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## Chapter 1 : Aubrey Beardsley Designs from the Age of Chivalry by Barbara Holdridge

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August 21, Died: His father, Vincent Beardsley was from a wealthy family but eventually lost his standing in society and was forced to find employment. His mother, Ellen Pitt Beardsley also came from a well-to-do family, and was an accomplished pianist and painter of silhouettes. Before his penchant for drawing, Aubrey had a passion for music which followed him throughout his life. At age seven, he was diagnosed with tuberculosis and had to be sent away to a school in Sussex to regain his respiratory strength. In , Vincent Beardsley accepted a position in London, where Aubrey and his sister, Mabel were encouraged to give piano recitals to earn extra money. A year later in , financial difficulties forced Vincent and Ellen to send Aubrey and Mabel to live with their great-aunt Pitt in Brighton. In , Aubrey was sent to boarding school in Brighton, where Aubrey took great interest in his housemaster A. During his time at school, Aubrey developed a love of reading and eventually, drawing. His family moved to Pimlico, London in , and Aubrey left school and joined them. Finding work at an insurance company the following year, Aubrey, like Arthur Rackham, would come home after work every night to draw in his free time. A family acquaintance, Father Alfred Gurney, was an art collector who invited Aubrey to view his collection of Renaissance artists and Pre-Raphaelite drawings. Gurney also gave Aubrey some of his first commissions and urged him to look to Renaissance artists for inspiration. He and Mabel also began visiting London art museums and private art collections where Aubrey was mesmerized by the paintings of the Pre-Raphaelite artists. After ringing the doorbell and being politely turned away by the servant who answered, they were stopped by Burne-Jones and invited in to view his art. All [these drawings] are full of thought, poetry and imagination. Nature has given you every gift which is necessary to become a great artist. I seldom or never advise anyone to take up art as a profession, but in your case I can do nothing else. In , a bookseller named Frederick Evans, recommended Aubrey to publisher J. Dent as an illustrator for his upcoming book. Evans and Aubrey had become close friends over the years as Aubrey frequented his bookshop in Queen Street, London. In the beginning of the project, Aubrey was enthusiastic and created drawing after drawing, however that enthusiasm soon waned as the extensive project continued, and his illustrations began to deviate from the story. The events of this time seem to happen in quick succession, at the same rapid speed as his drawing style morphs from Medieval Revival, to Japonisme, to the beginnings of Art Nouveau. While at the launch party for *The Savoy* in January , Beardsley suffered a slight hemorrhage due to his tuberculosis. Though he was weakened further after this resurgence of his illness, he began working on his illustrations for *The Rape of the Lock*, a long narrative poem by Alexander Pope. These tremendously intricate drawings with a clear reference to 18th century Rococo style are considered to be some of his best work. *The Rape of the Lock* was published in May while he was working on *Lysistrata*, an erotic book that was to be distributed by Leonard Smithers. Afterwards, he moved to the nearby town of Bournemouth to dwell in the mild climate. On March 31, Beardsley chose to be received by the Catholic Church before his death, and as repentance for what he felt were his sins, he wrote to Leonard Smithers imploring him to destroy all copies of *Lysistrata* in addition to any other obscene drawings. During the last year of his life, Aubrey Beardsley moved to the French Riviera where he died on March 16,

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His drawings in black ink, influenced by the style of Japanese woodcuts, emphasized the grotesque, the decadent, and the erotic. Beardsley was born in Brighton, England, on 21 August, and christened on 24 Oct. His father, Vincent Paul Beardsley, was the son of a tradesman; Vincent had no trade himself, however, and instead relied on a private income from an inheritance that he received from his maternal grandfather when he was twenty-one years of age. Soon after their wedding, Vincent was obliged to sell some of his property in order to settle a claim for his "breach of promise" from another woman who claimed that he had promised to marry her. In his family settled in London, and in the following year he appeared in public as an "infant musical phenomenon", playing at several concerts with his sister. He attended Brighton, Hove and Sussex Grammar School in, before moving on to attend Bristol Grammar School, where in he wrote a play, which he performed together with other students. At about the same time his first drawings and cartoons were published in the school newspaper of the Bristol Grammar School Past and Present. Work In, Beardsley travelled to Paris, where he discovered the poster art of Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec, and the Parisian fashion for Japanese prints, both of which would be major influences on his own style. His six years of major creative output can be divided into several periods, identified by the form of his signature. In the early period his work is mostly unsigned. During and he progressed to using his initials, A. He co-founded The Yellow Book with American writer Henry Harland, and for the first four editions he served as Art Editor and produced the cover designs and many illustrations for the magazine. He was also closely aligned with Aestheticism, the British counterpart of Decadence and Symbolism. Most of his images are done in ink, and feature large dark areas contrasted with large blank ones, and areas of fine detail contrasted with areas with none at all. Beardsley was the most controversial artist of the Art Nouveau era, renowned for his dark and perverse images and grotesque erotica, which were the main themes of his later work. His illustrations were in black and white, against a white background. Some of his drawings, inspired by Japanese shunga artwork, featured enormous genitalia. He also produced extensive illustrations for books and magazines. Beardsley was a public as well as private eccentric. He said, "I have one aim—the grotesque. If I am not grotesque I am nothing. Although Beardsley was associated with the homosexual clique that included Oscar Wilde and other English aesthetes, the details of his sexuality remain in question. He was generally regarded as asexual. Speculation about his sexuality include rumors of an incestuous relationship with his elder sister, Mabel, who may have become pregnant by her brother and miscarried. During his entire career, Beardsley had recurrent attacks of the disease that would end it. He suffered frequent lung hemorrhages and was often unable to work or leave his home. Death In deteriorating health prompted his move to the French Riviera, where he died a year later on 16 March at the Cosmopolitan Hotel in Menton, France, attended by his mother and sister. He was 25 years of age and the cause of death was tuberculosis. Following a Requiem Mass in Menton Cathedral the following day, his remains were interred in the adjacent cemetery.

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