

BEARDSLEY MOVEMENT IN RUSSIAN SILVER AGE CULTURE¹

Valeria D. Ryabchenko-Shats

Moscow State Institute of International Relations (University)

Abstract. This article dwells on the phenomenon of Russian *Beardsleism*, which was formed by the influence of the works and personality of the English graphic artist Aubrey Beardsley on the Russian intelligentsia at the turn of the twentieth century. As the brightest representative of English aestheticism and Art Nouveau, Aubrey Beardsley became a champion of the ideas of new art for Russia. In his homeland, Aubrey Beardsley managed to usher in a real revolution in the field of illustration and book graphics, turning them into independent elements of creativity and raising the art of graphics to a completely new, unprecedentedly high level. No less revolutionary was the artist's behaviour – Aubrey Beardsley turned his life into art, postulating innovative aesthetic and philosophical aspirations by his very appearance. The worth of his personality was undoubtedly comparable to the worth of his works, and one became inseparable from the other. Thus, the very image of Aubrey Beardsley became a symbol of the Art Nouveau era, containing numerous complex concepts. No wonder, therefore, that the sphere of his influence in Russia was extremely wide – not limited to the field of graphic art, it extended from new artistic methods to lifestyle and demeanor. The significance of Beardsleism in the Russian artistic life of the turn of the twentieth century is also indicated by its scope – the most prominent figures of the Silver Age, such as Sergei Diaghilev, Léon Bakst, Nikolai Feofilaktov, and the rather obscure Aleksandr Silin, Anatoly Arapov and Modest Durnov – both these and others experienced the significant influence of Aubrey Beardsley on their works and life.

Keywords: Silver Age, decadence, Aubrey Beardsley, Russian journals, graphics, illustration, symbolism, Anglomania, dandyism

Anglomania first appeared in Russia in the late eighteenth century, as a response to the obsession with all things French in the country. English-style parks were all the rage in Russia after Catherine the Great, who was known to be a “great admirer” of English garden art,² entrusted her gardens to James Meader, the

¹ Ryabchenko-Shats V. D. 2022. Beardsley Movement in Russian Silver Age Culture. *Concept: Philosophy, Religion, Culture*. 6(3). P. 141–155. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.24833/2541-8831-2022-3-23-141-155>

² Cross A. 1997. British Gardeners and the Fashion for English Parks in Russia in the Late 18th Century. In *From the Banks of the Thames to the Banks of the Neva. The Masterpieces of British Art in the Hermitage: Catalogue*. State Hermitage Museum. P. 80.

head gardener of the Duke of Northumberland, and the design of her Tsarskoye Selo and Pavlovsk residences to Charles Cameron, who would become one of her favourite architects (Bott 2004: 19). And later, everyone just had to have furniture in the style Thomas Chippendale and interiors à la William Morris (in 1894–1895, Morris & Co. even started to supply fabrics for decorating the personal apartments of Nicholas II and Alexandra Feodorovna).³ What is more, a manner of behaviour for the gentlemen of the “English fold” was developed – a special *modus operandi* known as the “dandy.” But it was not until the turn of the twentieth century that “British fever” truly swept Russian society, when the English illustrator and poet Aubrey Beardsley, one of the most prominent representatives of the English aesthetic movement (which ushered in the Art Nouveau era), entered the cultural arena in Russia and, in the words of Kuzma Petrov-Vodkin, immediately acquired “full citizen rights” (Petrov-Vodkin 1982: 428).

Beardsley’s outrageous works caused quite the stir from the very beginning. No wonder that his contemporaries wanted to study his graphics, highly impressed by his innovative artistic decisions. For example, the Scottish painter and art critic Dugald Sutherland MacColl, who was a friend of Beardsley, wrote one of the first articles in Russian on English graphic art, published in 1900 in the journal *Mir iskusstva* (*World of Art*).⁴ In 1905, Vittorio Pica published a short essay on Beardsley’s work,⁵ and later that year, the English symbolist poet, essayist and literary critic Arthur Symonds, produced a study of Beardsley’s art.⁶ A more in-depth study of Beardsley’s legacy by the art critic, publisher and poet Sergey Makovsky was published in 1906, which focused on the origins of the artist’s work and his creative world.⁷ Three years after that, Robert Ross published the seminal biography *Aubrey Beardsley*.⁸ In 1912, the Russian art critic and playwright Nikolai Evreinov wrote an essay entitled Beardsley, in which he analyses the significance of Aubrey Beardsley’s contribution to art and carefully plots his creative path.⁹ In 1913, the artist and critic Nicolas Radlov published an article entitled “Modern Russian Graphics and Drawing” in the journal *Apollo*, in which he mentions the significance of Aubrey Beardsley’s art in the development of world graphics and illustration.¹⁰ And, finally, the last pre-revolutionary study on the English artist – Aleksei Sidorov’s biography *Aubrey Beardsley: Life and Work* – came out in 1917.¹¹

It is important to note here that the artistic legacy of the controversial English illustrator is of no less interest to modern researchers. The artistic world of Aubrey Beardsley and his influence on the Russian art of the turn of the twentieth century have

³ Russian State Historical Archive. Fund 475. Series 1. File 605. Sheet 95.

⁴ MacColl D. 1900. Aubrey Beardsley. *Mir Iskusstva*, 7/8, 73–84; 9/10, 97–98, 100–101, 104, 106–110, 112–120.

⁵ *Aubrey Beardsley: Illustrations. Prose, Poetry, Aphorisms, Letters. Reminiscences and Articles about Beardsley.* (1992). Introductory Article in the Album. Edited, compiled and annotated by A. Basmanov. Igra-Tekhnika. P. 240–241.

⁶ *Ibid.* P. 242–248.

