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Aubrey Beardsley's *The Story of Venus and Tannhäuser* as a Decadent Fairy Tale

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In the latter decades of the nineteenth century, fairy tales were in vogue. The painter John Anster Fitzgerald saw his piece *The Fairy's Lake* shown at the Royal Academy of Arts in 1866, and contributed various works to the Christmas editions of *The Illustrated London News*; for the stage, James Robinson Planché adapted the fairy tales of Madame D'Aulnoy to great success, and, by the 1890s, Andrew Lang's 'coloured' Fairy Books were a staple of the middle-class nursery.[1] Perhaps inevitably, however, much discussion ensued as to what the fairy tale should do or be, and what they might inculcate in the child reader. As John Ruskin writes in his 1869 introduction to an edition of stories by the Brothers Grimm:

> In the best stories recently written for the young, there is a taint which it is not easy to define, but which inevitably follows on the author's addressing himself to children bred in school-rooms and drawing-rooms, instead of fields and woods. […] The fairies who interfere in the fortunes of these little ones are apt to be resplendent chiefly in millinery and satin slippers, and appalling more by their airs than their enchantments.[2]

The fairy tale reveals a series of opposing themes: the rural and the metropolitan; the socialised and the natural. Juliana Horatia Ewing references these contrasts in her 'Preface' to *Old-Fashioned Fairy Tales* (1888):

> In these household stories (the models for which were originally oral tradition), the thing most to be avoided is a discursive or descriptive style of writing. Brevity and epigram must ever be soul of their wit, and they should be written as tales that are told.[3]

Here, Ewing emphasizes the way in which language participates in these oppositions during the late nineteenth century, a period that Linda Dowling refers to as the 'post-philological moment'.[4] As she explains, this consists in the opposition between the organic and ephemeral nature of the oral tradition (J. G. Herder's concept of the *Volksstimme* or voice of the people: protean, earthy, and unselfconscious)[5] and the curated, embalmed nature of the written word. For W. B. Yeats, this is the mannerism and sterile artifice resulting from the excessive contemplation of a generation raised on the works of Walter Pater and his circle – from 'too much brooding over methods of

expression, and ways of looking upon life, which come, not out of life, but out of literature, images reflected from mirror to mirror'.[6] The oral tradition derives its language from the *Volksmärchen* [folktale], contrasted with the curated language from that of the *Kunstmärchen* [literary fairy tale] – an opposition which the German philologist Jens Tismar points up in his 1977 study *Kunstmärchen.* Jack Zipes glosses this opposition between the natural and the artificial: the *Kunstmärchen* is 'written by a single identifiable author [and] thus synthetic, artificial, and elaborate in comparison to the indigenous formation of the folk tale that emanates from communities'. [7] The decadent fairy tale as a genre, then, is something of an oxymoron. An artificial product of nature, the fleeting made permanent.

There is perhaps no fairy tale which makes such a fetish of these oppositions between nature and artifice as Aubrey Beardsley's unfinished pornographic novel *The Story of Venus and Tannhäuser*, a retelling of the Tannhäuser legend.[8] The text itself is preceded by a mock-dedication to the fictive prince and clergyman Giulio Poldo Pezzoli, before the story opens with the arrival of the German knight at the mystical grotto ruled by the Goddess Venus. Beardsley then goes on to record the orgiastic revels enjoyed by Venus, Tannhäuser, and the inhabitants of Venus' realm in explicit detail. The rococo, decadent aesthetic of the grotto described in the text, meanwhile, is paired with various illustrations by Beardsley including *The Toilet of Venus* (fig. 1) which I discuss below. At every point, in both language and content, a cloying atmosphere of artifice prevails, the abstraction from nature to which Yeats's 'images reflected from mirror to mirror' allude. We might remember that for Pater's Flavian in *Marius the Epicurean* 'all that can be achieved in these latter days is the self-conscious *imitation* of simplicity […] artificial artlessness, *naïveté*'.[9] In the case of Beardsley's novel, however, it is the very process of imitation itself which is staged. In an ongoing process of making the internal workings externally visible, the crafted, mannered nature of his language becomes the end in itself. Dowling characterises the *Volksstimme* as a poetic language 'so transparent as to leave a very minimum of verbal interposition between the reader and the feeling of the poet', but interposition is one of Beardsley's most practised skills.[10]

