



GROTESQUE AND PERFORMANCE IN THE ART OF AUBREY BEARDSLEY

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Conclusion and Aftermath

In Aubrey Beardsley's entry for *The Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Alan Crawford states that "it is actually hard to see who Aubrey Beardsley was." Writing back in 2004, Crawford argues that the artist's legacy has been in the hands of academics, collectors, and connoisseurs, stifling significant progress in understanding him: he "has been parcelled out among different intellectual allegiances – biography, connoisseurship, cultural theory, bibliography, race and gender studies, reception studies," to ultimately stand "fragmented."¹ Twenty years later, such an evaluation feels decidedly out-of-date. Indeed, in 2016 Linda Gertner Zatlin's *Catalogue Raisonné* presented an outstanding piece of scholarship on Beardsley's artistic oeuvre. This comprehensive work allows for a well-informed and insightful assessment of Beardsley's drawings, piece by piece. The 2022 critical edition of his writings by Sasha Dovzhyk and Simon Wilson took another step forward by fully showing the claim of an unexpurgated version of *Under the Hill* to enter the Decadent literary canon, the extent of Beardsley's reading, the relation of his literary work to his art, and his ingenious way of co-opting the reader in contributing to his illustrations.² A further critical edition of his correspondence would make a highly significant tribute.³

Challenging and daring as an artist, Beardsley poses questions, throughout his wide-ranging production, regarding customary approaches to art and literature. By innovating tactics that Decadence employed to pave the way for avant-gardism, sophisticated creation, the

1 Alan Crawford, "Beardsley, Aubrey Vincent (1872–1898)" (23 Sept 2004), *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, <https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/1821>

2 *Decadent Writings of Aubrey Beardsley*, ed. by Sasha Dovzhyk and Simon Wilson, MHRA Critical Texts 10, Jewelled Tortoise 78 (Cambridge: Modern Humanities Research Association, 2022).

3 Such a critical edition was announced by Zatlin but has yet to materialise.

interrelation of the arts, and the intertwining of modes of expression, he stands as a central figure. He pioneered major aesthetic reversals, upturned the relation between periphery and centre and made margin significant in art. He promoted artwork printed in numbers as genuine and legitimate, extended and ousted the boundaries of the book by endorsing an “all margin” volume. And he revolutionised the canon by renewing the grotesque tradition as pivotal. His multifaceted talent, extensive literary knowledge, and resourceful use of press media call for an integrative, multidisciplinary approach inclined to de-fragment him. In this book, I endeavour to bring together seemingly dispersed views on Beardsley through interdisciplinary studies and differential comparison of the artist’s work and persona. Although this book is no global reassessment of Beardsley, I will conclude by making explicit five modest principles I have applied in my attempt to fathom his art and its reception. These are not offered as unconditional precepts and unquestionable recommendations, but rather as the broad foci I have seen as most useful in exploring his legacy both closely and from a distance.

First, I found it fruitful to investigate one of Beardsley’s innovative motifs, as I have done with the foetus, in a way that takes into account its entire aesthetic evolution. If one abides by Brian Reade’s estimate (of the foetus as minor obsession) or Ian Fletcher’s observation (its disappearance after 1893), it would be tempting to dismiss this complex motif as short-lived, and in doing so overlook its plasticity, malleability, and use as a graphic nucleus for other works. No less crucially, I have attempted to temper autobiographical readings – favoured by much previous scholarship – in order to privilege the motif’s aesthetic weight. The influence of contemporaneous evolutionary theories, however implausible by modern standards, reinstates Beardsley’s work outside the dominant autobiographical bias. It brings him closer to shared preoccupations of the period and highlights his attuned audacity and innovative talent. It further indicates how assumptions based on science expound aesthetic creativity and artistic breakthroughs.