⁷ *Ibid.* P. 248–256

⁸ *Ibid.* P. 227–238.

⁹ Evreinov N. 1912 *Beardsley: A Sketch*. N. I. Butkovskaya.

¹⁰ Radlov N. 1913. Modern Russian Graphics and Drawing. *Apollo*. 6. P. 5–23.

¹¹ Sidorov A. A. 1917. *Aubrey Beardsley: Life and Work*. Doctoral dissertation. Moscow University. Venok.

been examined by G. Y. Sternin (Sternin 1984), E. S. Vyazova (Vyazova 2004; 2009), Y. Y. Gerchuk (Gerchuk 2004), A. E. Zavyalova (Zavyalova 2008), S. Chapkina-Rugi,¹² D. L. Lebedev (Lebedev 2021), A. K. Dovzhyk (Dovzhyk 2021), M. Sturgis (Sturgis 2014), and others. We should point out here that while all these works are of undoubted scientific value and content, they still leave room for further work into the influence of Aubrey Beardsley's work, and especially of Aubrey Beardsley the man, on the culture of the Silver Age of Russian Poetry.

The research methodology employed in this article is based on a comprehensive and systematic cultural approach, combining the historico-cultural method, textual analysis, scientific classification (the analysis of primary sources and secondary data), and the philosophical-aesthetic method. Sources used include archival materials of the Russian State Historical Archive, as well as documents kept in storage in the manuscript section of the State Russian Museum. Also important to our work are the pre-revolutionary art magazines *World of Art*, *Zolotoye runo* (*Golden Fleece*), *Vesy* (*Libra*) and *Apollon* (*Apollo*), as these were the journals that most clearly reflected the dynamics of the development of Russian thought and art at the turn of the century. A corpus of scientific and art-critique works also used, as were the memoirs of prominent figures of the Silver Age of Russian Poetry, including: Andrei Bely, Alexander Benois, Georgy Chulkov, Mstislav Dobuzhinsky, Igor Grabar, Vladislav Khodasevich, Nikolai Kuzmin, Pyotr Pertsov, Nina Petrovskaya, Kuzma Petrov-Vodkin, Sergei Shcherbatov, Konstantin Somov, and Sergei Vinogradov.

Beardsleism in the Culture of the Silver Age of Russian Poetry

Aubrey Beardsley played the role of messiah of new aesthetics in world culture and, undoubtedly, became an era-defining figure at the turn of the twentieth century. In his seemingly absurd work, the transcendental truth of the enchanting and frightening *fin de siècle* is clear to see. The works of numerous creators at the time contained a tacit and painful premonition of the fall of the old world. "*Incipit vita nova*" reads the dwarf in one of Beardsley's drawings – and he would become the living embodiment of this new life.

As a follower of decadence, the English illustrator recognized beauty as the only possible religion and managed to bring about a real revolution in the field of graphics and illustration. The colours of life that captivated his Impressionist contemporaries left Beardsley indifferent – for him, only black, white, ink, pen and paper existed. Beardsley's graphic works are simple yet pretentious at the same time: it is a game of contrasts, minimalism combined with unbridled imagination. "With fragile flourishes of ornamental design, a dust of small dots, patterned alternation of thick shadows and

¹² Chapkina-Rugi S. A. 2014. Russian Beardsleists. In *Oscar Wilde. Aubrey Beardsley. A View from Russia*. ABCdesign. P. 142–198.

white blots, this brilliant young man has created a graphic style that surpasses everything we have known to this point in its exquisite boldness and sharp contrasts” writes Sergey Makovsky, editor and publisher of the *Apollo* magazine.¹³

Despite the fact that Beardsley’s art is an amazing synthesis of eras (“there is nothing more charming than Beardsley’s anachronisms,” notes Makovsky¹⁴), and Beardsley himself always demonstrated a certain escapism, he was undoubtedly an artist of his time, for whom everything clean, simple and healthy was alien. “Graphics is a new and thoroughly model artform; Aubrey Beardsley will go down in art history not only as a perfect graphic artist, but also as a representative of his era, a man who felt and expressed more clearly than anyone else the creative problem facing art,” stresses art critic and bibliophile Aleksei Sidorov, who in 1917 published a large album of Beardsley’s drawings with detailed comments and analyses of his works.¹⁵ Beardsley also considered himself a graphic artist of modern life. As a true child of his time, he only saw beauty in the unnatural: he marvelled at oddly shaped flowers, disproportionate figures, and whimsical silhouettes. And, without a doubt, one of Beardsley’s most enduring masterpieces was Aubrey Beardsley himself – a real dandy, elegant and original in everything he did. Affectation was natural for him

It is truly amazing just how closely Beardsley’s frame of mind matched the spirit of the turn of the century. Not only was he able to express through his work the artistic aspirations of his contemporaries, their penchant for and pursuit of the ornamental, but he also set the tone, cultivating an elegant and sophisticated aesthetics. “Gaunt, dandified, racked by disease” (Sturgis 2014: 11), he mirrored the images he created. “It was a striking connection, promoted by the press and embraced by the public” (Sturgis 2014: 11). In the late 1890s, “Beardsley seemed to embody the very spirit of the *fin de siècle* (Sturgis 2014: 12). The image of Beardsley, coupled with the style of Oscar Wilde, would later become the tuning fork of Russian dandyism.