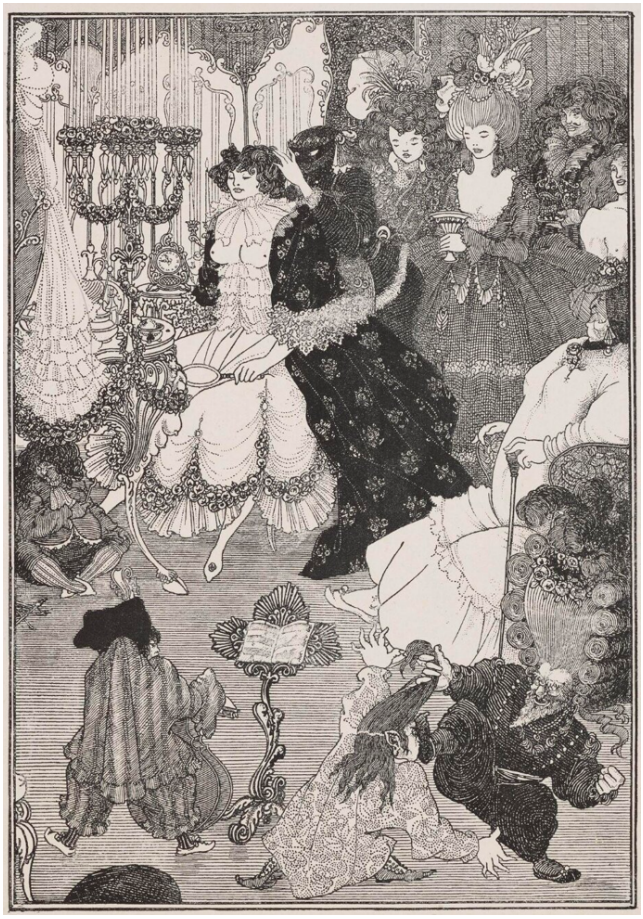

Fig. 1: Aubrey Beardsley, *The Toilet of Venus*, c. 1896. © Public Domain

Indeed, this interposition can be understood as a display of sprezzatura. Harry Berger Jr. glosses this notion in its original context of Castiglione's *The Book of the Courtier* as 'the cultivated ability to display artful artlessness', a hair's breadth away from Pater's 'artificial artlessness'.[11] Berger also describes sprezzatura as 'the display of the ability to deceive' and, more playfully, 'the ability to show that one is not showing all the effort one obviously put into learning how to show that one is not showing effort'.[12] In this sense, Beardsley seeks not to imitate the authenticity of the *Volksmärchen*, that is to say the oral tradition, but rather to advertise his disinterest in doing so, and his work's status as *Kunst* ('artifice'). This, for Kostas Boyiopoulos, is the very essence of decadence: 'a style in which the mental process of absorbing impressions draws attention to itself by exposing its apparatus and grafting it onto the textual surface'.[13] *The Story of Venus and Tannhäuser*, then, is a kind of literary case study in revealed construction. At every turn, it shows but refuses to

sublimate its influences, displaying the morbidity of its status as a reconstituted patchwork of other texts. In this way, the Beardsleyean text is a kind of composite, the stitches of which remain visible. As I will discuss, this showcased artifice is the fundamental decadent means by which Beardsley engages with the oppositions that the fairy tale represents.

If Wordsworth felt, along with Coleridge, that a true poetic language of the people meant doing away with all the 'motley masquerade of tricks, quaintnesses, hieroglyphics, and enigmas',[14] it is as well that he never read *The Story of Venus and Tannhäuser*. The book opens with the dedication I mention above, addressed to the fictional 'Prince Giulio' by the fictionalised sycophant 'Aubrey Beardsley', who writes: 'I must crave your forgiveness for addressing you in a language other than the Roman, but my small freedom in Latinity forbids me to wander beyond the idiom of my vernacular'.[15] Here, the word 'Roman' introduces an uncanny hermeneutic ambivalence in that it remains unclear whether it refers to Italian, Latin, or perhaps French, given the chivalric tone suggested by the subtitle 'A Romantic Novel'. The word 'Latinity', likewise, serves to subtly destabilise meaning in that it typically refers to the use of Latin style, not the language itself, and often in a pejorative sense. Indeed, in creating a language which is hyper-ornamented to the point of near exhaustion, makes an almost archetypally decadent show of gilding the lily, parodying himself even from the first line. Already, then, his language has something of the rococo about it in its being over-refined and playfully insincere. This is the essence of Beardsleyean interposition: language which continually comes between the reader and the percept described, representing only itself. Such manipulation of language equally reminds the reader of the role played in this *Kunstmärchen* by authorial curation, given the emphasis it places upon the writer's ability to be glib, should he so choose. This latent threat begins to take shape when 'Beardsley' states that 'the writing of epistles dedicatory has fallen into disuse, whether through the vanity of authors or the humility of patrons'.[16] In this line, he appears overweening in his praise of Pezzoli's humility, yet creates a subtle and insidious equivalence between himself and Pezzoli through parallelism of syntax in the pairing of 'vanity' with 'humility' and 'authors' with patrons'.

