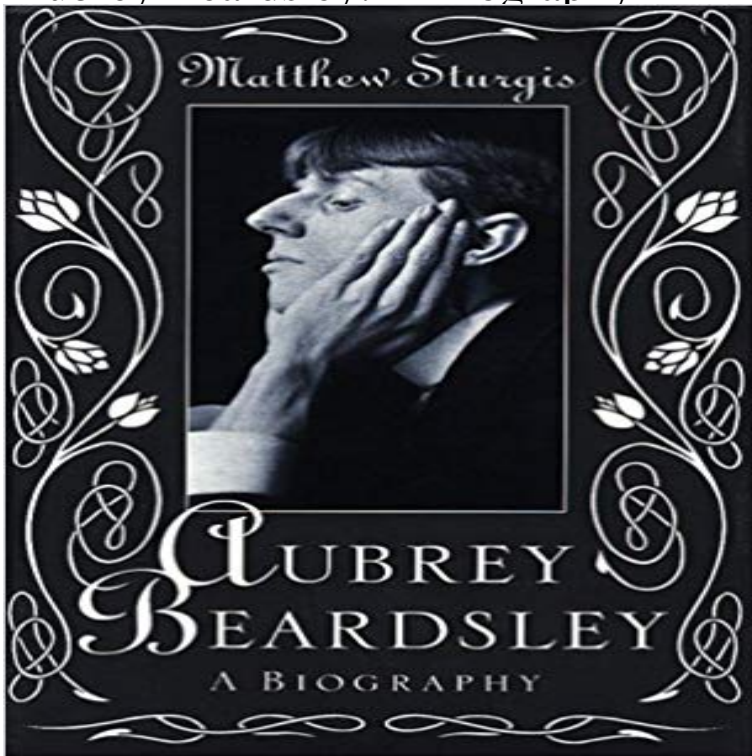


Aubrey Beardsley: A Biography



In this informative life of Beardsley, the great turn-of-the-century illustrator, limner of impossibly elongated, imperious femmes fatales and fey androgynes, Sturgis captures both his precocious subjects rise to infamy and the cultural changes that made it possible. Like Oscar Wilde, Beardsley was a leading member of the Decadent movement in England during the 1890s. Together they shocked the press and the establishment by cultivating the pose of dandies, coolly removed from prevailing social mores, and took aim at the dominant figures of the late 19th-century art world: moralizing critic John Ruskin and the sentimental pre-Raphaelite painters. That Beardsley met an early death at the age of 25 after a lifelong battle with tuberculosis was especially ironic, as the cult of the doomed youth was central to the Decadent movement. Throughout, Sturgis is in full command of the cultural conditions that led to Beardsley's emergence as an enfant terrible, such as the newly available illustrated picture press that made the artists deliberately shocking drawings easily available to the masses and turned him into a media-art star *avant la lettre*. Sturgis never resorts to flimsy psychological conjecture (although his circumspection may in part be due to Beardsley's own efforts to fashion an elaborate mask for public consumption), and the biographer's prose is unexpectedly affecting when the end comes for his subject, as Beardsley rushes from spa to sanitarium, searching for a cure, frantically taking up and abandoning projects all the while. Arriving as it does in the midst of our own surface-obsessed *fin de siècle*, Sturgis's biography is not only a faithful record of Beardsley and of his world but also a useful study of the birth pangs of modernity. 26 b&w photographs and Beardsley's line drawings throughout.

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