It was through illustration that Beardsley carved out for himself one of the most spectacular careers of the nineteenth century. Beardsley’s fame came thanks to books and magazines – he never produced a single painting, nor was a single exhibition of his works held during his lifetime. The artist and critic Nicolas Radlov noted that it was thanks to Beardsley’s work that book illustration became a genre of its own: “We only recently caught on to what is the central idea of his art – the separation of book graphics from the art of drawing.”¹⁶ During the short period of his creative output, covering the last seven years of his life, Beardsley managed to create a truly unique artistic language. Working on his drawings, the artist was provocative, mocking, treating the frivolous seriously and the serious frivolously. Beardsley was incredibly prolific: he was the illustrator and graphic designer for such works as *Le Morte d'Arthur* by

¹³ Beardsley: *Illustrations. Prose, Poetry...* P. 249

¹⁴ Makovsky S. 1908. On Beardsley’s Illustrations. In O. Wilde. *Salome*. Op. cit.

¹⁵ Sidorov. P. 61.

¹⁶ Radlov. P. 15.

Thomas Malory, *Salome* by Oscar Wilde, and *The Rape of the Lock* by Alexander Pope, among others; he also worked on his own poetry and prose, including the unfinished novel *Under the Hill* (his take on the Tannhäuser legend); he produced drawings and caricatures; and actively collaborated with the journals *The Savoy*, *The Studio*, *Pall Mall Budget*, *Pall Mall Magazin* and *The Yellow Book*. This, Aubrey Beardsley was a light that shone bright, albeit briefly, illuminating the *fin de siècle* era and serving as a powerful impetus for a new aesthetic and new ideological crusades in art.

One year after the 25-year-old Beardsley succumbed to tuberculosis, his “resurrection” began in Russia. This aesthetic spirit of this truly unique man became a symbol of freedom and individualism for the Russian culture of the Silver Age. The thirst in Russian societies for the ideas of aestheticism and pure form, which Oscar Wilde had demonstrated years before, was also a significant factor in Beardsley’s popularity. The translator and art critic Abram Efros noted that “Beardsley did not experience the brief resistance we offered to Wilde. He entered triumphantly in a country he had already conquered and had become prisoner to him.”¹⁷

The incredibly powerful wave of Art Nouveau that swept the Russian Empire gave rise to a cult of Beardsley’s work among the so-called *Miriskusniki* – contributors to the *Mir iskusstva* (*World of Art*) literary and arts magazine published monthly in St. Petersburg from 1898 to 1904, as well as members of the association of the same name. The creative core of the *World of Art* journal, the first periodical devoted entirely to promoting “new art,” was made up of Alexander Benois, Léon Bakst, Sergei Diaghilev, Dmitry Filosofov, Eugene Lansere, Walter Nouvel, Andrei Nurok, and Konstantin Somov. We cannot stress enough here that the *World of Art* was an entirely new phenomenon in the history of Russian culture, and changed its image forever. The group opposed the ideals of populism, which by that time had run its course, and opened the way to the search for new aesthetics and meanings in Russian art, and this, in turn, was contributed significantly to the emergence of Russian impressionism, modernism and symbolism. Thus, the periodical and the association of the same turned into a real phenomenon, reflecting the trends that emerged in Russian society in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, resonating most profoundly with the wants and needs of the new generation.

Interestingly, the *World of Art* magazine was directly influenced by the English journal *The Studio*, where Beardsley got his start. As Alexander Benois recalls, *World of Art* embodied the aspirations of the members of the group to ensure that “something similar to the *The Studio* would emerge in Russia” (Benois 1980b: 194). It is hardly surprising, therefore, that it was the students of the World of Art movement who were the first in Russia to be captivated by the work of Aubrey Beardsley, their ideology and aesthetics being remarkably close to his. And it is natural that they were the ones who introduced the Russian audience to Beardsley’s art, which was then cultivated in the Moscow-based journals *Libra* and *Golden Fleece*.

¹⁷ Rosstsii (Abram Efros). 1912. The Religious Crisis in the Life of Aubrey Beardsley. *Russkie vedemosti* (October 5). 3.

One figure who played a particularly important role in popularizing English graphic art was the music and art critic Andrei Nurok, who was known for being infatuated with all things English (having spent part of his childhood and adolescence in Great Britain) (Benois 1980b: 2490. Benois mentions Nurok in his memoirs: "... he is the one we have to thank for introducing us to the work of Aubrey Beardsley, which dominated our thoughts for five or six years (Benois 1980a: 685). Nurok was, according to Benois, a "typical decadent," fascinated by the "taste of decay," the "vicious sensuality dressed in all sorts of lace" in the English artist's work (Benois 1980a: 685). It was largely thanks to Nurok's obsession with English aestheticism that Sergei Diaghilev made Beardsley's acquaintance – having read Nurok's writings, Diaghilev considered it his duty during his trips to France in 1897–1898 to visit Oscar Wilde in Dieppe, where he also met Aubrey Beardsley and Charles Conder (Benois 1980a: 685). Moreover, it is generally accepted that Nurok was the first person to publish an article in Russian about Aubrey Beardsley, which was published in *World of Art* in 1899.¹⁸ Other articles on Beardsley came in 1900, the most notable of which was a translation commissioned by Diaghilev of an article by *The Studio* contributor, art critic and personal friend of Beardsley Dugald MacColl.¹⁹

It did not take long for the *World of Art*'s active promotion of Beardsley's work to bear fruit – the Russian public of the Silver Age was immediately taken with the English illustrator's unique work. He opened the door to his deliberate, pretentious and unimaginably attractive world, where defects are elegant, irony kills feelings, and beauty gifts us sweet oblivion. Beardsley turned out to be incredibly in sync with the ideas of the World of Art movement, and the mood of the Silver Age in general, with its eschatological crusades, a sprinkling of spiritualism and symbolism, and intoxicating decadence and aestheticism. And this explains why the followers of the World of Art movement were so passionately committed to his style. His precise technique – the thin, clean, perfect lines outlining the impure, the small nuances and detail of his illustrations – left a profound impression on their worldview. This is where their desire to produce a journal that was sophisticated, aesthetic, obsessed with artistic detail, and filled with all kinds of vignettes, borders, backdrops, letter frames, and so on, came from. As a matter of fact, it was the design of the *World of Art* magazine that would serve as a model for future apologists of symbolist journalism: for example, Nikolay Ryabushinsky, editor of the *Golden Fleece* art magazine, saw his publication to be a successor to the work of Sergei Diaghilev (Benois 1980b: 439).