Second, I think it is extremely useful to pay attention to aspects of Beardsley’s oeuvre considered unimportant or secondary by conventional standards of “major” and “minor” works. The *Bon-Mots* vignettes are a good example. When seen through the lens of grand accomplishments, they seem insignificant. Yet, when reassessed through

Beardsley's reversal of centre and periphery, and his inversion of margin and centre, the grotesques open new aesthetic pathways fuelling his artistic experience far from his more famous work in, for example, *Le Morte Darthur*. His grotesques bring into being a rich test bed of new shapes, supply him with an ample scale of design possibilities, and equip his nib with accrued flexibility. They quarry foreign antecedents but often transmute them beyond recognition. They build a varied fin-de-siècle grotesque vocabulary, confirm the period's experiments with hybrid forms, and grow into a vital input of eccentric creation to nourish further a proto-form of surrealism. When set in perspective within fin-de-siècle print culture, they join the period's probing of novel ways to illustrate, think, and shape the book.⁴

Third, I think it is important to set Beardsley in context, read his work by comparison with others, and through the lens of shared preoccupations. Every period evolves under a galaxy. In fin-de-siècle skies speckled with numerous stars, he is a meteor no less dazzling. We can better grasp his avant-garde stances and the period's intellectual and aesthetic landscape when we explore his nuanced kinships with other artistic luminaries – as well as lesser-known contemporaries – to bring out similarities, parallels, and differences. Beardsley studies are still overwhelmingly monographic and centred on Britain. To reassess him in a wider and varied milieu reveals an international Beardsley, shining brightly across Europe and the United States.

Fourth, to truly understand Beardsley I think it is necessary to see him in the context of media-driven modernity and burgeoning print culture. He was the leading artist of a technical revolution, printing black-and-white drawings from line-blocks with images circulating rapidly for a low price in a mass market. His linear style opened new trajectories for graphic art and it is no coincidence that he incarnated the "Beardsley period," that is, a time characterised by the work of a young prodigy and the era of clear-cut black-and-white graphics that were easily reproducible. In the Victorian twilight, he also was a sophisticated book artist. Photomechanical engraving and cheap reproduction processes allowed his pen-and-ink drawings to be replicated next to letterpress to great advantage. Several of his drawings exist only in reproduction. He offered images that were not

4 On this more general question, see Évanghélia Stead, *La Chair du livre: Matérialité, imaginaire et poétique du livre fin-de-siècle* (Paris: PUPS, 2012), repr. 2013.

illustrations but freely related to text or inserted to texts in a way that still made them central to the book's meaning.

Finally, printed matter stands as the backbone of Beardsley work, and this was also reflected in his work's mass dissemination. His fame grew thanks to periodicals and I have often assessed journals, magazines, and the press in this book. The press allowed him to create his public persona, play with it, and broadcast it, in a way that ultimately went far beyond his control. Rather than critically assessing his art, press articles often simply spread it through endless duplication and international distribution, magnifying the artist's poses. The artist had chosen to shock and impress, using body art even before the term was coined. But his work also transmitted poignant semblances to critics moved to empathy by his untimely end. Differential comparisons between different types of periodicals across different countries within a "Europe of reviews" allow us to see how these images were shaped and disseminated.

Much of this book has focussed on Beardsley's reception during his lifetime and immediately after his death. This conclusion further points to the way Beardsley has been received and reinterpreted through multi-medial forms of expression and by other artists throughout the twentieth century. Beyond his iconic images, why was his legacy so prevalent? What outstanding contribution has he made to modern art? Performance, the claim of black-and-white to fine art status over and beyond traditional divisions, the international dimension of his influence, and a pervasive stimulus for other artists emerge as the foremost driving forces stemming from his work. When studied comparatively, these shed light on how the arts dialogued and co-created in the *fin de siècle*; and how Beardsley's appeal fuelled others' aesthetics and choices in wider-ranging contexts than usually perceived.

Multimedia Performance

The twentieth century has come to consider *performance art* as an artwork or exhibition invented by the artists themselves through their actions, attested in documentation, at a precise time, in space, and involving their body, presence, and relation with the public. Performance in Beardsley's case is threefold: he used his drawings as a stage to present fleeting *fin-de-siècle* shows and fictitious dramatic settings; he adopted exaggerated

behaviour and a dandified stance to create a carefully directed public persona; he projected himself onto the social stage through his drawings and in photographs which were enthusiastically relayed by the press. As the Nicaraguan poet Rubén Darío put it in verse:

Aubrey Beardsley glides
like a disdainful sylph.
Charcoal, snow and ash plied
give the dream soul and skin.