Such a decision deftly conveys an unsettling amount of power to the authorial presence who, it seems, is minded to be glib. This is further suggested by the unusual syntax of 'epistles dedicatory' which, in aping French syntax, recalls the very particular diction of Pater, and the critical pedigree enjoyed by the use of French mannerisms in decadent literature. Consider, for instance, the French cadence in this sentence from Pater's *The Renaissance* (the famous conclusion of which marked a foundational moment for aesthetes and decadents).

> To such a tremulous wisp constantly reforming itself on the stream, to a single sharp impression, with a sense in it, a relic more or less fleeting of such moments gone by, what is real in our life fines itself down.[17]

Pater creates an increase in elan and pace when he builds his verbs into adjectival phrases, writing of a 'wisp constantly reforming itself' (as opposed to a 'wisp which constantly reforms itself'). Like Beardsley's 'epistles dedicatory', the French syntactical pattern which places the adjective after the verb ('le chat noir' for instance), is close at hand. Again, Pater writes of 'a relic more or less fleeting' (as opposed to 'a relic which is more or less fleeting', or perhaps 'a more or less fleeting relic'), evoking French syntax once again. The phrase 'moments gone by' continues this impression, the adjectival phrase again falling after the noun. In making indirect reference to this legacy of Francophilia, the fictional author 'Beardsley' seems more lettered than he professed to be only a moment earlier.

Later in the text, however, he turns the use of French mannerism into a conspicuous tick, littering the text with unglossed French vocabulary. He writes of 'pantoufles', slippers 'scented with maréchale', a 'finely curled peruke', and Venus' servant the 'fardeuse'.[18] This is not the earnest Latinity of Pater, nor the Romantic rhythms of certain scenes in *The Picture of Dorian Gray* when Wilde describes '[t]he mere cadence of the sentences, the subtle monotony of their music, so full as it was of complex refrains and movements elaborately repeated'.[19] Discussing scenes such as this last, Matthew Creasy notes that '[a] recursive loop of influence runs through this kind of writing, which occupies an uncertain space between translation and imitation as it seeks to evoke and enact the complex music of Huysmans's French'.[20] Yet, crucially, Beardsley seeks neither to

evoke nor to imitate but, rather, to make the act of imitation conspicuous by exaggeration. In this sense, Beardsley's co-option of French represents polished clumsiness, or 'artificial artlessness'.[21] This is the process of construction made externally visible, the stitches I spoke of above. To paraphrase Berger, Beardsley puts a great deal of effort into showing how little effort he has put into not showing effort.

It is significant, too, that such construction makes continual reference to existing forms:

> Those who have only seen Venus in the Vatican, in the Louvre, in the Uffizi, or in the British Museum, can have no idea of how very beautiful and sweet she looked. Not at all like the lady in 'Lemprière'.[22]

Venus here is compared to a patina of Latinate and pre-existing cultural forms. She is not an organic figure of the oral fairy tale, at home in the fields and woods of Ruskin's description, nor the Anglo-Saxon, primal language of Coleridge, Yeats, or Wordsworth. She is, instead, the recomposed product of two millennia of civilisation. The prevailing critical narrative in Beardsley scholarship would typically cast this hyper-referentiality and campy Francophilia as an example of Beardsley parodying the craze for pseudo-French sophistication at the fin de siècle. Jennifer Higgins, for instance, states that 'the cultural eclecticism of his references, especially his French ones, are fundamental agents in the satirical impact of his work', 'targeting the English literary establishment'.[23] While this is certainly true, such a reading undersells Beardsley's ambition in using this technique. By continuously reminding the reader that this text is made up not of organic material – a product of nature – but of reconstituted forms, Beardsley creates a hackneyed, recomposed text which hints perpetually at its own disintegration. Paraphrasing the philologist Max Müller, G. W. Cox writes that 'after having been established as the language of legislation, religion, literature, and general civilisation, the classical Latin dialect became stationary and stagnant […] it was haunted by its own ghost'.[24] In this sense, the crude Latinity and patina of references to other art forms render *The Story of Venus and Tannhäuser* a composite of dead forms. Considered from this angle, the text also recalls Symons's description (borrowed from Huysmans) of decadence as a style that is 'tacheté et faisandé': 'gamy and spotted with corruption', that is to

say, putrescent.[25] Such is the implication of double-entendres like the 'cultured flesh' of the inhabitants of the Venusberg: superlatively refined, yet artificially bred, evacuated from nature.[26] As Pater's Flavian states, this 'artificial artlessness […] might have its measure of euphuistic charm . . . but only of a bunch of field-flowers in a heated room'.[27] The concerns of Ruskin and Ewing seem altogether confirmed by the Beardsleyean fairy tale, then: a bravura display of interposition. Indeed, nature itself is repeatedly made subject to art in the scene of Tannhäuser's arrival.