The Moscow-based journals *Libra* and *Apollo* also clearly inherited the style of *World of Art* and demonstrate a passion for Beardsley's genius: in 1905, the graphic artist Nikolai Feofilaktov created a mock-up for the cover of the fifth edition of *Libra* that featured a depiction of Beardsley. The mock-up would eventually turn into a full-fledged cover for the eleventh issue of the magazine, which was dedicated entirely

¹⁸ A. N. (Nurok A.). 1899. Aubrey Beardsley. *Mir iskusstva*. 3/4. P. 16–17.

¹⁹ MacColl.

to Beardsley's work, containing numerous drawings and sketches, as well as some of his prose and a translation of an article by Vittorio Pica about him. Thus, Beardsley's aesthetics became a tuning fork for an entirely new area of Russian journalism and publishing. When discussing the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, one cannot but agree with Kuzma Petrov-Vodkin when he writes that it really was "the time of Beardsley, when all the books, journals and almanacs of the leading publishing houses were dotted and garlanded with circles" (Petrov-Vodkin 1982: 428).

The speed with which the new English aesthetics took root in Russia and the degree to which it influenced Russian culture are clear from the writings of prominent figures of the Silver Age of Russian Poetry. Nina Petrovskaya, femme fatale of the bohemian world at the turn of the century and heroine of Valery Bryusov's debut novel *The Fiery Angel*, describes the prevailing mood of the era thus: "Ladies, who only yesterday were heavy, like dolls in their nests, started to dream about Balmont's 'serpent-like nature' and 'moon streams'; dressed in the tunics of Pre-Raphaelite maidens and, as if on command, combed their hair à la Monna Vanna. Gentlemen and husbands became dignified and ironed à la Oscar Wilde. Languidly powdered young men with shadows under their eyes appeared. The 'tiger orchid' became everyone's favourite flower, even though it had been immortalized even before Balmont by the most piquant Maupassant as a 'sinful flower'" (Garetto 1989: 42).

"All" of Moscow, the vast Moscow of merchants, sworn attorneys, merchant sons, the sophisticated people – i.e. the same "old Moscow" that over the course of two or three years repainted their villas in "stylish nouveau" colours – swapped their suit jackets for tuxedos, à la Wilde, and their dresses for chitons, 'à la Botticelli,'" Andrei Bely commented sardonically (Bely 1990a: 125). To be sure, the philosophy and style of the English aesthetic movement, embodied in the figure and art of Aubrey Beardsley, instantly captured literally all spheres of life of Russian society, especially bohemian circles.

As these new trends extended to both the spiritual and material aspects of the lives of the Russian people at the turn of the century, they would also be reflected in the fashion of the time. The dandyism that was a distinctive feature of the representatives of the English Art Nouveau movement was all the rage in the artistic circles of Moscow and St. Petersburg in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Formulated by Charles Baudelaire as a "new aristocracy" that sought to achieve rebellion and combat vulgarity, and which adhered to the "doctrine of elegance and originality" and the "cult of one's own personality" (Baudelaire 1986: 283–315), dandyism was a cultural role that was adopted by many, if not all, of the most prominent figures of the Russian Silver Age. What made the image of the dandy so attractive was the fact that the dandy was, in a way, the last hero of a bygone era, the only worthy reference point against the backdrop of world that was crumbling. Baudelaire subtly noted that dandyism arises precisely in unstable periods of social change, when "democracy has not yet achieved true power, and the aristocracy has only partly lost its dignity and the ground under its feet," and that it is like "a sunset: like a dying star, magnificent, lacking warmth

and filled with melancholy” (Baudelaire 1986: 283–315). Thus, the image of the dandy became an homage to the noble habits of the disappearing aristocracy, creating a new “caste,” uniting individuals who were idle, uncompromising in the face of vulgarity, spiritually gifted, and original.

One such original individual was the architect, artist, poet and *arbitrum elegantum* of the Moscow bohemia of the turn of the century, Modest Durnov, who, thanks to his emphatically impeccable manners, wit and immaculate appearance, rightfully earned the title of Moscow’s first dandy. It is worth noting here that his deliberately elegant image was intended not only to shock, but also to challenge the ideology of the populists, who called, among other things, for people to dress unpretentiously. Modest Durnov was an ardent apologist for “new art” and was known for spreading the latest ideas and trends, which, of course, made him a passionate admirer of Oscar Wilde. In 1903, he created a watercolour portrait of this idol, and later illustrated Wilde’s poem “The Ballad of Reading Gaol,” as well as his novel *The Picture of Dorian Gray* and his play *Salome*. Durnov’s unique style and refined taste, which he manifested in both his life and his art, made him a kind of focal point for the most brilliant creators of his time. Valentin Serov, Mikhail Vrubel, Vasily Vereshchagin, Aleksandr Golovin, Serge Soudeikine, Valery Bryusov, Konstantin Balmont – they all fell into the orbit of this “gloomy devil,” (Bely 1990a: 188). “Bryusov and Balmont considered him one of their own, and Balmont dedicated his book *Let Us Be Like the Sun*, among others, to ‘Modest Durnov, [who was] hard as steel,’ recalls Sergei Vinogradov (Vinogradov 1993: 431). Balmont also wrote in the dedication: “To Modest Durnov, an artist who created a poem out of his own personality.”²⁰ And, according to Vladislav Khodasevich, “legends” truly “were created” about the Modest Durnov and his fate.²¹ Much like that of Beau Brummell, the most famous of all the British dandies, his “whole life was an influence” (Barbey d’Aurevilly 2000: 77). Durnov was especially influential in shaping the worldview of the masters of the World Art movement. Following him, all the members of the association, in addition to Alexander Benois, sought not only to adhere to the dandy style in their manner of dress, but also to reproduce the most characteristic features of this *modus operandi*. Aubrey Beardsley served as an unconditional point of reference here too. For example, Nikolai Feofilaktov, who equally imitated Beardsley in his appearance and his artistic style – and thus received the nickname the “Moscow Beardsley” (Bely 1990b: 212) – according to Sergei Vinogradov’s memoirs, even “had his hair styled like Aubrey Beardsley” and “tried all the time to keep his profile in people’s view, because his profile resembled that of Oscar Wilde” (Vinogradov 1993: 431). Bely, meanwhile, contests that Feofilaktov had a “profile like Beardsley’s” (Bely 1990a: 422).