*Aubrey Beardsley se desliza
como un silfo zahareño.
Con carbón, nieve y ceniza
da carne y alma al ensueño.*⁵

Beardsley's performance art did not develop in museums or the street, but in press interviews, periodicals, drawings, all published and widely circulated. Yet, its conceptual depth is evident, as shown by Evans's photographs. In its break away from convention and quest for new modes of expression, it foreshadows the performances of Dadaism by a couple of decades. It produced many reactions, mostly on paper, which Beardsley steered with a predilection for scandal but also a growing sense of aesthetics. Although his own differ from twentieth-century performances, since they are not live or publicly demonstrated (but for Beardsley's remarkable entrances or incarnations) and refrain from rebuke or social criticism, they are, however, piquantly related to his aesthetic experiences and aim to generate strong reactions. Even if his major accomplishment is the mark he left on the graphic arts, his black-and-white oeuvre tended to move away from paper, beyond books, and materialise in three dimensions.

In a little-known event on 2 June 1908, Beardsley's drawings escaped their book and bindings onto a stage at the grand studio of a Parisian princess who had decided to entertain her guests with a spectacle far from ordinary. Fernand Ochsé, multi-talented painter, stage-designer, composer, author and diseur, produced twelve tableaux vivants

5 Rubén Darío, "Dream," *El canto errante, ilustraciones de Enrique Ochoa* (1907); in *Obras Completas*, 22 vols. (Madrid: Administración Editorial "Mundo Latino," n.d. [1918]), XVI, 84, v. 16–20. Beardsley appears in good company: Shakespeare, Heine, Hugo, Verlaine, Nerval, Laforgue, and Mallarmé. He is the only one with Verlaine to earn a whole stanza.

named *Engravings* (*Eaux-fortes*) after poems by his brother, Julien Ochsé, inspired by Beardsley's plates.⁶ Previously staged at the Ochsé household in Neuilly-sur-Seine, and become "popular in Paris society,"⁷ the tableaux were performed for a hundred guests at the mansion of Princess Edmond de Polignac. A rich American, born Winnaretta Singer (of the sewing machine dynasty), the princess was a music and art lover, a well-known patron of the arts, and a Wagner enthusiast. If only for that detail, the Beardsley show may rival the German composer's idea of the *Gesamtkunstwerk*.

As in numerous other cases that capitalised on Beardsley, the event attracted the attention of the press. The tableaux were displayed in trios, each headed by a "frontispiece" and heralded by "invisible" music (replicating Julien Ochsé's title *L'Invisible Concert*) led by the young conductor and composer Désiré-Émile Inghelbrecht: "A foreword explains and introduces it [the show], and a musical prelude provides a harmonious opening, while the stanzas of the poem, recited by the author's brother, accompany and paraphrase each new vision. An interlude indicates the pauses between the different parts," wrote a press reviewer.⁸ The black-and-white walls, flooring, and dark draperies of the stage were made after Beardsley's designs. The flats carried an array of his most recognisable hallmark motifs, including tall candles burning high. The three sequences, known as "The Black Page," "The Park," and "The White Page," grouped drawings from *Salome* and other works. They rose against the stage background, first in black, then in black-on-white, finally as on a white page, to the sound of Fernand Ochsé reciting and music. Then they came to life:

And as if escaped [...] from the sheets of paper that usually hold them back and keep them still, fleetingly restored to life and taking on the form of real actors, the figures in these drawings emerge from the darkness

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- 6 Julien Ochsé, "Eaux-fortes (à la manière d'Aubrey Beardsley)," in *L'Invisible Concert* (Paris: Bibliothèque Internationale d'Édition, E. Sansot et Cie, 1908), 101–14.
 - 7 Sylvia Kahan, *Music's Modern Muse: A Life of Winnaretta Singer, Princesse de Polignac* (Rochester, NY: University of Rochester Press, 2003), 154.
 - 8 Alexandre de Gabriac, "La Vie à Paris: Un spectacle d'art," *Le Figaro* (1 June 1908): 1: "Un avant-propos l'explique et le présente, et un prélude musical lui fait une entrée harmonieuse, tandis que les strophes du poème récitées par le frère de l'auteur accompagnent et paraphrasent chaque nouvelle vision. Un interlude indique les haltes séparant les différentes parties."

and follow one another, casting their light or shadow over the white or black backdrops – human appearances that reveal the place they hold only by the mere outline of their contours, white on black and black on white.