> Huge moths so richly winged they must have banqueted upon tapestries and royal stuffs, slept on the pillars that flanked either side of the gateway, and the eyes of all the moths remained open, and were burning and bursting with a mesh of veins.[28]

Such descriptions are of the variety which Ewing might find troubling. If the organic world is likened not only to art, but to art that has consumed only other art forms in a uroboric process of infinite regress, the reader proves multiply abstracted from nature (the 'fields and woods'). Though the alliterated phrase 'burning and bursting with a mesh of veins' might suggest a certain rank vigour, the healthful vigour of nature is at a great remove from this description. To be sure, that the consumer of art might take on something of its essence is a decadent idea with roots. Grace Lavery explains that the 'fleshly poet' Bunthorne describes himself as, 'A Japanese young man, | A blue-and-white young man', comparing this to Wilde's epigram: 'I find it harder and harder to live up to my blue china'.[29] Such *topoi* speak to the archetypal decadent question of mimesis which Wilde addresses in *The Decay of Lying*. In this last, he states that 'Art takes life as part of her rough material, recreates it, [keeping] between herself and reality the impenetrable barrier of beautiful style', before 'Life gets the upper hand, and drives Art out into the wilderness'.[30] It is this same fraught relation between nature and art which emerges from Beardsley's descriptions of rose trees as being 'wound and twisted with superb invention over trellis and standard'.[31] It is not the beauty of the rose trees that is of note, but the 'invention' by which nature has been made subservient to design. Elsewhere Beardsley writes of stone carved with 'such a cunning invention', and 'buckles of very precious stones set in most strange and esoteric devices', glorying with a little nasty relish at the triumph of art over nature.[32] The torsional motions 'wind' and 'twist' in the quote above are

also of particular significance, suggesting the inversion – something directed back towards itself – which characterises the self-referential nature of the text. This also distantly recalls the sexual perversion associated with decadents of the 1890s (remembering the fact that the term 'invert' was used to describe homosexuals, and the Latin etymon *perversus*: 'turned the wrong way'). Later in the text, Tannhäuser stands 'like Narcissus gazing at his reflection in the still scented water'.[33] That Tannhäuser reflexively observes himself on the face of the stagnant water, itself an artificial simulacrum of the natural pond, is a further condensation of this airtight, hyper-artificial aesthetic and enslavement of nature. If the body of water constituted the unrestrainable sublime for the Romantics, here it has been domesticated: scented, bounded, stilled, and turned into an object for the indulgence of vanity. The word 'still', moreover, emerges as a particularly considered word choice. In the grounds of the Venusberg, 'through the trees, gleamed a *still*, argent lake', comparable to the point earlier in the text when Tannhäuser encounters '*still* lakes strewn with profuse barges full of gay flowers and wax marionettes'.[34]

Such a repeated emphasis upon barrenness as a motif is also something commonly found in the decadent canon. Congress with Swinburne's *Hermaphroditus*, a 'thing of barren hours', yields only the 'waste wedlock of a sterile kiss',[35] for example, while the love of Wilde's Salmacis is '[f]ed by two fires and unsatisfied/Through their excess'.[36] As Clifton-Everest notes, however, this suspension also characterises the realm of fairylands across cultures.

> The common picture is of a realm which is idealised in terms of normal human experience: while pleasures abound, pain and sorrow are entirely absent. […] '[N]o snow falls, no strong winds blow and there is never any rain ...' says Homer of Elysium; in *Owen Miles* the Earthly Paradise is reported to have no night, no winter, no heat and no cold; Tennyson employs the same formula in his *Morte d'Arthur* to evoke the fairyland serenity of Avalon.[37]

There is, in fact, direct precedent for this sense of a barren, hermetic enclosure in the Tannhäuser legend. In Andrea da Barberino's *Guerrino, Detto il Meschino* (1410/1473), a Renaissance iteration of the story, such overtones appear as Tannhäuser (named Guerrino in this work) is led into the Venusian grotto.

> After lunch they led him into a garden that seemed a second Eden, laden with fruit of every kind. However, when he looked closely at the fruit he had the sneaking feeling that there was something very wrong, and potentially dangerous: it was the wrong season for many of the varieties to be growing.[38]

The Venusberg is a kind of sealed vault, like a bottle garden, and is thus cut off from the processes of nature. In the same vein, the richness and beauty of the Venusberg exists only in suspended animation, at a remove from the seasons of the natural world; in short: from life itself. The beauty of the grotto can therefore only give the airless, fixed impression of Pater's 'field-flowers in a heated room', and the still figures depicted on Keats's Grecian urn. Indeed, it must not be forgotten that the word 'grotesque' – applied so frequently to the Beardsleyean – originates from the Italian *grotta* ('cave'), that is to say, an isolated enclosure.

