

A Probe into the Artistic Style of Aubrey Beardsley

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Abstract: This paper explores the artistic style of British artist Beardsley from three different aspects. Beardsley's unique style of Art Deco is formed by his absorption of Japanese Ukiyo-e's style and features, the coordinated proportion of the picture composition and the use of black and white blocks. In addition, the beautiful and gorgeous painting style and the expression of the theme of "evil" constitute the artistic characteristics of decadentism. At the same time, the creation of female images in the works of Aubrey Beardsley also shows a rebellion against the ideal female images in the Victorian era.

Keywords: Aubrey Beardsley, Gaze Theory, Decadentism, Art Deco.

1. Introduction

Beardsley was born in Brighton, England in 1872. His father died when he was young, not only that, because of the change, he could not inherit his father's legacy. Beardsley's mother is a middle-class educated woman, but now she can only earn some subsidies for her family by teaching piano. Beardsley was diagnosed with tuberculosis when he was 7 years old. The disease became the prelude to his rough life. Beardsley was only a company employee when he first entered the society, but in 1891, inspired by Bonn Jones, he began his painting career. Beardsley created many paintings in his life, which were illustrations for the magazine founded by Bonn Jones himself. Throughout his life, he left many and 300 paintings [1].

However, after he was dismissed, his lung disease suddenly relapsed and worsened. Three years later, he died in a small hotel in France at the age of 26. Beardsley is a very successful painter in his art career. In his era, he created a unique style of painting, which caused a heated discussion in the art world and society. Beardsley's excellent understanding of lines and images is fully demonstrated in his pictures. The picture composition of his works is simple and can highlight the key points. The soft lines of the characters and the cold expressions of the characters form a sharp contrast. Her illustration style is both fine and subtle, and her illustration is even more subtle. The decorative style of the picture is one of the subtle meanings. This article aims to use the research method of iconology to explore the decorative style, morbid and decadent aesthetic feeling and his rebellion against the ideal female image in the works of Aubrey Beardsley, a unique artist.

2. Full of Art Deco

As an illustrator, Aubrey Beardsley's success cannot be separated from the uniqueness of his pictures. His artistic creation has been inspired by various sources, such as artworks of Ukiyo-e from Japan and neoclassicism from Rome and Ancient Greece, etc. Japan's Ukiyo-e, as a genre painting with

Japanese local characteristics, has an obvious influence on Aubrey Beardsley. Ukiyo-e has just started as a screen, a pattern on wallpaper, and therefore has a decorative style. Ukiyo-e is good at painting flat colors, as well as slim, soft and curvaceous lines depicting women. These characteristics can be found in Aubrey Beardsley's paintings. Another point is that the lines used by Ukiyo-e in depicting buildings and objects are mostly straight lines, which have the effect of "framing" the picture, while soft curves are used for people and clothing (figure. 1).



Figure 1: Suzuki Harunobu's "Lovers Beneath an Umbrella in the Snow", 27.2 cm x 20.2 cm, Conservation at the Art Institute of Chicago (1767).

From another dimension, neoclassicism is also a great inspiration to Aubrey Beardsley. Neoclassicism originated from Rome in the 18th century and then spread to Europe and the United States. It is a trend of thought to revive the artistic style of ancient Greece and Rome. Neo-classical painters consciously imitated the works of that era. Therefore, the characteristics of neoclassical figure paintings are firstly in line with the costumes of ancient Rome and Greece, and secondly, they hope that the figures will have sculptural lines (figure 2). This tendency of neoclassicism in shaping images can also be seen in the works of Aubrey Beardsley.

An excellent illustrator can effectively express his inner consciousness in the pictures he paints, and Aubrey Beardsley has done this very well. The complex in his works is often related to murder, conspiracy and secrets. The artistic expression in Beardsley's works often shows a special artistic style around the complex of pictures, which achieves a good combination of content and form. First, from the color aspect, many of Beardsley's works have a creepy smell to the viewer. A large part of this smell comes from the black and white color of the picture. The contrast between black and white gives people a sharper look and feel. There is no soft mid-tone decoration. The whole picture is placed directly in front of the viewer. Although the theme and content of Beardsley are very clear, the black-

and-white images, because they are different from the colorful real world around them, give the audience more space to imagine. When the viewers think about the images in their minds, it is easier to create an atmosphere of extreme fear when combining the plots [2].



Figure 2: Jacques-Louis David's "Le Serment des Horaces", canvas oil painting, Conservation at the Louvre Palace (1784).