*Et comme échappées [...] des feuillets qui d'habitude les retiennent et les immobilisent, rendues à la vie passagèrement, et prenant corps sous la forme de véritables acteurs, les figures de ces dessins sortent de l'obscurité et se succèdent, promenant leur clarté ou leur ombre sur les fonds de blancheur ou de nuit – apparitions humaines n'accusant la place qu'elles occupent que par le seul tracé de leurs contours, blanc sur noir, et noir sur blanc.*⁹

Fleshing out the plates, waking up the book, the actors (including “shaggy gnomes and hydrocephalic dwarfs”) were costumed, made up and coiffed after Beardsley’s drawings.

Select guests flocked to the entertainment. The audience included aristocrats, the upper crust, and some of the finest in letters and the arts: the Grand Duke Vladimir, uncle of Emperor Nicholas II; the Ambassador of the United States; Princess Murat; the Marquis and Marquise de Ganay; Prince and Princess Pierre de Caraman-Chimay; Countess Edmond de Pourtalès; Henri de Régnier and his spouse, Marie, known by the pen-name Gérard d’Houville; Jacques-Émile Blanche, Beardsley’s portraitist; Marcel Proust and his friend Lucien Daudet; the Italian count Giuseppe Primoli; Lucien Muhlfeld of *La Revue blanche*; and artists Ernest Helleu and Leonetto Cappiello.¹⁰ Freed into space out of the darkness, the printed word became a three-dimensional leafing through an imaginary volume while a musical recital gave the performance its tempo. As the avant-garde show followed a choice dinner, all senses were involved.

Period accounts compare it to “a suggestive album” with pages turned by a graceful hand,¹¹ or a silent masque of Beardsley’s *fantoches* mannequins “emerging, morphing and melting into the night.”¹² To others, such as Edmond Jaloux, *habitué* of Beardsley aesthetics and the Ochsé performances at their idiosyncratic Neuilly home, the show in the grandiose setting of the Polignac mansion seemed sad and sullen: “It is

9 *Ibid.*

10 See Ferrari, “Le Monde et la Ville,” *Le Figaro* (4 June 1908): 2; Benoît Duteurtre, *La mort de Fernand Ochsé: Récit* (Paris: Fayard, 2018), 57–58.

11 Gabriac, “La Vie à Paris: Un spectacle d’art.”

12 De Tanville, “Le Monde,” *Gil Blas* (3 June 1908): 2: “*surgissant, évoluant et se fondant dans la nuit.*”

the funeral for Cythera," reportedly alleged Marie de Régnier.¹³ Although appreciations diverge, the multimedia performance credits Beardsley's art with an aura that dispersed well beyond drawing and print culture. That evening, Winnaretta Singer's guests massively pledged Sergei Diaghilev and Gabriel Astruc's plan to free the famous-to-be ballet company from the dominance of the Russian Imperial Theatres. Thanks to the remarkable Beardsley soirée, Diaghilev's troupe "became an independent entity, henceforth known as the Ballets Russes."¹⁴ Avant-garde performances flourished in interaction.

A silent film adaptation of Wilde's *Salome*, directed by Charles Bryant and Broadway star Alla Nazimova, who also played the heroine, extended Beardsley into yet another medium in 1922–23. The stylised costumes and minimal sets in black and white by talented set designer and art director Natacha Rambova were consciously designed after Beardsley's plates.¹⁵ It was called at the time "a painting deftly stroked upon the silversheet,"¹⁶ but proved a flop, at great financial expense. Yet, it has recently been rediscovered, considered as the first American art film, and favourably assessed: "Even by today's standards, the film's art direction reached for the outer limits of avant-garde."¹⁷

Collecting the Beardsley Pieces

These are but small, alluring scraps of evidence from period reviews and memoirs teeming with data, mentions, and allusions to the taste for showmanship and the spectacular that drove a whole era. Beardsley's creation had come to an early end, but his aftermath saw his production reused and reinterpreted by imitators, devotees, and ingenious artists. They adopted the same methods of appropriation, creative homage, and transformation that he himself had used, taking their very inspiration from his work even so far as to become part of life.

