Beardsley

The Art of Decadence and Intrigue

Introduction: Aubrey Beardsley, a name synonymous with the Decadent movement of the late century, stands as one of the most enigmatic and influential figures in the world of art. His work, characterized by its intricate line work, bold contrasts, and often provocative subject matter, has captivated audiences for over a century. Despite a tragically short life, Beardsley's artistic legacy endures, leaving an indelible mark on the realms of illustration, design, and modern art. This e-book delves into the life, influences, and distinctive style of Aubrey Beardsley, exploring the themes that permeate his work and his lasting impact on the art world.

Chapter 1: The Life of Aubrey Beardsley

Born in Brighton, England, Aubrey Beardsley's life was as dramatic and intense as his art. From a young age, he displayed a prodigious talent for drawing, which was nurtured despite the financial struggles of his family. His delicate health, marked by a lifelong battle with tuberculosis, influenced his work, imbuing it with a sense of urgency and a preoccupation with death and the macabre.Beardsley's formal education in art began at the Westminster School of Art, where he was exposed to the works of classical and contemporary artists. His early influences included the Pre-Raphaelites and the Arts and Crafts movement, yet Beardsley quickly developed a style that was uniquely his own. His big break came in when he was commissioned to illustrate Thomas Malory's *Le Morte d'Arthur*. The success of this project established Beardsley as a leading illustrator of his time, but it was his work for *The Yellow Book* that cemented his reputation as a daring and controversial artist.

Aubrey Vincent Beardsley was born on August, in Brighton, England, into a family of modest means. His father, Vincent Beardsley, was a man of inherited wealth that had dwindled over time, leaving the family to live a somewhat precarious life. His mother, Ellen Pitt, had musical talents and artistic sensibilities, which she encouraged in her children. From a young age, Beardsley showed a remarkable aptitude for drawing, producing sketches that revealed his early inclination towards art.Beardsley’s early life was marked by illness, a theme that would shadow him throughout his short life. At the age of seven, he was diagnosed with tuberculosis, a disease that was both debilitating and life-threatening during that era. This illness forced the family to relocate multiple times in search of healthier climates, a nomadic existence that perhaps contributed to the melancholic and sometimes morbid tone of his later work.Despite his health challenges, Beardsley’s artistic talent flourished. He attended the Brighton Grammar School, where his skills were nurtured, and he quickly gained a reputation as a precocious talent. His drawings from this period already exhibited a sophistication and an understanding of composition that was advanced for his age. His early exposure to literature and classical music, particularly the works of Richard Wagner, influenced his artistic vision, infusing his work with a sense of drama and narrative.

In, Beardsley moved to London, a city that would become the backdrop for his brief but intense career. At , he began working as a clerk, a job that allowed him to support his family but did little to fulfill his artistic ambitions. In his spare time, he continued to draw, honing his distinctive style. The turning point in Beardsley’s life came in when he enrolled at the Westminster School of Art. Under the tutelage of Professor Fred Brown, Beardsley was exposed to a range of artistic influences, from classical art to contemporary movements. However, it was not long before he began to break away from academic traditions, developing a style that was uniquely his own. Beardsley’s big break came in 1893 when he was commissioned to illustrate Sir Thomas Malory's *Le Morte d'Arthur*. The project, published by J.M. Dent, was a monumental task that required Beardsley to produce hundreds of illustrations. His work on *Le Morte d'Arthur* was met with critical acclaim and marked the beginning of his career as a professional artist. The illustrations, characterized by their intricate detail, dramatic use of black and white, and a blend of medieval and contemporary styles, established Beardsley as a leading figure in the world of book illustration.In the same year, Beardsley became associated with *The Yellow Book*, a quarterly literary magazine that became a symbol of the Decadent movement in England. As the art editor, Beardsley was responsible for the magazine’s visual identity, and his illustrations, often provocative and controversial, drew as much attention as the literary content. *The Yellow Book* was a platform for Beardsley to fully express his artistic vision, and it quickly became a sensation, both celebrated and reviled for its boldness.

However, Beardsley’s association with *The Yellow Book* was short-lived. In , Oscar Wilde, with whom Beardsley was often associated, was arrested for gross indecency. Although Beardsley was not directly involved, his connection to Wilde led to his dismissal from the magazine. This period was a turning point in Beardsley’s career, as he began to focus on more personal and experimental works.One of the most significant projects of this later period was his illustrations for Oscar Wilde’s play *Salomé*.

