

Sado-masochism and synaesthesia: Aubrey Beardsley's 'Frontispiece to Chopin's Third Ballade'

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TO HONOUR THE centenary of his death, at the end of 1998 the Tate's Patrons of British Art purchased for the Gallery Aubrey Beardsley's *Frontispiece to Chopin's Third Ballade* (Fig.27). At first sight this appears to be a straightforwardly witty, perhaps even charming image of a woman on a horse, with something of the pantomime or theatre about it. But this is by Beardsley and thus it contains a range of references, both iconographic and ideological, that slyly combine to subvert and pervert the apparent simplicity and innocence of the image.

The *Frontispiece* touches on sexual themes, specifically those associated with domination and masochism, and it also addresses contemporary theoretical discussions about synaesthesia and correspondence. In dealing with these, Beardsley employs a rich range of pictorial sources which demonstrates the melting pot of references that inhabit his art, making connexions with high Pre-Raphaelitism and contemporary European Symbolism, and his choice of each sheds a certain light on the subject and meaning of the design as a whole.

However, before dissecting these exciting and titillating attributes, it is worth establishing briefly the circumstances of the drawing's history. It might be assumed from the title that Beardsley made it as the frontispiece or cover design to an edition of Chopin's Ballade no.III, opus 47. But there is no record in the music department of the British Library of any such edition being published, and no mention of one is made in Beardsley's letters.¹ This suggests that it may have been intended as an independent work, simply inspired by the music. Whatever the reason for its creation, it remained unpublished until the year of Beardsley's death, when it was used to illustrate his obituary by Gleeson White in the *Studio*,² the journal which shot Beardsley to fame with his illustrations in its first volumes. 'After the publication of its first number', D.S. MacColl recalled, 'a youth who was known to a few dozen became quickly famous on two continents.'³

Beardsley and his publisher, Leonard Smithers, desperately wanted to use the *Frontispiece* in *A Book of Fifty Drawings* (1897), the first survey of Beardsley's work. But along with all the other drawings in his possession, its owner, Charles Holme, steadfastly refused to release the *Frontispiece* for reproduction: 'I am furious at Holme's refusal. The Beast', an irritated Beardsley wrote to Smithers.⁴ In September 1896 Beardsley instructed Smithers to try again, writing from Boscombe where he had gone to recover from a tubercular attack: 'ask the *Studio* for the Chopin drawing whilst you are about it. I will do another colour picture *gratis* if they will lend it.'⁵ Holme's continuing veto prompted Beardsley to attempt a second version of the drawing to be used instead, evidently feeling it was very important for the subject to be represented in the



26. *Sidonia von Bork, 1560*, by Edward Burne-Jones. 1860–61. Water-colour and body-colour, 33 by 17 cm. (Tate, London).

first published selection of his drawings. 'If you give me time at the last moment', he wrote desperately to Smithers, 'I should like to attack a picture for the Chopin Ballade.'⁶ But this attempt was unsuccessful, with Beardsley reporting to Smithers 'I don't feel equal to repeating the *Chopin Ballade*. It's like putting old wine into new bottles. I failed utterly with the second version. Pray heaven the *Studio* will show us some clemency.'⁷ Holme, however, continued to refuse to release it, apparently because he wanted to save it for reproduction in the *Studio*.⁸ But in part he may also perhaps have been motivated by distaste for Smithers who, in addition to later courageously publishing Oscar Wilde's *Ballad of Reading Gaol*, was one of late Victorian Britain's greatest publishers and purveyors of pornography. The two men shared Yorkshire origins, but the upstanding Holme was a very different type from Smithers, whom William Rothenstein considered 'an evil influence' on Beardsley, and snobbishly described as 'a bizarre and improbable figure – a rough Yorkshireman with a strong local accent and uncertain h's, the last man, one had thought, to be a Latin scholar and a disciple of M. Le Marquis de Sade'.⁹ Wilde, meanwhile, wrote of Smithers, 'He loves first editions, especially of women: little girls are his passion. He is the most learned erotomaniac in Europe. He is also a delightful companion and a dear fellow.'¹⁰

¹ H. Maas, J.L. Duncan and W.G. Good, eds.: *The Letters of Aubrey Beardsley*, London 1970 (hereafter referred to as *Letters*).

² G. White: 'Aubrey Beardsley. In Memoriam', *Studio* 13 (1898), p.262, repr. p.257.

³ Quoted in S. Calloway: *Aubrey Beardsley*, London 1998, p.56.

⁴ A. Beardsley to L. Smithers, 6th April 1896, from Hôtel de Saxe, Brussels (*Let-*

ters, p.122). M. Sturgis: *Aubrey Beardsley: A Biography*, London 1998, p.281, suggests the *Frontispiece* was requested for the second edition of *The Savoy* (1896), which might partly explain Holme's reluctance.

⁵ A. Beardsley to L. Smithers, 5th September 1896, from Pier View, Boscombe (*Letters*, p.160).

27. *Frontispiece to Chopin's Third Ballade*, by Aubrey Beardsley. 1895. Pen, brush and black ink and coloured wash, 25.4 by 23.4 cm. (Tate, London).