13 Edmond Jaloux, *Les Saisons littéraires: 1904–1914* (Paris: Plon, 1950), 51.

14 Kahan, *Music's Modern Muse*, 154.

15 See Carlos Carmila, "Salome de Oscar Wilde | Charles Bryant | Vose. | 1923" (25 Nov 2013), *YouTube*, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Pt0DSbnf7q8>

16 "Little Hints," *Screenland* (Sept 1922): 41.

17 Martin Turnbull, "Salomé," *National Film Registry*, <https://www.loc.gov/static/programs/national-film-preservation-board/documents/salome.pdf>

Already in 1895, a Japanese critic remarked that Beardsley's drawings, particularly from the *Yellow Book*, had given rise "within a single year" to "a strong group of imitators," shaping interior decoration and public taste in the United States through "recent newspaper illustrations and obtrusive posters."¹⁸ Coteries were branded "corrupt" after the *Yellow Book* crowd. Society belles lay in hospital beds "pillowed and counterpaned with a hundred muslin frills to look like Aubrey Beardsley's *Rape of the Lock*."¹⁹ Writer Francis de Miomandre lived in an interior à la Beardsley, lace-bedecked, with black objects stationed on white ground and the artist's works in ebony frames.²⁰ Such *décor* was but a pretext to elaborate theories on the non-realist or oneiric novel. Indeed, Edmond Jaloux alluded to fiction as a domain "where I myself also carried the wrought-iron lantern that Beardsley suspends from the fist of his Mercuries in rose-spangled cloaks."²¹

Beardsley's influence on fin-de-siècle and avant-garde graphic design, beyond the manifesto appeal of several drawings, has not gone unheeded. Matthew Sturgis has made a useful distinction between mere "followers" who "tried to assume his mantle" and the "few who were able to transmute the influence of Beardsley's intensely personal vision into their own."²² He counted among the latter Charles Rennie Mackintosh, the Macdonald sisters, Leon Bakst's early designs for the Ballets Russes, "Kandinsky, Klee, Matisse and Picasso."²³ Yet, there is prolific and productive middle ground in between such clear-cut categories in the intricate way some of Beardsley's so-called copiers and clones elaborated on his drawings. In this book, Karel de Nerée tot

18 Sadakichi, "Aubrey Beardsley from a Japanese Standpoint," *Modern Art*, 3:1 (Winter 1895): 22.

19 Diana Cooper, *The Rainbow Comes and Goes* (London: Rupert Hart-Davis, 1958), 82 and 140.

20 Jaloux, *Les Saisons littéraires*, 41–42.

21 Jaloux, *Correspondance avec Henri et Marie de Régner: 1896–1939*, ed. by Pierre Lachasse (Paris: Classiques Garnier, 2019), 141: "où j'ai promené aussi la lanterne en fer forgé que Beardsley suspend au poing de ses Mercuries au manteau semé de roses" (letter to Henri de Régner, 12 Sept 1910). Jaloux alludes to *Le Boudoir de Proserpine* (Paris: Dorbon aîné, 1910), his collection of oneiric fictions where Beardsley appears in the conclusive text (p. 318).

22 Matthew Sturgis, *Aubrey Beardsley: A Biography* (London: Harper Collins Publishers, 1998), 357.

23 *Ibid.*, 358.

Babberich's piece after Beardsley's *Incipit Vita Nova*, analysed in Chapter 2, straddles new ground.

Many scholars have published lists of artists and writers influenced by Beardsley, but these usually provide little more than names and an occasional image. There is still much to explore and refine. What follows might also read as an overwhelming catalogue, and I could have limited it to a selection of examples in chosen directions. Nevertheless it is useful I think to conclude with such an imposing directory, even if devoid of analysis, in the hope of spurring detailed research, particularly beyond Britain and through comparison. The variety and length of the inventory testify at a glance to Beardsley's widespread impact.