²⁰ Cit. ex Khodasevich, V. 1928. The End of Renata. *Vozrozhdenie*. 3. P. 1045–1047.

²¹ Ibid.

Léon Bakst was also known for his dandyism: the artist loved to wear formal suits with spectacular bright colours, and had a “trademark” manner of speaking and gesticulating. Igor Grabar recalls: “... he was a dandy, dressed to the nines, in patent leather boots, with a magnificent necktie and a bright purple handkerchief coquettishly tucked into the cuff of his shirt. He was a coquette: his movements were soft, his gestures elegant, and his speech quiet – his entire manner of behaving was fashioned after that of the ‘secular’ dandies, with their deliberate disengagement and a feigned ‘English’ licentiousness” (Grabar 1937: 158). In his oft-cited memoirs, Mstislav Dobuzhinsky also pointed to the fact that Bakst “dressed extremely smartly” (Dobuzhinsky 1987: 201). The pianist and amateur composer Walter Nouvel, an “acknowledged *Magister elegantiarum*” among his World of Art colleagues (Dobuzhinsky 1987: 203), was elegant in both appearance and his rare wit. As was his friend, the “melancholy sceptic” (Chulkov 1999: 210) and “St. Petersburg Parisian” (Pertsov 2002: 206) Andrei Nurok, who was also known for his cynicism, subtle sarcasm and excellent panache.

However, the dandyism of the English aesthetes was most fully embodied in the life and work of Sergei Diaghilev. “Diaghilev was a dandy,” wrote Makovsky, “the people of St. Petersburg commented, not without mocking envy, on his top hat, his immaculate business cards and his *vestons*. “He had a foppish swagger, loved to show off his dandyism, and wore a scented silk scarf in the cuff of his shirt. Whenever he had the chance, he would, in order to spite the bigots of virtue, ignore, much like Oscar Wilde, the ‘prejudice’ of good morals, refusing to hide the unusualness of his tastes” (Makovsky 1955: 201). Paradoxically, even Diaghilev’s friends in the art world, themselves dandies to varying degrees, often accused him of excessive aplomb. Benois recalls: “We often called him on his ‘prancing,’ his obvious dandyism, and not without reason, I have to say” (Vyazova 2004: 68). Konstantin Somov, for one, could not stand the way Diaghilev carried himself, and often complained in his letters that he was “impudent to the point of disgusting,” or “such a grand sir that it’s sickening” (Somov 1979: 62). However, some were able to see behind the image of a brilliant dandy a man of lofty ideas and bold aspirations. In his homage to Diaghilev, Nicholas Roerich wrote: “He was not your run-of-the-mill ‘bearer of a green carnation,’ but was rather a sincere knight of evolution and beauty.”²² To be sure, Diaghilev’s affected and defiantly impeccable style was nothing more than the externalization of the ideas he put into practice, and a manifestation of his nonconformism, something he would admit in a letter to Alexander Benois in April 1897: “Everything I have done in my life... I have done in defiance of everyone – just remember how long I seemed to you to be your inner hussar. Then society started to attack my appearance, my pomposity and dandyism. I know this for sure, yet I walk into the Assembly of the Nobility dressed just like this.”²³

²² Roerich N. K. 1930. A Wreath for Diaghilev. *The League of Composers’ Review*. URL: <https://rerih.org/library/3008/50>

²³ Manuscript Section of the Russian State Museum. Fund 137. File 939. Sheets 20–25.

It is important to note that dandyism did not only take over the World of Art movement, as the employees at the *Apollo* art magazine were equally enamoured, following the lead of its editor, art critic and the “living embodiment of dandyism,” Sergey Makovsky.²⁴ According to the illustrator Nikolai Kuzmin, “this was the most gentlemanly editorial office in the capital” – Makovsky even proposed making it obligatory for all employees to come to work wearing tuxedos.²⁵ The writer and author of the theory of “mystical anarchism” Georgy Chulkov recalled the atmosphere that reigned in the editorial office: “There was a cult of dandyism at *Apollo*. The employees flaunted a special kind of aristocracy, almost ludicrous at times, causing one to wonder about its authenticity. The magazine put on parties, attended by ladies in striking dresses, low-cut, like at balls. And many of the men would be wearing tailcoats” (Chulkov 1999: 201).