The illustrations, which are among Beardsley's most famous works, are a masterful blend of sensuality and grotesque imagery. The stark contrasts of black and white, the elongated and androgynous figures, and the intricate detailing all contribute to a sense of decadence and unease that is characteristic of Beardsley's mature style.As his career progressed, Beardsley's health continued to deteriorate. The tuberculosis that had plagued him since childhood worsened, and by 1897, he was forced to leave England for the warmer climate of the French Riviera in a desperate attempt to prolong his life. Despite his failing health, Beardsley continued to work, producing some of his most innovative and daring pieces during this time.

In his final years, Beardsley converted to Catholicism, a decision that surprised many of his contemporaries given the often subversive and irreverent nature of his work. He even requested that many of his more controversial works be destroyed, a wish that was only partially fulfilled.Aubrey Beardsley died on March, at the age of. Despite his brief life, his impact on the world of art was profound. His work, characterized by its elegance, complexity, and often provocative content, challenged the artistic conventions of his time and continues to influence artists today. Beardsley's legacy is one of innovation and defiance, a testament to the power of art to transcend the limitations of the artist's life.

Chapter 2: The Aesthetic and Decadent Movements

To understand Beardsley's art, one must first explore the cultural and artistic movements that shaped his vision. The Aesthetic movement, with its mantra "art for art's sake," sought to divorce art from moral or utilitarian purposes, focusing instead on beauty and sensuality. Beardsley embraced this philosophy, creating works that were visually stunning, yet often devoid of explicit narrative or moralizing content.The Decadent movement, closely associated with the Aesthetic movement, further influenced Beardsley's work. Decadence celebrated excess, artifice, and the exploration of taboo subjects, often challenging the prevailing moral and social norms of the time. Beardsley's illustrations, with their eroticism, grotesque imagery, and fascination with the bizarre, epitomize the Decadent spirit.The Aesthetic and Decadent movements were two interconnected artistic and cultural phenomena of the late century that significantly influenced Aubrey Beardsley's work. Both movements challenged conventional norms and celebrated a radical approach to art and aesthetics.

Origins and Philosophy: The Aesthetic movement emerged in the s in Britain and was a reaction against the utilitarian and moralizing tendencies of Victorian art. Its central tenet was "art for art's sake," which advocated that art should be valued for its beauty and sensory experience rather than for its social or moral messages. The movement was influenced by earlier Romantic ideals and the ideas of French poet Charles Baudelaire, who emphasized the importance of beauty and the artist's personal vision.

Key Figures: The movement included notable figures such as James McNeill Whistler, Oscar Wilde, and Dante Gabriel Rossetti. Whistler's art, known for its emphasis on aesthetic composition and color harmony, and Wilde's writings, which championed the aesthetic ideal, were central to the movement. Rossetti, a founding member of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood, also contributed to the movement's ethos through his focus on beauty and the medieval revival.

Impact on Beardsley: Aubrey Beardsley was profoundly influenced by the Aesthetic movement's emphasis on beauty and form. His early works reflect a preoccupation with visual aesthetics and a desire to create art that transcended moral or narrative constraints. Beardsley's intricate line drawings and emphasis on ornamental detail align closely with the Aesthetic movement's principles, demonstrating his commitment to creating art that was both visually captivating and self-contained.

Origins and Philosophy: The Decadent movement, which emerged in the was an offshoot of the Aesthetic movement and took its principles to their extremes. Decadence was characterized by an obsession with excess, artificiality, and the exploration of taboo subjects. It often involved a fascination with decay, moral corruption, and the macabre, reflecting a sense of disillusionment with contemporary society and its values.

Key Figures: Key figures of the Decadent movement included writers such as Oscar Wilde, Algernon Swinburne, and Joris-Karl Huysmans, whose novel *À rebours* (Against the Grain) is considered a quintessential Decadent text. The movement also had its visual artists, including Beardsley, whose work embodied the movement's aesthetic and thematic concerns.

Impact on Beardsley: Beardsley's work is often cited as a prime example of Decadent art. His illustrations are known for their provocative and sometimes disturbing imagery, including eroticism, death, and the grotesque. This thematic focus aligns with the Decadent movement's fascination with the darker aspects of human experience. Beardsley's use of stark contrasts, elaborate patterns, and a tendency towards the theatrical and the bizarre all reflect the movement's aesthetic principles.

