morality is not different from Symons's; the two writers defend the same idea that art and morality should be reckoned as different matters. She, furthermore, claims that "[a]rt is a temenos, a sacred place. It is ritually clean, a swept floor, the threshing floor that was the first site of theater. Whatever enters this space is transformed ... Literature's endless murders and disasters are there for contemplative pleasure, not moral lesson" (29). Accordingly, in "To One in Alienation," Symons again reduces love into a relationship between a man and a

prostitute and transforms her into an artistic figure for “contemplative pleasure” not for a simple moral lesson. From this point of view, Symons as a non-conformist writer highlights the artificial Decadent love affairs through employing the imagery of prostitutes who are the typical urban figures of the eighteen-nineties.

Escape is a remarkable theme in Symons’s poetics, and it is possible to trace the relationship between urban life and the theme of escape. Symons tried to escape from several terrible events; for example, Munro (1969, p.119) states that when Symons’s dog died, he “turned inward and sought escape from the intolerable present” and “found that his most effective escape was into a world of art.” Moreover, affirming Munro’s argument Muddiman (1921, p.52) claims that escape is “Mr. Symons’s favourite word.” Also, Muddiman underlines the significance of art for Symons that “Mr. Symons has turned to Art so that he may not feel the eternal flames taking hold of him” (54). Accordingly, it can be claimed that Symons employs the theme of escape and uses art in his poetics as a means of space of sanctuary. The first poem of *London Nights*, “Prologue” is a good example of the relationship between escape and art; Symons states,

*My life is like a music-hall,
Where, in the impotence of rage,
Chained by enchantment to my stall,
I see myself upon the stage
Dance to amuse a music-hall. (1895, p.3)*

Firstly, Symons represents a thoroughly urban image in the quoted lines above; he compares his life to a music-hall, a remarkable symbol of city life. Music hall was a concert hall which “featured a mixture of musical and comic entertainment,” and widely liked and expanded in the Victorian era due to “the rapid growth of urban population” (“Music Hall and Variety”). In the first poem of *London Nights*, Symons’s employment of urban imagery signifies his explicit connection to the city. According to Lefebvre (1991, p.101), urban space provides social space; “urban space gathers crowds, products in the markets, acts and symbols. It concentrates all these, and accumulates them.” In “Prologue,” Symons highlights urban space using music-hall as a token of the city life.

Secondly, the music-hall represents an enclosed space; in this space, Symons (1895, p.3) feels himself “in the impotence of rage, / Chained by enchantment to my stall.” It can be stated that he feels the fear of being enclosed

in the music-hall. Gordon (1971, p.430) interprets Symons's enchainment, "[u]nlike real dancers who move in total freedom, the poet-speaker is locked in a prison of his own creation." Symons reveals the sense of alienation, which can be considered as one of the results of urban space. At this point, Lefebvre (2003, p.92) claims that "segregation becomes commonplace: by class, by neighborhood, by profession, by age, by ethnicity, by sex. Crowds and loneliness. Space becomes increasingly rare." Thus, Symons, in this crowded place, feels himself alienated and chained, yet he does something to defeat the sense of confinement employing his poetic skills.

Thirdly, with the elements of music and entertainment, music-hall represents the space of art where one can "watch the dancers turn" (Symons, 1895: 3). In this place, Symons states, "It is my very self I see / Across the cloudy cigarette" (3). He regards himself as one of the performers acting on the stage in the music-hall; in this sense, Gordon (1971, p.430) claims that Symons attempts "to immortalize the moment and so escape from a stifling corporality, the poet participates totally in the fantasies of his own creation. By participating in the art form of his own creation, he can transform his life into art." Representing himself as both the actor and the spectator in the music-hall, Symons regards his life as an artefact. Lefebvre (1991, p.11) does not suppose that "the exercise of hegemony might leave space untouched" because "it is exercised over society as a whole." One can escape from the hegemony and alienation through producing representational spaces, and Symons reproduces his own representational space through the poem, "Prologue." The employment of representational space distinguishes Symons from the poets of the eighteen-nineties.