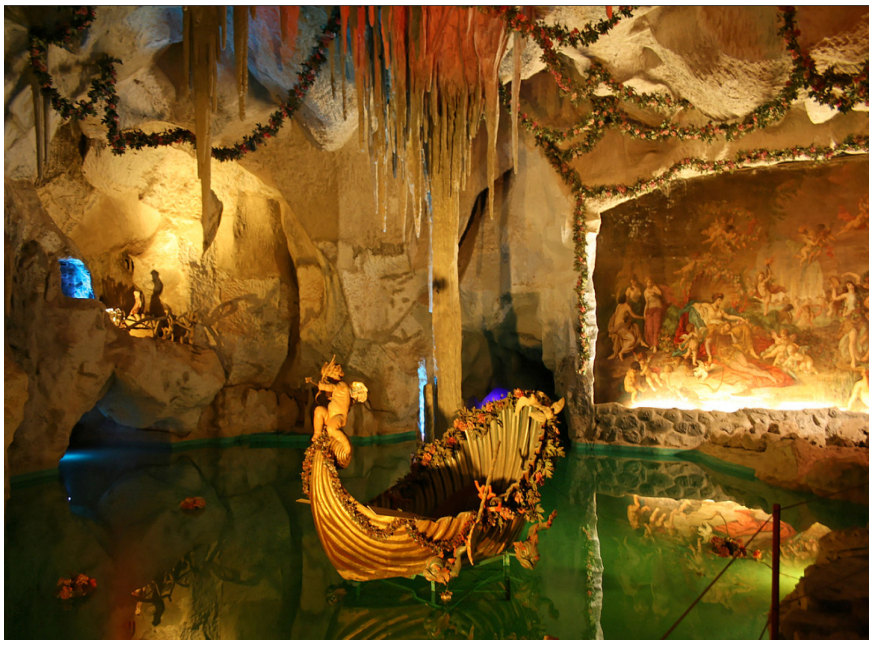

Fig. 2: The artificial grotto of King Ludwig II of Bavaria, the 'Märchenkönig'. 29 August 2014.
© Wikicommons

Tonally, this sense of hermeticism in the myth owes a great deal to the decadent mythos of King Ludwig II of Bavaria, the *Märchenkönig* ('fairy tale king'), a hermetic aesthete lionised by the Romantics and, later, the continental Symbolists, for his reclusive adherence to the cult of beauty. A great patron of the composer Richard Wagner, the King had an entirely artificial underground grotto constructed at Linderhof Palace in the 1870s (fig. 2) to model the scene from

Wagner's opera in which Tannhäuser arrives at the Venusberg. August von Heckel's painting *Tannhäuser in the Venusberg* (1876-1877) adorns one of the walls of the grotto, and a boat in the shape of a shell rests on water as still as that in which Beardsley's Tannhäuser sees himself reflected. Later, in 1892, the Symbolist poet Stefan George canonised King Ludwig's hermetic realm in his poetic cycle *Algabal*, in which he reimagines the King as the Roman emperor Elagabalus, a decadent figure par excellence.[39] The image of a vaulted, self-contained space, then, has a charged legacy in decadent aesthetics. Its mythopoetic significance lies in its status as the preserve of art, and as a refuge to house the poetic mind. It is, furthermore, the veneration of this imagined space which enables the artist-as-warrior mythos in which Stefan George, Thomas Mann, and the Baltic German writer Elisàr von Kupffer, among others, take part.[40] To be sure, it is not incidental that Beardsley's Tannhäuser is a knight.[41] This sense of an hermetic realm in which art responds only to art – a kind of vivarium - also underpins Beardsley's decision to decorate his rooms on Cambridge Street as a simulacrum of Des Esseintes' interior in *À rebours* (the 'breviary' of decadence).[42] As is the case of the moths mentioned above, artifice for Beardsley responds to and engages with other forms of artifice, given the fact that George Moore also modelled sections of his *Confessions of a Young Man* (1887) on Des Esseintes' interiors.[43] It is likewise this sacral refuge of artifice which Beardsley consciously courted when he asked Ada Leverson to arrive an hour before his dinner party to help 'scent the flowers'. On arriving she found him 'spraying bowls of gardenias and tuberoses with opopanax' and was handed 'a spray of frangipani for the stephanotis'.[44]