Overlap and Influence: The overlap between the Aesthetic and Decadent movements is significant, as both shared a disdain for conventional morality and embraced a radical approach to art. While the Aesthetic movement focused on beauty and the sensory experience of art, the Decadent movement pushed these ideas into more controversial and provocative territory.For Beardsley, these movements provided a framework within which he could explore and express his unique artistic vision. His work reflects the Aesthetic movement's dedication to beauty and form, as well as the Decadent movement's interest in exploring the boundaries of conventional taste and morality.

In conclusion, the Aesthetic and Decadent movements were pivotal in shaping the artistic landscape of the late century. Aubrey Beardsley, with his distinctive style and thematic interests, stands as a key figure in both movements, embodying their ideals and contributing to their legacy. His art continues to captivate and challenge audiences, serving as a testament to the enduring influence of these revolutionary artistic movements.

Chapter 3: The Distinctive Style of Aubrey Beardsley

Beardsley's artistic style is immediately recognizable, characterized by its elegant line work, stark contrasts of black and white, and intricate patterns. He drew heavily on the influences of Japanese woodblock prints, which were becoming popular in Europe at the time, and incorporated elements of Rococo art, with its ornamental and playful qualities.His use of negative space and the interplay of light and shadow create a sense of depth and drama, while his figures, often elongated and androgynous, exude an air of ethereal beauty and otherworldliness. Beardsley's work is also noted for its subversive and often controversial content, with themes of sexuality, death, and the grotesque frequently appearing in his illustrations. Aubrey Beardsley's artistic style is celebrated for its uniqueness and boldness, capturing the essence of the Aesthetic and Decadent movements through a visual language that remains strikingly original. His work is characterized by several distinctive elements that collectively define his artistic identity.

1. Intricate Line Work: Beardsley's most notable feature is his mastery of line work. His illustrations are composed of delicate, flowing lines that create intricate patterns and forms. This technique, often referred to as "linear elegance," allows for both detailed ornamental elements and a fluid sense of movement within the composition. Beardsley's lines are precise yet expressive, contributing to the overall sense of dynamism and drama in his work.

2. High Contrast Black and White: Another hallmark of Beardsley's style is his use of high contrast between black and white. His illustrations often employ solid areas of black ink juxtaposed against stark white backgrounds, creating a striking visual impact. This use of contrast not only emphasizes the intricacy of his line work but also enhances the dramatic and sometimes eerie atmosphere of his illustrations.

3. Ornamental and Decorative Elements: Beardsley's art is heavily influenced by decorative and ornamental styles, including the Japanese woodblock prints of the Ukiyo-e tradition and the elaborate patterns of Rococo art. His illustrations frequently feature elaborate borders, intricate patterns, and ornamental details that contribute to the overall sense of luxury and opulence. These elements are not merely decorative but are integrated into the narrative and composition, adding depth and complexity to his work.

4. Elongated Figures and androgyny: Beardsley's figures are often elongated and stylized, exhibiting a sense of grace and otherworldliness. This elongation serves to heighten the aesthetic effect of his compositions and to create a sense of ethereal beauty. Many of his figures are androgynous, reflecting the Decadent movement's fascination with blurring gender boundaries and exploring themes of sexuality and identity. This ambiguity adds to the intrigue and complexity of his illustrations.

5. Themes of Eroticism and the Grotesque: Beardsley's work frequently explores themes of eroticism, death, and the grotesque. His illustrations often feature provocative and controversial content, including sensual imagery, macabre elements, and satirical representations of societal norms. This focus on taboo subjects reflects the Decadent movement's preoccupation with excess and moral transgression, and it contributes to the provocative and challenging nature of Beardsley's art.

6. Influence of Japanese Art: The influence of Japanese art is evident in Beardsley's work, particularly in his use of space, composition, and decorative elements. Japanese woodblock prints, with their emphasis on flat areas of color, bold outlines, and intricate patterns, can be seen in Beardsley's illustrations. This influence is particularly apparent in his treatment of negative space and the way he integrates decorative motifs into his compositions.

7. Theatricality and Symbolism: Beardsley's illustrations often possess a theatrical quality, with a focus on dramatic poses, elaborate costumes, and expressive facial features. This theatricality enhances the narrative quality of his work, drawing the viewer into a world of fantasy and intrigue. Additionally, Beardsley frequently employed symbolic elements in his art, using imagery to convey deeper meanings and themes related to beauty, decay, and the human condition.

8. Influence of Pre-Raphaelitism: Although Beardsley's style diverged from the Pre-Raphaelites in many ways, the movement's emphasis on detail and medieval themes had a lasting impact on his work. Elements of Pre-Raphaelite art, such as intricate patterns and a focus on narrative, can be seen in Beardsley's illustrations, although he adapted these influences to fit his own distinctive style.