Symons is different from the other fin de siècle poets because he uses various settings from the city. Goldfarb (1963, p.232) suggests that "[m]usic halls, bars, the London streets, and the rooms of prostitutes provide the settings for [Symons's] poems." Goldfarb's argument can be followed in Symons's five-poem sequence, the "Décor de Théâtre" in which he illustrates particular images from the music-hall. In the first piece, "Behind the Scenes: Empire" he illustrates the interior of The Empire. The title, Nicholas Freeman claims, refers to the music-hall, the Empire Theatre of Varieties, which was open in 1884 and turned into a music-hall in 1887. Symons (1895, p.21) depicts a scene from the theatre where "The little painted angels flit" who are "Blonde, and bewigged, and winged with gold." Then, Symons combines the image of the theatre with the atmosphere of the poem,

*The gusty gaslight shoots a thin
Sharp finger over cheeks and nose
Rouged to the colour of the rose.
All wigs and paint, they hurry in:
Then, bid their radiant moment be
The footlights' immortality! (1895, p.21)*

In the above quotation, Symons first represents the dimly lit stage of the theatre and how it reflects light on the performers' red faces. In the last stanza of "Behind the Scenes: Empire," Symons draws attention to the stage prop and makeup on the actors because the elements of makeup like wigs and paint enable performers to disguise their own identities and act totally as someone else. Apparently, it is possible to draw a relationship between actors and Decadent dandy as they share the same unnatural condition. Similarly, their common point indicates the "high artifice in style," which is one of the main aspects of Decadence (Abrams, 1999, p.55). Furthermore, it can be deduced that Symons glorifies the period and allows this moment to be immortal by composing his poem. He suggests that art provides immortality for the artist, and the Empire music-hall turns into an eternal image in "Décor de Théâtre." From the point of Lefebvre's space theory, the Empire music-hall represents a spatial practice with the performance on the stage and spectators in their seats. Symons, however, transforms it into a representational space by attributing the characteristics of work of art to the music-hall.

Conclusion

Symons's poetry captures one of the fundamentals of the poetics of the nineties – the relationship of the troubled situation of the individual in urban life. Symons's consideration of urban space carries two different aspects. On the one hand, Symons illustrates the individual estranged from urban life; in "London: Midnight" and "The Barrel Organ," Symons touches upon the theme of the estranged individual in the urban space and in "In the Train," he focuses on the emotional consequences of the estrangement. It can be deduced that Symons is concerned with urban space through the different representations of city life. One of the critical figures in urban space Symons produces is the representation of the prostitutes. In "Idealism," Symons treats the body of a prostitute and its portrayal in urban space. In "To One in Alienation," he simplifies the notion of love and introduces it as a relationship be-

tween a man and a woman. Symons's stance toward the prostitutes also manifests the artifice of love in Decadence; hence, his concern with those typical urban figures connects these poems with urban space.

Symons's concern with representational spaces is traced with regard to the theme of immortality. The poem, "Prologue" exemplifies his consideration of the subject of immortality. In this poem, Symons discusses how city life confines the individual; at the same time, he offers music-hall as a place to flee away from urban restrictions by representing himself as an actor on the stage. It can be drawn that Symons believes in art, and through the power of art, Symons offers an escape from the restrictions in society. Next poem, "Behind the Scenes: Empire" illustrates how Symons transforms a spatial practice, the Empire music-hall into a representational space. Consequently, it can be inferred that Symons employs real places and figures to produce representational space rather than applying imaginary places.

It has been displayed that Symons's concern for the psychological effect of urban space marks his poetry as fundamentally important. He depicts the alienated individual characters in the city life, and it can be maintained that Symons treats urban space. Furthermore, in terms of the depiction of the estranged characters in urban space, Symons deals explicitly with the representations of prostitutes as well. Symons does not depict urban space negatively; he produces representational spaces from the elements of urban life; for example, the Empire music-hall is represented as an element of representational space. Symons's production of space does not revolve around natural space much; instead, he presents the problems in the urban life of the eighteen-nineties.

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