In "The Long Shadow," Stanley Weintraub pioneered such an investigation on Beardsley's influence in 1976, suggestively recalling ballet (Diaghilev and Bakst), writing (Harley Granville-Barker, the young D. H. Lawrence, early James Joyce, Carl Van Vechten, Ronald Firbank, Roy Campbell, Rubén Darío, and William Faulkner), and mentioning pell-mell design, drawings, film, criticism, French literature, Matisse and Picasso, Charles Ricketts, Laurence Housman, Alan Odle, Eric Gill, Edward Gordon Craig, Arthur Rackham, Will Barnett, and others.²⁴ In his *Dictionary of 19th Century British Book Illustrators and Caricaturists*, first published 1978, among several "Schools of Illustration," Simon Houfe singled out a special list labelled "Arts Influenced by Aubrey Beardsley," the only one under an individual artist's name. Fourteen artists convene, ranging from American Will H. Bradley, to Irishman Harry Clarke, Dane Kay Nielsen, German Hans-Henning von Voigt (known as Alastair and commented in this book), and a large assembly of Brits of varied fame and achievement: Stewart Carmichael of Dundee, Annie French (alias Mrs G. W. Rhead), Fred Hyland, Francis Ernest Jackson, Gilbert James, John Kettlewell, William Brown Macdougall, Alan Elsdon Odle, George Plank, and Austin Osman Spare.²⁵ Later Houfe added to the list Sidney H. Sime, Mabel Dearmer, Ilbery Lynch, Léon Solon for ceramics, James Hearn who signed himself "Weirdsley Daubery," the American Frank Hazenpflug, the Swiss Paul Klee, and Germans Thomas Theodor Heine,

24 Stanley Weintraub, "The Long Shadow," in Weintraub, *Aubrey Beardsley, Imp of the Perverse* (University Park, Penn., and London: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1976), 261–69.

25 Simon Houfe, *The Dictionary of 19th Century British Book Illustrators and Caricaturists* (Woodbridge: Antique Collectors' Club, 1996), 362.

Emil Preetorius, Marcus Michael Douglas Behmer, and Julius Diez.²⁶ In an appendix on a similar theme, a 1985 Italian exhibition on Beardsley added Ronald Egerton Balfour, Max Beerbohm, Edmond Xavier Kapp, Edgar Wilson, Heinrich Vogeler, Umberto Boccioni, Hermann-Paul (through *Le Courrier français*), Ephraim Moses Lilien, Nikolai Petrovich Feofilaktov, and Anatoli Afanasyevich Arapov.²⁷ The 2020–21 Tate/Musée d'Orsay Beardsley exhibition added Edward Tennyson Reed, René Gockinga (who specialised in Decadent literature and was nicknamed the “Dutch Beardsley” for illustrating Wilde’s *Salomé*), before expanding to several works, record sleeves, and even wallpaper from the 1960s,²⁸ as the 1998 V&A exhibition had already done.²⁹ In the Tate/Musée d'Orsay catalogue, a contribution on “Beardsley and Russia” by Rosamund Bartlett signalled Konstantin Somov, Alexander Benois, Vsevolod Maksymovych, Nikolai Kalmakov, along with significant avant-garde theatre, dance, and literary events.³⁰ Joichiro Kawamura’s insightful article on “Beardsley and Japan” further offered an entirely new harvest of Japanese affiliates with a telling frontispiece by Eitaro Takenaka and a vignette by Kiyoshi Hasegawa.³¹

Many more could join the ranks, from renowned Victorian illustrator Arthur Rackham (who, fascinated by Beardsley, had successfully parodied him)³² to a French article on “Fine Art in the Army,” mentioning in passing “lieutenant Dupouey’s curious drawings recalling Aubrey Beardsley.”³³ Such a fleeting mention shows the pervasive extent of Beardsley’s art, which would have never achieved such a resounding reverberation if not for periodicals and reproduction. Much fine

26 Houfe, “Beardsley and his Followers,” in Houfe, *Fin de Siècle. The Illustrators of the Nineties* (London: Barrie and Jenkins, 1992), 65–81, particularly 79–81.

27 *Aubrey Beardsley 1872–1898*, ed. by Brian Reade, Susan Lambert, and H. Lee Bimm (Rome: Fratelli Palombi Editori, 1985), particularly 216–29.

28 *Aubrey Beardsley*, ed. by Stephen Calloway and Caroline Corbeau-Parsons (London: Tate, 2020), 171–83.

29 See Stephen Calloway’s last chapter, “The Aftermath and the Myth,” in his *Aubrey Beardsley* (London: V & A Publications, 1998), 204–19.