One of *Apollo*’s employees in particular was often compared to the English aesthetes and dandies, and that was the poet Mikhail Kuzmin. The “lean and elegant” (Bely 1990a: 356) Kuzmin was alternately compared with Beau Brummell, Dorian Gray, and even Oscar Wilde himself. “It was the picture of Dorian Gray” – this is how Dobuzhinsky described meeting the poet (Dobuzhinsky 1987: 279). It is no coincidence that it was Mikhail Kuzmin who wrote the preface to a short treatise on Brummell and dandyism by the French author Jules Barbey d’Aurevilly, where he defined dandyism as a “true property of art” (Barbey d’Aurevilly 2000: 46).

In the same preface, Kuzmin very accurately noted that d’Aurevilly’s book is devoted to dandyism as an “inner fashion” first and foremost, rather than an outward one, as a “psychological way of ‘knotting a tie’” (Barbey d’Aurevilly 2000: 46). This line of thinking is followed by the author himself, who notes that dandyism must be understood much more broadly than just “the art of dressing”: dandyism, according to d’Aurevilly, “is a manner of living [...] consisting of subtle shades” (Barbey d’Aurevilly 2000: 72). This fundamental aspect of the understanding of dandyism was also emphasized by Charles Baudelaire, who wrote that “it is also unreasonable to reduce dandyism to an exaggerated passion for dress and external elegance. For the true dandy, all of these material attributes are merely a symbol of the aristocratic superiority of his spirit” (Baudelaire 1986: 283–315). Thus, the most important reason why dandyism took root on Russian soil was that, in addition to the external trappings of the phenomenon, Russian bohemia also adopted the internal content of dandyism, which presupposes a special behavioural code that cultivates individuality. We can therefore assume that the style and behaviour of Aubrey Beardsley and Oscar Wilde, transformed into true art and becoming a facet of the expression of their aesthetic and philosophical aspirations, had a significant impact on the formation of the concept of the creative life,

²⁴ Kuzmin N. V. 1982. *The Recent and the Distant*. Sovetsky khudoazhnik. P. 245.

²⁵ Ibid. P. 244.

which was of paramount importance for the culture of the Russian Silver Age, involving, as it did, the postulation of artistic ideas through life itself. It was during the Silver Age of Russian Poetry that behaviour, fused with style, emerged as an artistic task in itself. In addition, the exaggerated aloofness that supposedly elevated the dandy above all those around him, his effeminacy, his aversion to the brutal aspects of life, and his standoffishness in pursuit of his aesthetic and hedonistic needs, probably contributed to the Art Nouveau apologists separating themselves from the social and utilitarian functions of creativity.

This new style of behaviour at the turn of the twentieth century was accompanied by the deliberate stylization of interiors and an abundance of unusual and whimsical decorative elements. From this moment on, the interior of one's home had to match the aesthetic principles of the owner, it had to be a perfect reflection of his personality. Prince Mikhailo Shcherbatov, the ideologue and financier of the "Modern Art" salon, wrote: "... a home, a room – could it not be a 'symphony' in its forms, colours, and overall harmony?" (Shcherbatov 2016: 118). Shcherbatov wanted "Modern Art" to become a platform around which "creativity would be concentrated, that it, it would show through in the applied arts, which is closely connected to pure art [...] The applied arts should not be represented, as they typically are, by selected works, but should reveal a kind of holistic plan of artists who are gradually involved in arranging the interiors of rooms as a kind of organic and harmonious whole, where, starting with the walls and furniture and ending with all the small details, the principle of unity, which I indicated as an unshakable law, would be realized" (Shcherbatov 2016: 179–180).

Participants had to present their own interior design projects, which they worked on just as reverently and diligently as they would on their own artworks: according to Dobuzhinsky, interior design was a "parallel sprout" of the creativity of the World of Art artists (Dobuzhinsky 1987: 192). "Modern Art" pursued the goal of "creating a series of 'model' interiors with all the furnishings into which our artists from the World of Art circle could invest their taste for grace and sense of style" (Dobuzhinsky 1987: 192). The best artists of the period were involved in the enterprise, including Eugene Lansere, Alexander Benois, Igor Grabar, Konstantin Korovin, Léon Bakst, and Aleksandr Golovin. Each room was decorated by the artists, using the general concept and sketches as guidelines, without the involvement of architects. The project's curator, Igor Grabar, explained his vision: "the truly extraordinarily beautiful decoration of the rooms will be a wonderful surprise and will stun the St. Petersburg public. It will give an impetus to taste, practically ushering in a new era..." (Dobuzhinsky 1987: 193). And we have to say that the interiors were indeed splendid and caused quite the stir among the public: they were impractical and unusable, which was essentially the point, and people either marvelled at them or were somewhat bemused.

The commitment of the World of Art members to English aestheticism is also worthy of note here. For example, Léon Bakst created a boudoir-rotunda in the spirit of the Suite en Blanc brought to life by the architect and decorator Edward William Godwin at Oscar Wilde's house on Tite Street in Chelsea. The interior was supposed to

leave an impression of incredible fragility and weightlessness: ivory walls, white fabrics with ornaments on the floor and the finest, most delicate furniture, which is intended to exude “the aroma of perfume and power,” as Bakst himself said (Shcherbatov 2016: 152). The influence of English culture can also be seen in the dark blue dining room of Alexander Benois and Eugene Lansere: the furniture made by the in-demand Nikolai Svirsky according to sketches produced by Benois was partly stylized as Chippendale furniture, which was typical of the palace furnishings of the Peter the Great era and served as inspiration for the craftsmen who managed to organically and successfully combine it with Modern Art. Reproductions of all the interiors were published in the fifth issue of *World of Art* in 1903, dedicated entirely to the activities of the Modern Art salon.