No feature of the text gives the impression of a closed loop system so exactly as Beardsley's decision to illustrate it himself. In the line drawing *The Toilet of Venus*, she is depicted a few pages after the reader encounters the line '[h]er neck and shoulders were wonderfully drawn', setting up the Venusberg as the result of a mirroring effect between text and image.[45] Remembering the dedication by the fictionalized 'Beardsley', it does not even seem clear whether the illustrations are by the real or fictive version of the author himself. This being the case, the word 'drawn' instead emerges as Beardsley's underhand but polished way of praising his own artwork within the text,

such that a word which might initially evoke the broadening of *ut pictura poesis* gives way only to a performance of narcissism. The reader is firmly in the realm of the *Kunstmärchen* then, a world away from the organic, unselfconscious quality of the authorless *Volksmärchen* tradition. This is an effect continued by the word 'drawn', given its appearance in the insinuating dedication in which the author states that he must praise the fictional Pezzoli: 'else I should be forgetful of the duties I have *drawn* upon myself in electing to address you in a dedication'.[46] Given Symons's claim that Beardsley's 'whole conception of writing was that of a game with words', it would be remiss to overlook the double meaning of 'drawn' here ('assumed', but also 'elaborated'), and the possibility that Beardsley is again reminding that his text takes art, not nature, as its point of reference.

Because abstracted from nature, the hermetic, calcified impression created by the Beardsleyean fairy tale can be understood as the aesthetic equivalent of the embalmed language which characterises the written word for Dowling, and thus the *Kunstmärchen*. When removed from the axis of time as the oral folktale is when transcribed, only barrenness can result. It is to this end that, as though under a bell-jar (or depicted on Keats's Grecian urn), many of Beardsley's characters take on a miniaturised, inanimate quality.

> Within the delicate, curved frames lived the corrupt and gracious creatures of Dorat and his school; slim children in masque and domino, smiling horribly, exquisite letchers leaning over the shoulders of smooth doll-like ladies […] terrible little Pierrots posing as lady lovers and pointing at something outside the picture, and unearthly fops […].[47]

Like a vivarium, the picture acts as a self-contained world in which 'slim children' will never broaden with the physical changes of adulthood, and 'doll-like ladies' exist in extended, ossified maidenhood. The fops, too, are 'unearthly', the kind of characters who might know 'no night, no winter, no heat and no cold'. Equally, the ekphrasis creates the impression of a *tableau vivant* (or, as it were, *tableau mort*) within the text itself, like *The Toilet of Venus*. This again heightens the sense that the Beardsleyean text takes as its source material not life, but the artistic, artificial product of a developed civilisation. Even this mise-en-abyme allows for various decadent *topoi* to be brought together, given the references to Dorat and the Commedia dell'arte in the pictures. The marmoreal,

sterile impression also recalls the Pygmalionic; one is reminded of E. T. A. Hoffmann's *The Sandmann* (1816) – the archetypal Romantic *Kunstmärchen* – and to *The Borghese Hermaphrodite* (1620) in the Louvre. Venus herself is described in terms which recall the puppet-like: '[h]er arms and hands were loosely, but delicately articulated, and her legs were divinely long. From the hip to the knee, twenty-two inches; from the knee to the heel, twenty-two inches'.[48] Even the measurements here recall the language of a wall label in an art gallery: 'length: 22 in.'. The words of Pater come to mind, for whom Winckelmann's conception of Attic marble epheboi involved 'a premonition of the fleshless consumptive refinements of the pale mediæval artists' and 'a touch of the corpse'.[49]

In view of the deathful atmosphere created by the description above, the cadaverous element to the reconstituted text comes once again to the fore. That such references are barely disguised is another example of visible stitches. *The Story of Venus and Tannhäuser* has been accused by some of Beardsley's more myopic critics of a heavy-handed attempt at euphuism, a kind of formulaic deployment of cross-references, as though regurgitating Lemprière as a form of automatic writing. Haldane MacFall sees only 'laboured literary indecency' and 'fantastic drivel, without cohesion, without sense, devoid of art as of meaning – a sheer laboured stupidity, revealing nothing – a posset, a poultice of affectations'.[50] Mario Praz's comment on the text maintains much the same view: '[t]here are passages which read like romanticised excerpts from the *Psychopathia Sexualis* of Krafft-Ebing'.[51] But, if there is one fact which emerges from consideration of Beardsley's line drawings, it is that Beardsley is only heavy-handed when he means to be. In Kostas Boyiopoulos' words, the calculated, clumsy agglomeration of unhidden references instead represents 'the mental process of absorbing impressions draw[ing] attention to itself by exposing its apparatus and grafting it onto the textual surface'.[52] As suggested by Beardsley's pseudo-imitation of Pater, this is not mimesis proper, but the process of construction exposed and placed front and centre. That this internal process is externalised as a conspicuous display of learning adsorbed to the surface of the text is, as before, an example of Beardsleyean sprezzatura.

