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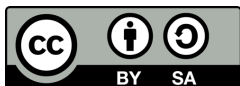
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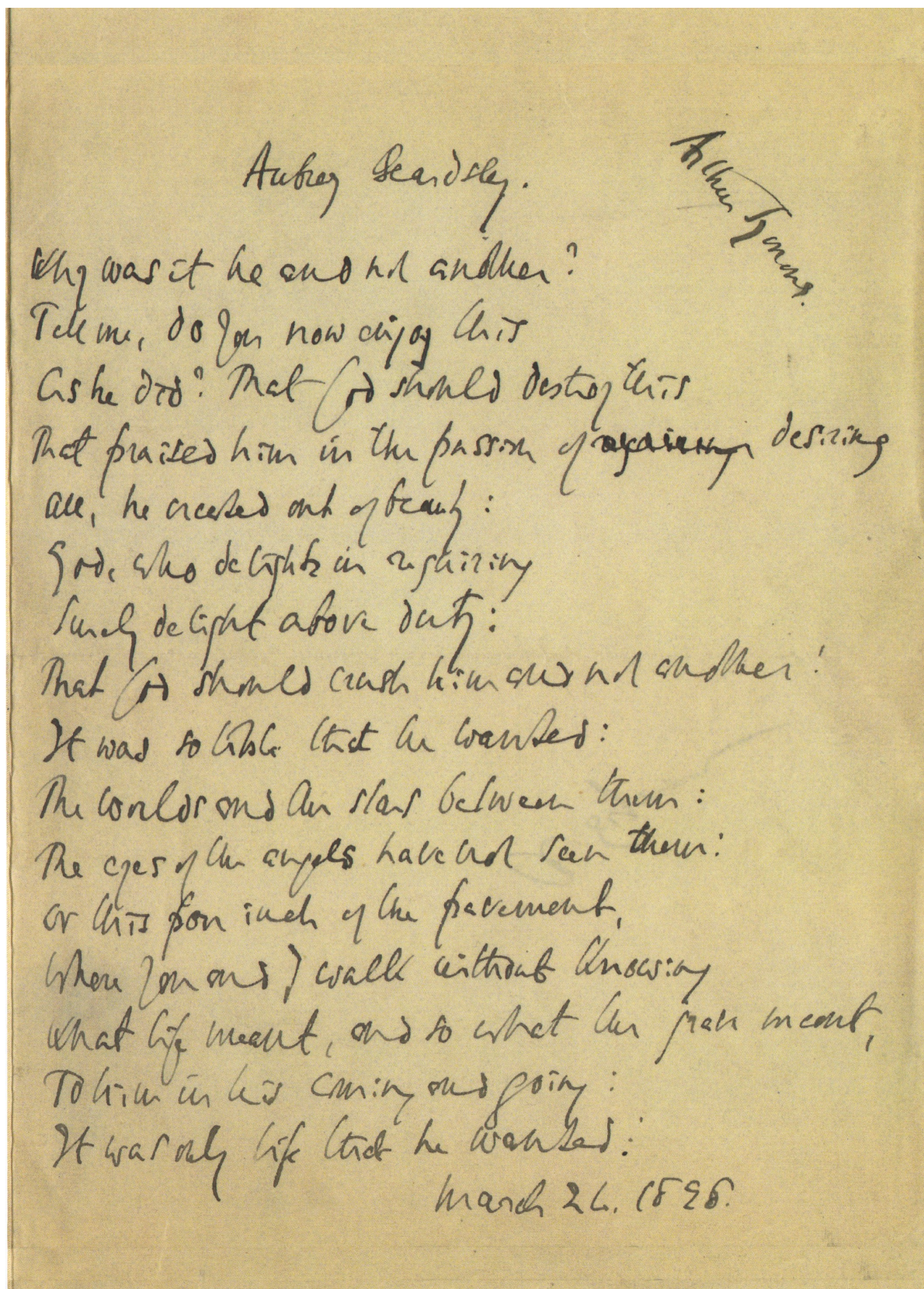


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Arthur Symons, 'Aubrey Beardsley: A Memorial Poem'

Simon Wilson



Aubrey Beardsley

Why was it he and not another?
Tell me, do you now enjoy this
As he did? That God should destroy this
That praised him in the passion of desiring
All, he created out of beauty:
God, who delights in requiring
Surely delight above duty:
That God should crush him and not another!
It was so little that he wanted:
The worlds and the stars between them:
The eyes of the angels have not seen them:
Or this poor inch of the pavement,
Where you and I walk without knowing
What life meant, and so what the grave meant,
To him in his coming and going:
It was only life that he wanted.

Arthur Symons
March 26 1898

* * *

A Brief Note by Simon Wilson

Beardsley was born on 21 August 1872 and died in Menton, France, on 16 March 1898, and so he was almost exactly twenty-five and a half years old at his death.¹ This poem by Arthur Symons is a memorial work that laments the young artist's passing and in the process questions the actions of a joyless God who 'should crush him and not another!'

In 2016 Yale University Press published a monumental two-volume catalogue raisonné of Beardsley's work by Linda Zatlin (*Aubrey Beardsley: A Catalogue Raisonné* (Yale University Press, 2016)). It was Linda who drew my attention to the manuscript poem, a fair copy made by Symons for the purposes of the album in which it is placed. 'Aubrey Beardsley' was published a number of times. It was first published in *Love's Cruelty*, in 1923, and then in the second volume of *Poems* (London: Martin Secker, 1924). More recently it appears in a collection titled *The Death of the Pierrot: A Beardsley Miscellany*, edited by Steven Halliwell and Matthew Sturgis and published by The Eighteen Nineties Society in 1998.² In *Love's Cruelty*, 'Aubrey Beardsley' is followed by half a dozen poems on individual Beardsley drawings; according to the bibliographical scholar Peter Mendes all the poems in this book appear to date from the 1890s.³ Symons's handwriting is very distinctive, if hard to read, but the whole thing is a holograph, including the signature across the top right. Symons has clearly and carefully punctuated the poem, but I remain baffled by the comma after 'All' at the opening of line five.

¹ See Arthur Symons's obituary: 'Aubrey Beardsley', *Fortnightly Review*, 63 (May 1898), 752-61.

² My thanks to Michael Seeneey who pointed this out.

³ For a discussion of these poems, see Chris Snodgrass, 'Decadent Mythmaking: Arthur Symons on Aubrey Beardsley and Salome', *Victorian Poetry*, 28, 3/4 (1990), 61-109.