Conclusion: Aubrey Beardsley's distinctive style is a fusion of intricate line work, bold contrasts, and elaborate ornamentation, characterized by a preoccupation with themes of eroticism and the grotesque. His work reflects the aesthetic ideals of the Aesthetic and Decadent movements, incorporating influences from Japanese art, Pre-Raphaelitism, and other decorative traditions. Beardsley's ability to blend beauty with the macabre, and to challenge conventional norms through his provocative imagery, has solidified his place as a pioneering and influential figure in the world of art. His legacy continues to inspire and captivate, demonstrating the enduring power of his unique artistic vision.

Chapter 4: Key Works and Themes

Beardsley's portfolio is rich with iconic images that continue to resonate today. Some of his most famous works include the illustrations for Oscar Wilde's *Salomé*, a series that exemplifies his ability to blend beauty with the macabre. The illustrations for *Salomé* are notable for their sensuality, with an emphasis on eroticism and the femme fatale archetype, embodied in the figure of Salomé herself.Another significant work is his contribution to *The Yellow Book*, a quarterly literary magazine that became synonymous with the Decadent movement. Beardsley's covers and illustrations for *The Yellow Book* were as much a part of its allure as the content within, blending the grotesque with the refined in a way that both fascinated and shocked contemporary audiences.A recurring theme in Beardsley's work is the tension between beauty and decay, often represented through floral motifs intertwined with skeletal or grotesque figures. This duality reflects the artist's own preoccupation with mortality, likely influenced by his chronic illness.Aubrey Beardsley's oeuvre is marked by several key works and recurring themes that define his distinctive style and artistic vision. His illustrations, known for their intricate line work and provocative content, reflect his engagement with the Aesthetic and Decadent movements. Here, we explore some of Beardsley's most significant works and the thematic concerns that permeate his art**.**

Key Works- *Le Morte d'Arthur* (1893): Description: This project marked Beardsley's breakthrough as an illustrator. Commissioned to illustrate Sir Thomas Malory's *Le Morte d'Arthur*, Beardsley produced a series of illustrations that are notable for their elaborate detail and innovative use of black and white contrast. The illustrations blend medieval themes with contemporary aesthetic sensibilities, creating a unique visual interpretation of the Arthurian legends.**Significance:** This work established Beardsley as a prominent artist and showcased his ability to merge narrative with ornamental design. The illustrations' dramatic compositions and intricate patterns reflect the influence of both Pre-Raphaelitism and Japanese art.***The Yellow Book* (1894–1897): Description:** Beardsley was the art editor for this quarterly literary magazine, which became synonymous with the Decadent movement. He contributed numerous illustrations and covers, including some of his most iconic and controversial works. The magazine's visual identity, largely defined by Beardsley's contributions, was characterized by its bold and provocative imagery.**Significance:** *The Yellow Book* was a platform for Beardsley to fully explore his artistic vision. His illustrations for the magazine were groundbreaking, both in their aesthetic approach and their challenging of social norms. The magazine's association with the Decadent movement also enhanced Beardsley's reputation as a leading figure in this artistic trend.***Salomé* (1894): Description:** Beardsley's illustrations for Oscar Wilde's play *Salomé* are among his most famous works. The series of illustrations, which include the iconic depiction of Salomé with the head of John the Baptist, are characterized by their eroticism, elaborate patterns, and stark black-and-white contrasts.**Significance:** The illustrations for *Salomé* highlight Beardsley's ability to blend sensuality with the macabre. The dramatic use of space and line, coupled with the provocative content, exemplifies his mastery of the Decadent aesthetic and his skill in creating visually arresting and thematically rich artwork.***The Lysistrata* (1896): Description:** Beardsley illustrated Aristophanes' ancient Greek comedy *Lysistrata*, which deals with themes of sex and politics. The illustrations are known for their wit, elaborate detail, and a blend of classical and contemporary styles.**Significance:** This work showcases Beardsley's ability to adapt classical themes to his own artistic sensibilities. His illustrations for *Lysistrata* combine humor and sensuality with his distinctive line work and ornamental style, reflecting his engagement with both historical and modern artistic traditions.***The Rape of the Lock* (1896): Description:** Beardsley illustrated Alexander Pope's mock-epic poem *The Rape of the Lock*, which satirizes high society and vanity. The illustrations are characterized by their playful and satirical tone, with a focus on elaborate costumes and exaggerated expressions.**Significance:** This work demonstrates Beardsley's versatility as an illustrator. His ability to capture the humor and satire of Pope's poem through his distinctive style highlights his skill in adapting his aesthetic to different literary genres.