The influence of Aubrey Beardsley can also be seen in the work of the World of Art masters. Almost every single one of them, from Alexander Benois to Dmitry Mitrohin, became fascinated with Beardsley’s artistic style and they set about mastering and creatively reworking his methods, techniques and images. In his memoirs, Benois pointed out that Aubrey Beardsley “strongly influenced the art (and the overall attitude towards art) of the subtlest artist among us, Konstantin Somov” (Benois 1980a: 685). Indeed, Somov’s own unique style is a direct result of his dallying with Beardsley’s graphic inventions. “An impression that is truly special (a kind of spiritual connection with our cult of Hoffmann and Dostoevsky,” wrote Benois, “is being made on both of us, but on Somov in particular, by Aubrey Beardsley and Thomas Heine. His passion for the former (and partly for his friend Conder) helps even Somov to develop his own ‘graphic style,’ his own ‘artistic mark’” (Somov 1979: 482). Inspired by the eroticism of Beardsley’s drawings, Somov created a genre that was completely new for Russia, “nude art,” which he combined with the capricious sensuality and affectation of the “courtly age” he loved so much. What is more, Somov compiled the first ever album of Beardsley’s work to be released in Russia, in which he expressed his love for the illustrator’s showiness.²⁶ The small volume was extremely professionally made. Benois, in turn, incorporated broken silhouettes and the play of dotted lines and grotesque images into his work. Bakst managed to assimilate the sophistication of Beardsley’s work, but was far from him in terms of the obscene nature of his pictures. Lansere successfully imitated Beardsley’s style in intricate and whimsical patterns. The Oriental style and pomp organically became a part of the graphic work of Mitrokhin, as just like the mystical images and exquisite decorativeness became part of Sergey Chekhonin’s drawings. What is more, in their illustrative work, World of Art artists, like Beardsley, practiced “co-authorship” – the free interpretation by the artist of the writer’s ideas. In this case, the illustration would serve as both a visual reproduction of a literary work, and an independent work capable of radically changing the meaning

²⁶ Beardsley A. 1906. Beardsley: [album / works selected under the direction of the artist Konstantin Somov; engravings by Frismuth and Marx]. Shipovnik.

of the text, or adding something significant to it. In addition, one of Beardsley's most impressive qualities was his ability to combine motifs from different eras. Artists from the World of Art movement also strove to reconcile mysticism with reality: they drew from everything that they considered to be the best aesthetically, paying no attention to chronology or verisimilitude, creating images that astound in terms of their modernity and honesty.

World of Art was not the only magazine whose illustrations bear the unmistakable mark of Beardsley's genius, as his influence can also be seen in the Moscow periodicals *Libra* and *Golden Fleece*. Beardsley scholars claim that this influence extended to almost all the graphic artists who worked for these publications (Gerchuk 2004:121). One of the most glaring examples of this is the work of Nikolai Feofilaktov, who we talked about above. Feofilaktov was the lead designer of *Libra* and the creator of a cover to one of its issues that paid tribute to Beardsley (*Libra*, no. 11, 1905), whose style he was able to imitate both in his art and in his life. Along with his planar ornament-style patterns, the "Moscow Beardsley" was also captivated by the understated plot, full of meaning, and the unabashed eroticism of the works of his English colleague. As a result, his own drawings often acquired an "almost pornographic" character (Pertsov 2002: 193). Despite this, the ideologue and *de facto* leader of *Libra*, Valery Bryusov, had a soft spot for Feofilaktov, decorating his apartment on Tsvetnoy Boulevard with his works (Pertsov 2002: 193); he also sent an album of Feofilaktov's drawings published in 1909 entitled *Scorpio*, along with an album of Somov's paintings, to Émile Verhaeren.²⁷ The editor and publisher of *Libra*, Sergei Polyakov, was also partial to graphic art. While he gave Bryusov free rein to print what he wanted in the journal in terms of its ideological and literary content, he was extremely finicky when it came to the graphic style of the publication. According to Andrei Bely, Polyakov loved nothing more to "pour over a page of *Libra*," rustling one of Feofilaktov's "squiggles" and exclaim: "it's finer than Beardsley" – extremely carefully engraved, giving *Libra* a beautiful aesthetic (Bely 1990a: 415). The towering influence of Aubrey Beardsley's artistic style on the overall tone of *Libra* can be felt beyond Feofilaktov's work, too, as Anatoly Arapov's elegant and whimsical style was very close to that of Feofilaktov, and Alexander Yakimchenko, whose eclectic drawings were also likely more akin to Feofilaktov's work than to Beardsley's, and the ethereal and fragile graphics produced by Nikolai Sapunov, and many others. Vassili Milliotti, who worked as a layout artist for both *Libra* and *Golden Fleece*, endowed the style of his fabulous, "moving" drawings with a unique sophistication – his work was a kind of synthesis of the artistic methods of Mikhail Vrubel and Aubrey Beardsley. The artist and art critic Nicolas Radlov points to another man as the most direct and "subtle" imitator of Aubrey Beardsley, namely Aleksandr Silin.²⁸ Thus, *Libra*, which differed from the World of Art in that it was a literary journal only,

²⁷ Valery Bryusov to Émile Verhaeren (Jan. 22 / 4 Feb. 1900). In Valery Bryusov. *Literary Heritage*. V. 85. Nauka. P. 583.

²⁸ Radlov. P. 15.

became a centre of Russian *Beardsleism*. With regard to the Moscow artists of the *Libra* and *Golden Fleece* circle, we can say that it was their unique take on Beardsley that allows us to single out Russian *Beardsleism* as the most striking manifestation of camp stylistics on Russian soil.