30 Rosamund Bartlett, “Beardsley and Russia,” in *Aubrey Beardsley 1872–1898*, 60–65.

31 Joichiro Kawamura, “Beardsley and Japan,” in *ibid.*, 55–59.

32 Rackham’s drawing was published in the *Westminster Budget*, 20 July 1894, with the comment “A Nightmare: Horrible result of contemplating an Aubrey Beardsley after supper.” See Derek Hudson, *Arthur Rackham, His Life and Work* (London: Heinemann, 1974), 40 and 45.

33 Petrus Durel, “Les beaux-arts dans l’armée,” *Le Monde illustré*, 2609 (30 Mar 1907): 203.

combing remains to be done. In a research article on relations between fin-de-siècle Hungary and Britain, Katalin Keserü mentioned “series of drawings by Lajos Kosma, Guyla Tichy, Attila Sassy (Aiglon)” under Beardsley’s influence, which inaugurated a new genre in Hungarian art, i.e., a cycle of drawings on a specific theme. They followed a 1907 Beardsley exhibition at the Budapest Museum of Applied Arts and a detailed article on Beardsley in the periodical *Magyar Iparművészet*.³⁴ In Keserü’s wake, Katalin Gellér extended the record mentioning Emil Sarkady, Mihály Rezső, Sándor Nagy, and Guyla Tálos.³⁵

All these brief mentions are useful in view of building a research network on Beardsley’s continuous influence across Europe to Asia and over the Atlantic. The reverberation of his oeuvre, and the many ways it permeated not only his very period but later modern art, would be worth a global study. This could determine how deeply it stirred and marked graphic design, poster art, advertisement, illustration, interior decoration, and even fashion on one hand; and how it pollinated, impregnated, and fed into major artists’ creativity on the other. It is easy to see that several countries are still under-represented and most of these allusions need further in-depth exploration. Any undertaking would need to build on thorough research and previous inputs such as Sasha Dovzhyk’s 2020 article on Beardsley’s influence on Leon Bakst and the World of Art’s vision of modernity, their periodical *Mir iskusstva*, and the thematic “Beardsley issue” of the Moscow symbolist review *Vesy (Libra)*.³⁶ Such research might further discuss such classifications as *plagiarist*, *parodist*, *imitator*, *follower*, *pasticheur*, *affiliated*, or *creatively related artist*.

More than a century after his passing, exhibitions and publications of Beardsley’s work are still highly prized. The public flocks to admire his art and ponder the still-locked secrets of his drawings. Would the Beardsley craze of the 1960s and 1970s that gave birth to wallpaper, posters, T-shirts, record sleeves, and tea mugs after his work, still respond to contemporary curiosity? When Paris was in lockdown due

34 Katalin Keserü, “Art Contacts between Great Britain and Hungary at the Turn of the Century,” *Hungarian Studies*, 6:2 (1990): 141–54 (145).

35 Katalin Gellér, “Hungarian Art Nouveau and its English Sources,” *Hungarian Studies*, 6:2 (1990): 155–65 (156).

36 Sasha Dovzhyk, “Aubrey Beardsley in the Russian ‘World of Art,’” *British Art Studies*, 18 (2020), <https://doi.org/10.17658/issn.2058-5462/issue-18/sdovzhyk>

to the Covid-19 pandemic, the Musée d'Orsay staged a short-lived Beardsley exhibition, open to the public for only three weeks, in which his grotesque photographic portraits by Frederick Evans welcomed the visitor as gigantic entrance panels. Nearly 130 years after they were taken, these images still intrigue and hold their power, symbols of avant-garde Decadence, which heralded contemporary art practices and a media-driven public life. The 2022 Grolier Club exhibition pertinently called Beardsley "150 Years Young."³⁷ It is thanks to artists like Beardsley, his brilliant and short career, and his sense of provocation, that we now welcome elements of the grotesque, marginality, and posturing in art. These have become central concerns, while in his time they were literally peripheral. Ultimately, it is to artists like him that we owe our current visual education.

37 Margaret D. Stetz, *Aubrey Beardsley 150 Years Young. From the Mark Samuels Lasner Collection University of Delaware Library, Museums and Press* (New York: The Grolier Club, 2022).