Figure 3: Beardsley's "Venus between Terminal Gods", paper illustration.

In his works, the influence of Rococo style on Aubrey Beardsley is also obvious. Rococo style was popular in France in the 17th and 18th centuries. The clothing and painting style of the rococo style were gorgeous, meticulous and even complicated. Rococo is also very good at using winding and luxuriant plant lines and patterns for painting, home and architectural decoration. In this Rococo-style work "Venus between Terminal Gods" (figure 3), vines wrap around the whole picture, dense but not burdensome. Venus' clothing is narrow at the top and wide at the bottom, presenting the exaggerated clothing style of the Rococo period. The image of the old man in the robe with symmetrical sides has a sculptural texture in the treatment of the garment folds.

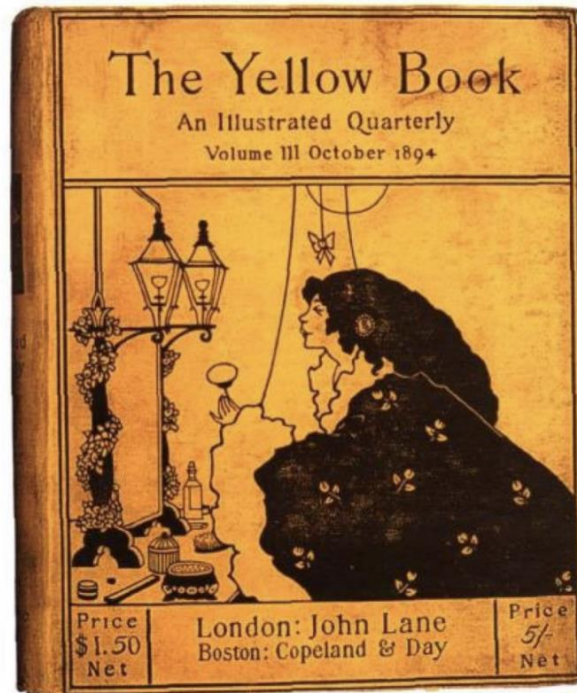


Figure 4: The Yellow Book, with a cover illustrated by Aubrey Beardsley.

In addition, Beardsley's use of graphics is just right. As an illustration in a novel collection, the framework of Aubrey Beardsley's works is mostly rectangular. In the frame of the illustrations, Aubrey Beardsley also shows the harmonious effect of the figures and the frame in proportion. It can be noted that the figure in Beardsley's painting is longer than that of a real person, especially the neck is very long and thin, the limbs are strangely unfolded, and the head is very small. Beardsley's artistic expression of human body did not produce an incongruous effect, but formed his distinctive artistic style. In the performance of the characters in the story, narrow-minded people have narrow shoulders, small heads and large bodies, which are in line with the aesthetics of the upper and lower styles that we have always recognized. Although it does not match the proportion of real people, the slender human body makes the picture look more relaxed. In addition, in the treatment of the characters' heads, Beardsley likes to depict fluffy hair, which makes his small head appear not to be out of proportion. The structure of the picture is both horizontal and vertical, which is in line with the proportion of the canvas. For example, Aubrey Beardsley made a cover for the third issue of the magazine "The Yellow Book" (figure 4). Since the page size of "The Yellow Book" is somewhat larger, the content of the picture has also changed accordingly. The woman's hair on the cover is no longer an extended flat rectangle, but is designed as a parallelogram extending downwards. In fact, if you draw the outer contour of the hair, you can actually find the floor area, which exactly matches the size of the cover of this book. The woman on this cover is not the long and huge shape of his painting as before, but is

inclined to square. The street lamps and other decorations in the back are not depicted with dark colors as in the front, but light colors with only lines are selected.

Beardsley's distinctive style is very obvious, which is why his works have been discussed and studied up to now. Whether it is flexible to absorb the advantages of other masters and make continuous progress, or to control the proportion of images, it is just right. This has created a unique Beardsley.

3. Morbid and Decadent Aesthetic Feeling

Decadence is a very old concept, derived from Latin word *decadentia*. Decadence means decline and corruption. However, the literary trend that really started from decadence became popular only in the 19th century. The reason why decadentism prevailed in Aubrey Beardsley's period was that the social outlook at that time was very different. At that time, people have begun to awaken their self-consciousness and do not regard religion as their only goal in life. However, the industrial society at that time greatly increased the death rate, and the family looked at their own small wages in crowded houses. They may also face the death of their children from factory work or illness. The classic elements in artworks of decadentism are murder, magic, decadence, and doing evil. Many intellectuals and capitalists are dissatisfied with this unfair society but cannot get rid of the status quo. They want to express their dissatisfaction in this way. At that time, many people who believed in religion and the upper class did not believe in decadentism, because the word "lying flat" was not encouraged in this time of famine. This was an act against god's expectation of his people. This kind of life dissatisfaction, desire to escape, but the contradiction with the faith, makes many people's attitude towards decadentism has two sides. "Decadentism" is not just a negative attitude towards life. Under the influence of this attitude, "decadentism" has formed its own unique aesthetic style.