The Story of Venus and Tannhäuser, then, is a kind of meta-*Kunstmärchen*, a meditation on the opposition between nature and artifice which is endemic to the decadent fairy tale as a genre. This opposition, though, finds many correlates. It is also that of the oral and the written tradition, the internal and the external, the cohesive and the disaggregating, the microcosm and the chaos of the real world. In this way, study of Beardsley proves illuminating of both the general and the particular. His text provides numerous tiny footholds for inquiry, an almost infinite miniature, a grotto in its own right. Yet, likewise, it sheds light on our understanding of the fairy tale genre, both across time and as a feature of the late Victorian era, in addition to the particular rhythms and *topoi* of decadence during the 1890s (the 'Beardsley period').[53] *The Story of Venus and Tannhäuser* will always remain unfinished, but its critical legacy must continue to be written.

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[1] See John Anster Fitzgerald, *The Fairy's Lake*, oil on board, exhibited 1866, Tate, London; Marie-Catherine d'Aulnoy and James Robinson Planché, *Fairy Tales / by the Countess D'Aulnoy; Translated by J. R. Planché* (George Routledge and Sons, 1855; reissued 1888); and Lang's series of 'coloured' fairy tales, starting with *The Blue Fairy Book* (1888), which were originally published by Longmans, Green & Co.

[2] John Ruskin, 'Introduction', in *German Popular Stories: With Illustrations after the Original Designs of George Cruikshank*, by Wilhelm Grimm and others, ed. by Edgar Taylor (J. C. Hotten, 1868), pp. v-xvi (p. v).

[3] Juliana Horatia Ewing, 'Preface' to *Old-Fashioned Fairy Tales* (Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge; Pott, Young & Co., 1882), pp. v-vii (p. v).

[4] Linda Dowling, *Language and Decadence in the Victorian Fin de Siècle* (Princeton University Press, 1986), p. x.

[5] Ibid., p. xiv.

[6] W. B. Yeats, 'Preface to the First Edition of *The Well of the Saints*' [1905], in *Essays and Introductions* (Collier, 1968), p. 298.

[7] Jack Zipes, 'Introduction', in *The Oxford Companion to Fairy Tales* (Oxford University Press, 2002), pp. xv-xxxii (p. xv).

[8] Aubrey Beardsley and John Glassco, *The Story of Venus and Tannhäuser* (Book-of-the-Month Club, by arrangement with New York: Blue Moon Books Inc., 1995). Begun around 1895, it was Beardsley's only published prose work and was first serialized in *The Savoy* from 1896 to 1897 before being published in expurgated form by John Lane in 1904. However, it was not until 1907, nine years after Beardsley's death, that the original unexpurgated text was published in full, though only for private circulation, by Leonard Smithers. The version I cite consists of the original unfinished text (pp. 15-80), followed by a theoretical second half to complete the text (pp. 80-140) written by the poet, memoirist and pornographer John Glassco (1909-1981).

[9] Walter Pater, *Marius the Epicurean: His Sensations and Ideas,* 2 vols (Macmillan, 1914), I, p. 102.

[10] Dowling, *Language and Decadence in the Victorian Fin de Siècle*, p. 21.

[11] Harry Berger, *The Absence of Grace: Sprezzatura and Suspicion in Two Renaissance Courtesy Books* (University of Standford Press, 2000), pp. 9-10. This work is the most in-depth treatment of sprezzatura as a concept, and considers its development in both *The Book of the Courtier* and Della Casa's *Galateo, Or: The Rules of Polite Behaviour*.

[12] Berger, *The Absence of Grace*, p. 9.

[13] Kostas Boyiopoulos, *The Decadent Image: The Poetry of Wilde, Symons, and Dowson* (Edinburgh University Press, 2015), p. 15.

[14] 'Appendix' in William Wordsworth, *Poems / by William Wordsworth: Including Lyrical Ballads, and the Miscellaneous Pieces of the Author: With Additional Poems, a New Preface, and a Supplementary Essay* (Longman, Hurst, Rees, Orme and Brown, 1815), pp. 395-400 (p. 397).

[15] Beardsley, *Tannhäuser*, p. 16.

[16] Ibid., p. 15.