Recurring Themes: 1. Eroticism and Sensuality: Description: *Beardsley's work frequently explores themes of eroticism and sensuality. His illustrations often depict provocative and sensual imagery, reflecting the Decadent movement's fascination with taboo subjects and the exploration of desire.**Examples:*** *The illustrations for* Salomé *and* The Yellow Book *are prime examples of Beardsley's engagement with erotic themes. His use of elongated figures, sensual poses, and intricate patterns creates a visually striking and emotionally charged portrayal of eroticism.*

1. **Death and the Grotesque- Description:** Death and the grotesque are recurring themes in Beardsley's art, often depicted with a blend of macabre and beauty. His work reflects a fascination with decay, mortality, and the darker aspects of human experience.**Examples:** In works like *Salomé*, the depiction of John the Baptist's head and the use of deathly imagery underscore Beardsley's preoccupation with the macabre. This theme is also evident in his other illustrations, where grotesque elements are juxtaposed with refined aesthetics.

2. **Ornamentation and Pattern- Description:** Beardsley's art is known for its elaborate ornamentation and intricate patterns. His use of decorative elements enhances the visual impact of his illustrations and reflects his interest in combining art with design.

Examples: The detailed borders and patterns in his illustrations for *Le Morte d'Arthur* and *The Yellow Book* highlight his commitment to creating visually rich and complex compositions.**Theatricality and Symbolism- Description:** Beardsley's illustrations often possess a theatrical quality, with dramatic poses and elaborate costumes. Symbolism plays a significant role in his work, with imagery used to convey deeper meanings and themes. **Examples:** The theatrical and symbolic elements in *The Rape of the Lock* and *Lysistrata* demonstrate Beardsley's ability to infuse his illustrations with narrative depth and emotional resonance.In summary, Aubrey Beardsley's key works and recurring themes reflect his unique artistic vision and his engagement with the Aesthetic and Decadent movements. His illustrations, characterized by their intricate line work, bold contrasts, and provocative content, continue to captivate and challenge audiences, showcasing his enduring impact on the world of art.

Chapter 5: Legacy and Influence

Aubrey Beardsley's influence extends far beyond his lifetime, impacting not only the world of illustration but also fashion, design, and modern art. His work has been celebrated for its innovation and boldness, inspiring generations of artists who followed. The stark black-and-white contrasts and intricate detailing of his illustrations can be seen echoed in the works of contemporary graphic designers and illustrators.Despite his early death at the age of, Beardsley's contribution to the art world is immense. His exploration of taboo subjects and his distinctive style challenged the artistic conventions of his time, paving the way for modernist and avant-garde movements. Beardsley's legacy is also preserved in the way he captured the spirit of the Decadent movement, embodying the idea that art could be both beautiful and disturbing, a reflection of the complexities of the human experience.Aubrey Beardsley's legacy is defined by his profound impact on the world of art and illustration, as well as his role in shaping the aesthetic and cultural trends of his time. Despite his brief career and life, his influence endures, reflecting the innovation and originality that marked his work.

1. Artistic Innovation: Beardsley's approach to illustration was groundbreaking. His use of stark black-and-white contrasts, intricate line work, and decorative patterns set new standards in visual art. His ability to blend ornamental detail with dramatic compositions created a distinctive style that challenged traditional artistic norms. Beardsley's work is often seen as a precursor to modern graphic design, influencing later generations of artists and illustrators.

Influence on Modern Graphic Design: Beardsley's innovative use of line and pattern has had a lasting impact on graphic design. His techniques can be seen in the work of early 20th-century artists and designers who embraced similar aesthetic principles. His style influenced Art Nouveau, particularly in its use of linearity and decorative elements, and continued to resonate in the works of later graphic designers and illustrators.

2. Cultural Impact: Beardsley's art, characterized by its provocative and often controversial content, played a significant role in challenging societal norms and cultural conventions. His work frequently explored themes of eroticism, death, and the grotesque, reflecting the Decadent movement's fascination with taboo subjects and the darker aspects of human experience.

Influence on Literature and Theatre: Beardsley's illustrations for Oscar Wilde's *Salomé* and his contributions to *The Yellow Book* were pivotal in shaping the literary and theatrical landscape of his time. His visual interpretations of Wilde's work helped to define the aesthetic of the Decadent movement, and his illustrations were integral to the success and notoriety of *The Yellow Book*. Beardsley's ability to capture the essence of literary texts through his art had a lasting impact on the way literature and theatre were visually represented.