The art of "decadentism" has rich and distinct characteristics. The first point is that it is very good at depicting ugliness and evil in the subject matter. Western traditional aesthetics holds that art works should be distinguished from everyday objects by aesthetic features, but artists representing decadentism vigorously promote evil and ugliness in an attempt to widely apply the painting contents of evil and ugliness to their own works, such as portraying the characters in the paintings, choosing ugly witches, evil sorcerers, etc.

The depiction of the dark realm in the works of Aubrey Beardsley is obvious. From many unpublished and strange illustrations of Salome, we can see the ambition of Aubrey Beardsley to express his views at the same time. For example, the artistic expression at the lower left of the mourning woman in "Platonic mourning" (figure. 5) implies that there is another dark side to it. Another example is an illustration in the third issue of "The Yellow Book", in which Beardsley compares himself to a Muslim patient who is suffering from fever. Death, adultery and darkness were all the most feared things in the Victorian era, but he did not hesitate to show them all. Beardsley once said: "He just wants to see those publishers surprised, shocked, and take his helpless face." The subject of murder is more common. This is explained by a painting that has been mentioned less frequently. "Kiss of Judas" is such a theme. Judas, one of the twelve apostles of Jesus, should have followed, but he did not hesitate to expose Jesus because of the money given by the church, and indirectly killed Jesus. At that time, the secret sign of the meeting between Judas and the church was to kiss the statue of Jesus. The church signaled to find the right person. In the Bible, Judas revealed the identity of Jesus to those who wanted to kill him with a kiss, but he repaid his mistake with eternal life. In the picture, the children of Judah are being punished for the evil of Judah from generation to generation. They die by kissing. The whole picture is very depressing. The picture of death is very obvious. Blood out, this is also one of his views [3].

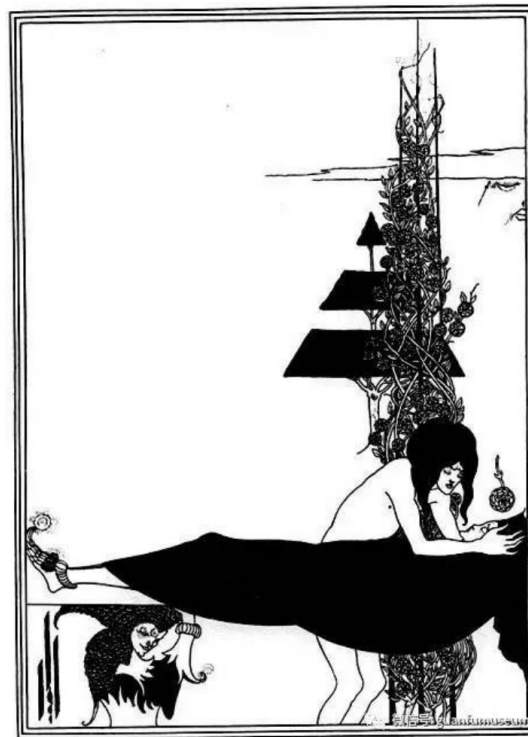


Figure 5: Cover of "A Platonic Lament" by Beardsley.

The art of "decadentism" is good at showing "evil", which is fully shown in Beardsley's paintings. Compared with false beauty, Beardsley is obviously more keen to show the real evil, which seemingly goes against the pursuit of "beauty" in western traditional aesthetics. However, Beardsley's unique artistic treatment, while forming the dark painting style for decadentism, shows the "flower of evil" side.

4. Rebellion Against the Ideal Female Image

A very important part of Aubrey Beardsley's works of art is the various female images. From his most famous work, "The Climax" (figure. 6).

