

B E A R D S L E Y

Sixty years have passed away since Aubrey Beardsley was born. Graphic art received its strongest inspiration from him and the influence exercised by his drawings stirred up a perfect army of imitators. We have seen the ultimate results of this influence; the form became a formula, the spirit was lost. But it is the intellectual content which is the unique feature of Aubrey Beardsley's work.

His creative work fell in the last years of a decaying epoch and at the same time marked the beginning of a new age. It was the period of the eighties and the nineties. The rise of industrialism was at an end and a new economic form had developed at the turn of the century. The art style which it produced exhausted itself in Germany in a grotesque formalism—the Jugendstil, known elsewhere as Art nouveau. To-day we are accustomed to contemplate the Jugendstil only in its most decadent and debased forms and it is usually forgotten that its best and greatest pioneers were artists such as Beardsley and Walter Crane. The highly developed pre-war poster art of Germany would be unthinkable without Beardsley.

The last echoes of this period lasted until the beginning of the World War; futurism and cubism had not as yet penetrated into the realm of black-and-white. During the war the art of all nations was infested by jingoistic productions which can only be estimated from the point of their value as propaganda. The political convulsions of the post-war years were reflected in expressionism, which rejected all previous standards. The short period of apparent economic revival also had its effect upon art. Technical trick effects were almost everywhere valued higher than artistic invention and honest ability. To-day art has no goal and no leader—things are as chaotic as in the sphere of economics.

All artistic creation is subject to the influences of its age. But important as it is to constitute its economic and intellectual connections, it must never be forgotten that the work of art itself survives its connection with a period. We therefore accept Julius Klinger's suggestion and devote more space to the work of Aubrey Beardsley than we have ever devoted to any individual artist. We are convinced that we are issuing these reproductions at a moment calculated to aid the great and exemplary work of this master to a new and wider significance.

H. K. Frenzel.