3. Artistic Legacy: Beardsley's legacy is also preserved through his influence on subsequent art movements and artists. His work is often cited as a key example of the transition from -century artistic traditions to modernist approaches. His innovative style and thematic concerns paved the way for new forms of artistic expression and contributed to the evolution of visual culture.

Influence on Modern Art Movements: Beardsley's emphasis on aesthetics and the exploration of unconventional themes influenced the development of modern art movements, including Surrealism and Expressionism. His ability to merge beauty with the macabre and to challenge conventional norms inspired artists who sought to push the boundaries of traditional art forms.

4. Preservation and Revival: Beardsley's art has been the subject of numerous exhibitions, retrospectives, and scholarly studies. His work continues to be celebrated for its artistic achievement and historical significance. Museums and galleries around the world have featured his illustrations, highlighting his contributions to art history and ensuring that his legacy endures.

Ongoing Interest and Scholarship: Academic research and critical analysis of Beardsley's work have continued to shed light on his artistic techniques and thematic concerns. His art remains a subject of interest for scholars, critics, and art enthusiasts, reflecting the enduring relevance of his contributions to the field of illustration and design.

5. Controversy and Myth: Beardsley's art, with its provocative content and unconventional themes, has often been the subject of controversy. His exploration of taboo subjects and his association with the Decadent movement contributed to his reputation as a rebellious and unconventional figure. This controversy, however, has also contributed to the enduring fascination with his work, cementing his place as a key figure in art histo

Enduring Fascination: The provocative nature of Beardsley's work continues to captivate audiences and provoke discussion. His art challenges viewers to confront themes of sexuality, mortality, and societal norms, ensuring that his legacy remains dynamic and relevant.In summary, Aubrey Beardsley's legacy is marked by his artistic innovation, cultural impact, and influence on subsequent art movements. His unique style and thematic concerns have left a lasting imprint on the world of art and illustration, and his work continues to inspire and challenge audiences today. Beardsley's contributions to art history and visual culture ensure that his legacy endures, reflecting the enduring power of his artistic vision.

Conclusion: Aubrey Beardsley remains a towering figure in the history of art, a symbol of the intersection between beauty and the macabre, the refined and the grotesque. His work, both celebrated and controversial, continues to captivate and inspire, reminding us of the power of art to challenge, provoke, and transform. In the end, Beardsley's art is not just a reflection of his time but a timeless exploration of the human condition, expressed through a unique and unforgettable visual language.

It was in the summer of that I first met Aubrey Beardsley. A publisher had asked me to form and edit a new kind of magazine, which was to appeal to the public equally in its letterpress and its illustrations: need I say that I am defining the "Savoy"? It was, I admit, to have been something of a rival to the "Yellow Book," which had by that time ceased to mark a movement, and had come to be little more than a publisher's magazine. I forget exactly when the expulsion of Beardsley from the "Yellow Book" had occurred; it had been sufficiently recent, at all events, to make Beardsley singularly ready to fall in with my project when I went to him and asked him to devote himself to illustrating my quarterly. He was supposed, just then, to be dying; and as I entered the room, and saw him lying out on a couch, horribly white, I wondered if I had come too late.

He was full of ideas, full of enthusiasm, and I think it was then that he suggested the name "Savoy," finally adopted after endless changes and uncertainties. A little later we met again at Dieppe, where for a month I saw him daily. It was at Dieppe that the "Savoy" was really planned, and it was in the cafe which Mr. Sickert has so often painted that I wrote the slightly pettish and defiant "Editorial Note," which made so many enemies for the first number. Dieppe just then was a meeting-place for the younger generation; some of us spent the whole summer there, lazily but profitably; others came and went. Beardsley at that time imagined himself to be unable to draw anywhere but in London. He made one or two faint attempts, and even prepared a canvas for a picture which was never painted, in the hospitable studio in which M. Jacques Blanche painted the admirable portrait reproduced in the frontispiece.

But he found many subjects, some of which he afterwards worked out, in the expressive opportunities of the Casino and the beach, lie never walked; I never saw him look at the sea; but at night he was almost always to be seen watching the gamblers at petits chevaux, studying them with a sort of hypnotised attention for that picture of "The Little Horses," which was never done. He liked the large, deserted rooms, at hours when no one was there; the sense of frivolous things caught at a moment of suspended life, en deshabillé. He would glance occasionally, but with more impatience, at the dances, especially the children's dances, in the concert room; but he rarely missed a concert, and would glide in every afternoon, and sit on the high benches at the side, always carrying his large, gilt-leather portfolio with the magnificent, old, red-lined folio paper, which he would often open, to write some lines in pencil.