[17] Walter Pater, *The Renaissance: Studies in Art and Poetry; With a New Introduction by Louis Kronenberger* (New American Library, 1959), p. 157.
[18] Ibid., pp. 30, 21, and 28.
[19] Oscar Wilde, 'The Picture of Dorian Gray', in *Collins Complete Works of Oscar Wilde*, ed. by Merlin Holland (Harper Collins, 2003), pp. 33-198 (p. 125).
[20] Matthew Creasy, '"Rather a Delicate Subject": Verlaine, France and British Decadence', in *Decadence: A Literary History*, ed. by Alex Murray (Cambridge University Press, 2020), pp. 65-86 (p. 73).
[21] Walter Pater, *Marius the Epicurean: His Sensations and Ideas*, 2 vols (Macmillan, 1914), vol. I, p. 102.
[22] Beardsley, *Tannhäuser*, p. 30.
[23] Jennifer Higgins, 'Unfamiliar Places: France and the Grotesque in Aubrey Beardsley's Poetry and Prose', *The Modern Language Review*, 106.1 (2011), pp. 63-85, https://doi.org/10.5699/modelangrevi.106.1.0063 [accessed 31 October 2025], p. 66.
[24] G. W. Cox, 'Max Müller on the Science of Language', *Edinburgh Review,* 115 (January 1862), 78-79.
[25] Arthur Symons, 'The Decadent Movement in Literature', in *The Symbolist Movement in Literature*, ed. by Matthew Creasy (Carcanet Press, 2014), pp. 267-83 (p. 267).
[26] Beardsley, *Tannhäuser*, p. 48.
[27] Walter Pater, *Marius the Epicurean: His Sensations and Ideas,* p. 102.
[28] Beardsley, *Tannhäuser*, p. 22.
[29] Grace Lavery, *Quaint, Exquisite: Victorian Aesthetics and the Idea of Japan* (Duke University Press, 2018), p. 61.
[30] Oscar Wilde, 'The Decay of Lying', in *Collins Complete Works of Oscar Wilde*, pp. 1071-1092 (p. 1078).
[31] Beardsley, *Tannhäuser*, p. 36.
[32] Ibid., pp. 22 and 30.
[33] Ibid., p. 61.
[34] Ibid., pp. 73 and 37. Both my emphasis.
[35] Algernon Charles Swinburne, 'Hermaphroditus', in *Major Poems and Selected Prose*, ed. by Jerome J. McGann and Charles L. Sligh (Yale University Press, 2004), pp. 104-106, ll. 42 & 19.
[36] Oscar Wilde, 'The Burden of Itys', in *Collins Complete Works of Oscar Wilde*, pp. 851-859 (p. 853, l. 122).
[37] J. M. Clifton-Everest, *The Tragedy of Knighthood* (Society for the Study of Mediaeval Languages and Literature, 1979), p. 56.
[38] Andrea da Barberino, *Guerrino, Detto il Meschino*, in *The Sibyll of the Apennines: Two Texts by Andrea da Barberino and Antoine de la Sale*, trans. by James Richards (Edizioni Simple, 2014), p. 39.
[39] Stefan George, *Hymnen; Pilgerfahrten; Algabal*, 6. Auflage (Georg Bondi Verlag, 1920); on Elagabalus and decadence, see Joseph Bristow, 'Decadent Historicism', *Volupté: Interdisciplinary Journal of Decadence Studies*, 3:1 (2020), 1-27.
[40] That the etymology of the word 'venerate' (from *venerāre*), is shared with that of the name 'Venus' is not incidental detail to this reading.
[41] For further discussion of this artist-warrior topos, see Fabio, Ricci, *Ritter, Tod und Eros: die Kunst Elisàr von Kupffers* (1872-1942) (Bo̎hlau, 2007).
[42] Arthur Symons, 'Joris-Karl Huysmans', in *The Symbolist Movement in Literature*, pp. 169-89 (p. 182).
[43] Creasy, '"Rather a Delicate Subject"', p. 73.
[44] Chris Snodgrass, *Aubrey Beardsley, Dandy of the Grotesque* (Oxford University Press, 1995), p. 209.
[45] Ibid., p. 29.
[46] Ibid., p. 17. My emphasis.
[47] Ibid., p. 59.
[48] Ibid., pp.29-30.
[49] Walter Pater, *The Renaissance: Studies in Art and Poetry; With a New Introduction by Louis Kronenberger* (New American Library, 1959), p. 151.
[50] Quoted in John Glassco, 'Introduction', in *The Story of Venus and Tannhäuser*, p. xii.
[51] Ibid., p. xiii.
[52] Kostas Boyiopoulos, *The Decadent Image: The Poetry of Wilde, Symons, and Dowson* (Edinburgh University Press, 2015), p. 15.
[53] Osbert Burdett, *The Beardsley Period: An Essay in Perspective* (John Lane, 1925).