At the beginning, the illustration depicts a vivid image of a siren who loves and hates. The image of Salomé, the protagonist in the work of climax, comes from the bible, Matthew. In the Bible, Salomé was instructed by her mother Herodias to seduce Herod the Great. At the same time, Saint John condemned her behavior. In the end, Herod reluctantly killed John and gave his head to the condemned Salomé. However, in Wilde's story, she was both ordered to seduce Herod the King and had different thoughts about Saint John. She killed John because of love and hate. In this work by Aubrey Beardsley, the plot of the story is: Salomé was not able to love John, and finally cut off John's head because of anger. Her last expression on John's face was grim and contemptuous. Although she knelt on the ground, she could not see any submission. The two pieces of flying hair seemed to tell the audience that she was a magic woman. If you don't look at the background of the story, it is hard to find that Salomé in the picture is actually a teenage girl. In the composition, Aubrey Beardsley treated the whole picture as if it were floating in the air, with a large scale-like pattern on the upper left corner, implying snake and cunning [4]. The middle and lower part of the whole picture is a black bottomless lotus pond. Obviously, the story is about a young girl, but the contrast between the image characteristics and the behavior it has made still brings a huge shock to the audience.



Figure 6: Beardsley's "The Climax", paper illustration.

Beardsley's works were all the rage at that time. Britain is the birthplace of gentlemanly manners. This kind of moral sense is higher than others' high-spirited and self-righteous. After many years, it is boring. As the birthplace of gentlemanliness, England should match gentlemen with ladies. People at that time believed that this should be the case. Women should become men's elegant and gentle spouses, and become men's success aids rather than their own career creators. Victoria's decades of mourning for her husband have left Britain dead. Under the atmosphere of decadentism in Britain, the endless black color seems to have no end. Rebellion has become the norm in people's life and creation [5]. People want to see visual impact in art, and want to see something different from dull black clothes. They can't see the hope of life, so why should the works of art be full of positive energy?

However, the style of Beardsley was quite in line with people's artistic requirements and aesthetic taste at that time. Beardsley suffered from tuberculosis since he was a child, and his physical condition made him unable to raise another child under the condition of ensuring his own survival and unable to have ambiguous feelings towards the opposite sex. Therefore, he does not have the concept of sexualization of women, because he cannot afford to play these interests. The concept of male gaze will be mentioned here. According to Michel Foucault's theory, which first proposed the concept of gaze, gaze is a kind of viewing mode, a gaze movement, and a force exerted by the subject on the person to be stared at. In addition, it represents tangible, concrete and ubiquitous existence in modern society, and symbolizes a kind of power relation and a kind of soft violence. In the traditional view of male chauvinism, women's status is lower than men's, and they live in male gaze for a long time. Male gaze is a yardstick, which not only measures women's body, but also restricts all aspects of women's life. Male gaze gives meaning to women from the perspective of men, which not only affects what image men want women to be, but also influences women's view of themselves. Men visualize women and regard women as resources and objects to be won.

From ancient times to today, many works of art contain the characteristics of male gaze. "Venus of Urbino" contains this feature as a pair of the world famous paintings. The amorous Venus is waiting for her lover's arrival. The Venus in this painting is full in shape and soft in line. It seems to invite the audience outside the painting with a seductive gesture. Slender but full-bodied women, with

strange depiction angles, are all part of the male gaze. Another work of art, "The Women of Algiers", is also a representative work of male gaze. "The Women of Algiers", drawn by Eugène Delacroix, satisfied the men's desire to spy on women at that time. Three North African women were sitting on the floor, chatting and admiring the window. It seemed to be a very daily scene. However, this is actually to satisfy the men's desire to see women's lithe and graceful posture and their private side that men cannot see. The curves of these women are soft, and the posture of the rightmost woman is very graceful, which is really not a particularly comfortable posture. However, how do the works of Beardsley express the female image? In belly dancing, there are Salomé with open chest and open arms, a queen who is more generous than the king in the appearance of siloed, and more images similar to "witches" in Europe. Women can be demagogic or imperfect. They have their own place in society and illustration. They have to serve themselves and serve the plot of the story, but they do not cater to men's desires and eyes [6].

5. Conclusions

Beardsley combines the characteristics of Chinese and western paintings and forms a decorative painting style in a unique form. At the same time, the expression of the theme of "evil" also promotes the formation of the artistic style of Beardsley's decadentism. When expressing these contents and forms, Beardsley often relies on the female image. However, different from traditional paintings, the women in Aubrey Beardsley's novels are rebellious against the image of "ideal women" in the environment at that time. Contrary to women's plump, strong, sexy and self-confident, men look awkward, weak and powerless in front of women. The characteristics of these artistic styles all reflect the characteristics of the era in which Aubrey Beardsley lived, as well as the hidden part of his own growth experience and character.

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