He was at work then, with an almost pathetic tenacity, at his story, never to be finished, the story which never could have been finished, "Under the Hill," a new version, a parody (like Laforgue's parodies, but how unlike them, or anything!) of the story of Venus and Tannhäuser. Most of it was done at these concerts, and in the little, close writing-room, where visitors sat writing letters. The fragment published in the first two numbers of the "Savoy" had passed through many stages before it found its way there, and would have passed through more if it had ever been carried further. Tannhäuser, not quite willingly, had put on Abbé's disguise, and there were other unwilling disguises in those brilliant, disconnected, fantastic pages, in which every sentence was meditated over, written for its own sake, and left to find its way in its own paragraph. It could never have been finished, for it had never really been begun; but what undoubted, singular, literary ability there is in it, all the same! I think Beardsley would rather have been a great writer than a great artist; and I remember, on one occasion, when he had to fill up a form of admission to some library to which I was introducing him, his insistence on describing himself as "man of letters."

At one time he was going to write an essay on "Les Liaisons Dangereuses," at another he had planned a book on Rousseau. But his plans for writing changed even more quickly than his plans for doing drawings, and with less profitable results in the meantime. He has left no prose except that fragment of a story; and in verse only the three pieces published in the "Savoy." Here, too, he was terribly anxious to excel; and his patience over a medium so unfamiliar, and hence so difficult, to him as verse, was infinite. We spent two whole days on the grassy ramparts of the old castle at Arques-la-Bataille, near Dieppe; I working at something or other in one part, he working at "The Three Musicians" in another.

The eight stanzas of that amusing piece of verse are really, in their own way, a tour de force; by sheer power of will, by deliberately saying to himself, "I will write a poem," and by working with such strenuous application that at last a certain result, the kind of result he had willed, did really come about, he succeeded in doing what he had certainly no natural aptitude for doing. How far was that more genuine aspect of his genius also an "infinite capacity for taking pains?" The republication by Mr. Lane, the publisher of the "Yellow Book," of Beardsley's contributions in prose and verse to the "Savoy," its "rival," as Mr. Lane correctly calls it, with the illustrations which there accompanied them, reopens a little, busy chapter in contemporary history. It is the history of yesterday, and it seems already at this distance of half a century. Then, what brave petulant outbursts of poets and artists, what comic rivalries and reluctances of publishers, what droll conflicts of art and morality, what thunders of the trumpets of the press!

The press is silent now, or admiring; the publishers have changed places, and all rivalries are handsomely buried, with laudatory inscriptions on their tombstones. The situation has its irony, which would have appealed most to the actor most conspicuously absent from the scene. Beardsley was very anxious to be a writer, and, though in his verse there was no merit except that of a thing done to order, to one's own order, and done without a flaw in the process, there was, in his prose, a much finer quality, and his fragment of an unachieved and unplanned romance has a savour of its own. It is the work, not of a craftsman, but of an amateur, and in this it may be compared with the prose of Whistler, so great an artist in his own art and so brilliant an amateur in the art of literature. Beardsley too was something of a wit, and in his prose one sees hard intellect, untinged with sentiment, employed on the work of fancy.

He wrote and he saw, unimaginatively, and without passion, but with a fierce sensitive precision; and he saw by preference things elaborately perverse, full of fantastic detail, unlikely and possible things, brought together from the four corners of the universe. All those descriptions in "Under the Hill" are the equivalent of his drawings, and they are of especial interest in showing how definitely he saw things, and with what calm minuteness he could translate what seemed a feverish drawing into oddly rational words. Listen, for instance, to this garden-picture: "In the middle was a huge bronze fountain with three basins. From the first rose a many-breasted dragon and four little loves mounted upon swans, and each love was furnished with a bow and arrow. Two of them that faced the monster seemed to recoil in fear, two that were behind made bold enough to aim their shafts at him. From the verge of the second sprang a circle of slim golden columns that supported silver doves with tails and wings spread out.

