

***ROBERT
BALDWIN ROSS***



***AUBREY
BEARDSLEY***

Robert Baldwin Ross

Aubrey Beardsley

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Illustrations

AUBREY BEARDSLEY

LIST OF DRAWINGS BY AUBREY BEARDSLEY

COMPILED BY AYMER VALLANCE

LIST OF DRAWINGS BY AUBREY BEARDSLEY

JUVENILIA

LATER WORK.

Illustrations

Table of Contents

Mrs Patrick Campbell	Frontispiece
<i>Now in the Berlin National Gallery</i>	
	facing page
Siegfried	12
<i>Reproduced from the original in the possession of Mrs Bealby Wright</i>	
The Woman in the Moon	14
<i>From "Salome"</i>	
The Toilette of Salome	18
<i>From "Salome"</i>	
The Dancer's Reward	20
<i>From "Salome"</i>	
Tailpiece	22
<i>From "Salome"</i>	
Design for a Frontispiece	26
<i>From "Plays" by John Davidson</i>	

The Wagnerites	28
Atalanta	32
The Mysterious Rose Garden	36
Illustration for "A Nocturne of Chopin"	38
Chopin, Ballade III. Op. 47	42
<i>Reproduced by permission of Charles Holme, Esqre.</i>	
The Baron's Prayer	44
<i>From "The Rape of the Lock"</i>	
The Battle of Beaux and Belles	48
<i>From "The Rape of the Lock"</i>	
A Design from "Lysistrata"	50
D'Albert in Search of Ideals	54
<i>From "Mademoiselle de Maupin." Reproduced from the original in the possession of Mrs Bealby Wright</i>	

AUBREY BEARDSLEY

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[Table of Contents](#)

Aubrey Beardsley was born on August 21st, 1872, at Brighton. He was a quiet, reserved child, caring little for lessons, though from an early age he shewed an aptitude for drawing. He began his education at a Kindergarten. He was seven years old when the first symptoms of delicacy appeared, and he was sent to a preparatory school at Hurstpierpoint, where he was remarkable for his courage and extreme reserve. Threatened with tuberculosis, he was moved for his health to Epsom in 1881. In March 1883 his family settled in London, and Beardsley made his first public appearance as an infant musical phenomenon, playing at concerts in company with his sister. He had a great knowledge of music, and always spoke dogmatically on a subject, the only one he used to say, of which he knew anything. He became attracted at this time by Miss Kate Greenaway's picture books, and started illuminating menus and invitation cards with coloured chalks, making by this means quite considerable sums for a child.

In August 1884 he and his sister were sent back to Brighton, where they resided with an old aunt. Their lives

were lonely, and Beardsley developed a taste for reading of a rather serious kind—the histories of Freeman and Greene being his favourite works. He could not remain a student without creating, so he started a history of the Armada! In November of the same year he was sent to the Brighton Grammar School as a day boy, becoming a boarder in January 1885. He was a great favourite with Mr King, the house-master, who encouraged his tastes for reading and drawing by giving him the use of a sitting-room and the run of a library. This was one of the first pieces of luck that attended Beardsley throughout life. The head-master, Mr Marshall, I am told, would hold him up as an example to the other boys, on account of his industry. His caricatures of the masters were fully appreciated by them, a rare occurrence in the lives of artists. He cultivated besides a talent for acting, and would often perform before large audiences at the Pavilion. He organized weekly performances at the school, designing and illustrating the programmes. He even wrote a farce called "A Brown Study," which was played at Brighton, where it received serious attention from the dramatic critics of the town. He would purchase each volume of the Mermaid series of Elizabethan dramatists then being issued, and with his sister gave performances during the holidays. From the record of the "Brighton College Magazine," Beardsley appears to have taken a leading rôle in all histrionic fêtes, and to "The Pied Piper of Hamelin" he contributed some delightful and racy little sketches, the first of his drawings, I believe, that were ever reproduced.



SIEGFRIED

Reproduced from the original in the possession of Mrs. Bealby Wright

In July 1888 he left school, and almost immediately entered an architect's office in London. In 1889 he obtained a post in the Guardian Life and Fire Insurance. During the autumn of that year the fatal hæmorrhages commenced; for two years he gave up his amateur theatricals and did little in the way of drawing. In 1891, however, he recuperated; a belief in his own powers revived. He now commenced a whole series of illustrations to various plays, such as Marlowe's "Tamerlane," Congreve's "Way of the World," and various French works which he was able to enjoy in the original. He would often speak of the encouragement and kindness he received at this period from the Rev. Alfred Gurney, who had known his family at Brighton, and who was

perhaps the earliest of his friends to realize that Beardsley possessed something more than mere cleverness or precocity.

Several people have claimed to discover Aubrey Beardsley, but I think it truer to say that he revealed himself, when proper acknowledgment has been made to Mr Aymer Vallance, Mr Joseph Pennell, Mr Frederick Evans, Mr J. M. Dent, and Mr John Lane, with whom Beardsley's art will always be associated in connection with the Yellow Book, that too early daffodil that came before the swallow dared and could not take the winds of March for beauty. To Mr Pennell belongs the credit of introducing Beardsley's art to the public; and to Mr Dent is due the rare distinction of giving him practical encouragement, by commissioning the illustrations to the "Morte d'Arthur," long before critics had written anything about him, or any but a few friends knew of his great powers. Beardsley was too remarkable a personality to remain in obscurity. Though I remember with some amusement how the editor of a well-known weekly mocked at a prophecy that the artist was a coming man who would very shortly excite discussion if not admiration. Fortunately Mr Pennell, a distinguished artist himself, and a fearless critic, not only espoused the cause of the new draughtsman, but became a personal friend for whom Beardsley always evinced great affection, and to whom he dedicated his "Album of Fifty Drawings."