Conclusion

There is no doubt that Aubrey Beardsley was a guiding light of Russian decadence. Beardsley, incredibly sensitive as he was to everything subtle, fragile and ephemeral, managed to create a world all of his own, woven from the terrible realities of the turn of the twentieth century, like rays reflected in the black diamond of his work. Building exquisite castles from lace, creating images that are terrifying in their brokenness and demonism, all he was doing was translating life into the language of decorative patterns. This ghostly metaphysical layer of reality, woven from vague experiences, inevitable and fatal, from images of purity and devilry, reflected the antinomy of the culture of the Russian Silver Age, and was fully understood and embraced by Russian society at the turn of the twentieth century, which became enveloped by the influence of the work and personality of the scandalous English graphic artist. Aubrey Beardsley, like no other artist before him, managed to express the presentiments and aspirations of the Russian creative intelligentsia, and, as such, he made a significant contribution to the creation of the myth of the Russian Silver Age.

About the Author:

Valeria D. Ryabchenko-Shats – a Ph.D. student and Lecturer in the Department of International Journalism at the Department of World Literature and Culture. 119454, Russia, Moscow, MGIMO University, Prospect Vernadskogo 76. ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-4940-6207>. Email: ryabchenko.v@inno.mgimo.ru

Conflicts of interest:

The author declares the absence of any conflicts of interest.

The article was submitted on July 11, 2022, approved after review on August 18, 2022, and accepted for publication on September 5, 2022.

References:

- Barbey D'Aurevilly J. 1879. *Du dandysme et de George Brummell*. Alphonse Lemerre.
- Baudelaire C. 1868. *L'Art Romantique*. Michel Levy Freres.
- Bely A. 1990a. *Mezhdu dvukh revolyutsii [Between Two Revolutions]*. Khudozhestvennaia Literatura Publishers. (In Russian)
- Bely A. 1990b. *Nachalo veka [The Beginning of the Century]*. Khudozhestvennaia Literatura Publishers. (In Russian)
- Benois A. 1980a. *Moi vospominaniya: v 5 kn. Kn. 1–3 [My Recollections: In Five Books. Books 1–3]*. Nauka. (In Russian)
- Benois A. 1980b. *Moi vospominaniya: v 5 kn. Kn. 4–5 [My Recollections: In Five Books. Books 4–5]*. Nauka. (In Russian)

- Bott I. 2004. 'Mebel' Charl'za Kamerona [Charles Cameron's Furniture]. *Pinacoteca*, 18/19, 18–25. (In Russian)
- Chulkov G. I. 1999. *Gody stranstvii* [Years of Wandering]. Ellis Lak. (In Russian)
- Dobuzhinsky M. V. 1987. *Vospominaniya* [Recollections]. Nauka. (In Russian)
- Dovzhyk S. 2021. Beardsley Men in Early Twentieth-Century Russia: Modernising Decadent Masculinity. *Modernist Cultures*. 16(2). P. 191–215. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.3366/mod.2021.0328>. (In Russian)
- Garetto E. 1989. Zhizn' i smert' Niny Petrovskoy [The Life and Death of Nina Petrovskaya]. In *Minuvsheye: Istoricheskiy Al'manakh* [The Past: Historical Almanac]. 8. Atheneum. P. 7–139. (In Russian)
- Gerchuk Y. 2004. Pod znakom Berdsli [Under the Banner of Beardsley]. *Pinacoteca*, 18/19. P. 119–125. (In Russian)
- Grabar I. E. 1937. *Moya zhizn': avtomonografiya* [My Life]. Iskusstvo. (In Russian)
- Lebedev D. L. 2021. Aubrey Beardsley and Arthur Rackham: Subtleties of Impact. *Arts, Education and Science*. 1(1). P. 97–107. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.36871/hon.202101011>. (In Russian)
- Makovsky S. 1955. *Portrety sovremennikov* [Portraits of Contemporaries]. Chekhova Publishers. (In Russian)
- Pertsov P. P. 2002. *Literaturnye vospominaniya 1890–1902* [Literary Memoirs]. Novoe Literaturnoe Obozrenie. (In Russian)
- Petrov-Vodkin K. S. 1982. *Khlynovsk: Prostranstvo Evklida: Samarkandiya* [Khlynovsk: Euclidian Space: Samarkand]. Iskusstvo. (In Russian)
- Shcherbatov S. 2016. *Khudozhnik ushedshei Rossii* [The Artist of Bygone Russia]. DirectMedia Publishers. (In Russian)
- Sternin G. Y. 1984. *Russkaia khudozhestvennaia kul'tura vtoroi poloviny XIX – nachala KhKh veka* [Russian Culture of the Second Half of the 19th to the Early 20th Centuries]. Sovetskii khudozhnik. (In Russian)
- Sturgis M. 1998. *Aubrey Beardsley: A Biography*. London: HarperCollins.
- Vinogradov S. 1993. O strannom zhurnale, ego talantlivykh sotrudnikakh i moskovskikh pi-rakh [On a Strange Magazine, Its Talented Employees and Moscow Feasts]. In *Vospominaniya o Ser-ebryanom veke* [Memories of the Silver Age]. Respublika. P. 430–440. (In Russian)
- Vyazova E. S. 2004. Bogema i dendizm: "shtany s bakhromoi" ili buton'erka v petlitse? [Bo-hemia and Dandyism: "Fringed Trousers" or a Boutonniere in a Buttonhole?]. *Pinacoteca*, 18/19. P. 63–69. (In Russian)
- Vyazova E. S. 2009. Gipnoz anglomanii. Angliya i "angliyskoye" v russkoy kul'ture rubezha XIX–XX vekov [Anglomania Hypnosis. England and "English" in Russian Culture at the Turn of the 20th Century]. Novoe Literaturnoe Obozrenie. (In Russian)
- Zavyalova A. E. 2008. Somov i Berdsli. Liubopytnye sovpadeniia. Novye fakty [Somov and Beardsley. Curious Coincidences. New Facts]. *Russkoe iskusstvo*. 4. P. 94–98. (In Russian)