The third, held by a group of grotesquely attenuated satyrs, is centred with a thin pipe hung with masks and roses and capped with children's heads." The picture was never drawn, but does it want more than the drawing? The prose of "Under the Hill" does not arrive at being really good prose, but it has felicities that astonish, those felicities by which the amateur astonishes the craftsman. The imaginary dedication is the best, the most sustained, piece of writing in it, but there is wit everywhere, subtly intermingled with fancy, and there are touches of color such as this: "Huge moths, so richly winged that they must have banqueted upon tapestries and royal stuffs, slept on the pillars that flanked either side of the gateway, and the eyes of all the moths remained open and were burning and bursting with a mesh of veins." Here and there is a thought or a mental sensation like that of "the irritation of loveliness that can never be entirely comprehended, or ever enjoyed to the utmost."

There are many affectations, some copied from Oscar Wilde, others personal enough, such as the use of French words instead of English ones: "chevelure" for hair, and "pantoufles" for slippers.

I do not think that Beardsley finally found a place for the word which he had adapted from the French, "papillions," instead of "papillons" or butterflies; it would have come amusingly, and it was one of his pet words. But his whole conception of writing was that of a game with words; some obsolete game with a quaint name, like that other favorite word of his, "spellicans," for which he did find a place in the story. Taken literally, this fragment is hardly more than a piece of nonsense, and was hardly meant to be more than that. Yet, beyond the curiosity and ingenuity of the writing, how much there is of real skill in the evocation of a certain impossible but quite credible atmosphere! Its icy artificiality is indeed one of its qualities, and produces, by mere negation, an emotional effect. Beardsley did not believe in his own enchantments, was never haunted by his own terrors, and, in his queer sympathy and familiarity with evil, had none of the ardors of a lost soul. In the place of Faust he would have kept the devil at his due distance by a polite incredulity, openly expressed, as to the very existence of his interlocutor.

It was on the balcony of the Hotel Henri IV, at Arques, one of those September evenings, that I had the only quite serious, almost solemn, conversation I ever had with Beardsley. Not long before we had gone together to visit Alexandre Dumas fils at Puy, and it was from talking of that thoughtful, but entirely, Parisian writer, and his touching, in its unreal way so real, "Dame aux Camélias" (the novel, not the play), which Beardsley admired so much, that we passed into an unexpectedly intimate mood of speculation. Those stars up yonder, whether they were really the imprisoning worlds of other creatures like ourselves; the strange ways by which the soul might have come and must certainly go; death, and the future: it was such things that I found him speaking, for once without mockery.

And he told me then a singular dream or vision which he had had when a child, waking up at night in the moonlight and seeing a great crucifix, with a bleeding Christ, falling off the wall, where certainly there was not, and had never been, any crucifix. It is only by remembering that one conversation, that vision, the tone of awe with which he told it, that I can, with a great effort, imagine to myself the Beardsley whom I knew with his so positive intelligence, his imaginative sight of the very spirit of man as a thing of definite outline, transformed finally into the Beardsley who died in the peace of the last sacraments of the Church, holding the rosary between his fingers. And yet, if you read carefully the book of letters to an unnamed friend, which has been published six years after his death, it will be seen that here too, as always, we are in the presence of a real thing. In these naked letters we see a man die.

And the man dies inch by inch, like one who slips inch by inch over a precipice, and knows that the grasses at which his fingers tear, clutching their feeble roots, are but delaying him for so many instants, and that he must soon fall. We see a fine, clear-sighted intellect set on one problem: how to get well: then, how to get a little better; and then, how not to get worse. He records the weather of each day, and each symptom of his disease; with a desperate calmness, which but rarely deserts or betrays him. To-day he feels better and can read Laclos; to-morrow he is not so well, and he must hear no music. He has pious books and pious friends for the days when he is driven back upon himself, and must turn aside his attention from suffering which brings despair. Nothing exists any longer, outside himself; and there may be safety somewhere, in a "preservative girdle" or in a friend's prayer. He asks for both.

Both are to keep him alive. He meets at Mentone someone who seems worse than himself, and who yet "lives on and does things. My spirits have gone up immensely since I have known him." A change of sky, the recurrence of a symptom: "to-day, alas, there is a downpour and I am miserably depressed." He reads S. Alphonsus Liguori, and it is "mere physical exhaustion more than hardness of heart that leaves me so apathetic and uninterested." He clings to religion as to his friend, thinking that it may help him to keep himself in life. He trains himself to be gentle, to hope little, to attack the sources of health stealthily. A "wonderful stretch of good health," a few whole days of it, makes him "tremble at moments." "Don't think me foolish to haggle about a few months," he writes, when he is hoping, all the time, that "the end is less near than it seems." He is received into the Church, makes his first confession, makes his first communion. It seems to him that each is a new clutch upon the roots of the grasses.