Charles Holme (1848–1923) was the son of a silk manufacturer, and forged a successful career in the woollen business; later he traded his Bradford-made goods for imports from India and the Far East, especially Japan. A great champion of the Arts and Crafts movement, in 1889 he bought William Morris's Red House at Bexleyheath. Holme retired from business in 1892 and, despite having no previous publishing experience, the following year he founded the *Studio*, a journal which from the start treated the fine and decorative arts as equal and inextricably connected. Holme sought to illustrate and promote good design and, although he had not sought commercial success, the magazine quickly attained a wide circulation both at home and abroad. An interventionist proprietor, Holme appointed C. Lewis Hind as editor, and it was he who introduced Beardsley to the enterprise. Hind left before the

journal's launch, and Gleeson White replaced him as editor. In the first issue in April 1893 Beardsley was the subject of an article by the influential Joseph Pennel, and the young artist also designed the front cover. However, Holme had required Beardsley to remove from his cover illustration a disturbingly lascivious-looking faun, and the resulting unpopulated landscape was actually rather dull.

Holme's high principles might have prevented him from endorsing the extremities of Beardsley's subversive decadence. Nevertheless, as a champion of new art, he bought a number of his drawings, and he was the first recorded owner of *Frontispiece to Chopin's Third Ballade*, apparently acquiring it at the Society of Portrait Painters exhibition at the New Gallery in 1895. That year Beardsley exhibited there 'The Comtesse d'Armailhacq', no.172

⁶ A. Beardsley to L. Smithers, c.6th April 1896, from Hôtel de Saxe, Brussels (*Letters*, p.122).

⁷ A. Beardsley to L. Smithers, c.17th September 1896, from Pier View, Boscombe (*Letters*, p.165).

⁸ Sturgis, *op. cit.* (note 4), p.281.

⁹ W. Rothenstein: *Men and Memories: 1872–1900*, London 1931, pp.244–45.

¹⁰ Quoted in Calloway, *op. cit.* (note 3), p.147.



28. *A Fosse. Sous les sapins*, by Fernand Khnopff. 1894. 65.5 by 44 cm. (Galerie Brachot, Brussels).

in the catalogue. No drawing of this title or possible subject-matter is now known, and R.A. Walker proposed convincingly that this drawing and the Chopin *Frontispiece* were one and the same work, a possibility Brian Reade endorsed in his catalogue raisonné of Beardsley's work.¹¹ 'A curious fact that may be connected with this drawing', Walker wrote, 'is that in October 1895 Beardsley exhibited a portrait of the Comtesse d'Armailhacq at the exhibition of the Royal Society of Portrait Painters. All effort to trace this drawing has failed, and no such person existed at this date. The last survivor of this family, an only son, and unmarried, tells me his mother died long before 1895. The "Portrait", however, must have been a fine one, for a writer in "The Star" of 21st February, 1899, recalls it, and finally Mr M.H. Spielmann tells me he remembers it. From his description, given me from memory after a lapse of over twenty years, I am inclined to think it is this drawing.'¹²

Beardsley exhibited only a very few works, but the idea of his making a straightforward portrait seems unlikely, and his involvement with the august Society of Portrait Painters may perhaps have been a tease. In the same exhibition was a dandified portrait in oils of Beardsley himself, painted by his friend Jacques-Emile Blanche. Beardsley deliberately cultivated a distinct persona, cre-

ating a context for the reception of his work, and he enjoyed pushing and playing with the possibilities of identity. In 1894 he had been photographed by Frederick Evans in profile with his face in his hands, adopting a pose which imitated the famous Notre Dame gargoyle 'Le Stryge'. This was exhibited at the London Photographic Salon of 1894, which also showed Frederick Hollyer's photographic portrait of 'Diane de Rougy'. This was in fact a picture of Beardsley's friend Jerome Pollitt in drag, although so convincing was this transvestite transformation that 'Diane' was apparently pronounced by many a great beauty.¹³

Whether Beardsley's Comtesse d'Armailhacq was a real person remains unresolved. The Armailhacqs were an ancient French family from the Midi, and today wine is still produced in the Médoc under their name, although their vineyards are now owned by the Rothschilds. Armand d'Armailhacq published *La Culture des Vignes* in 1857, a pioneering treatise on viticultural modernisation which ran to several successful editions and earned him the Légion d'honneur in 1885. Monsignor Albert d'Armailhacq was chaplain of S. Luigi dei Francesi, the French national church in Rome, and in 1894 published a guide to the church in French. The dress of Beardsley's rider suggests that it may be a historical portrait, and raises the possibility that the drawing is allegorical or symbolic, its wider subject related in some way to the behaviour of a French countess no longer alive. Beardsley was fascinated by seventeenth- and eighteenth-century pre-Revolutionary France, but no mention of such a figure has been found in any accounts of the period or in historical dictionaries. This might suggest that he invented her, but in Beardsley's lascivious novella *Under the Hill* he wrote that below the terrace on which Venus and Tannhäuser enjoy their orgiastic feast the gardens 'were designed so elaborately and with so much splendour that the architect of the Fêtes d'Armailhacq could have found in them no matter for cavil'.¹⁴ Such specificity suggests a real person, although it could equally be a piece of mythologising of his own invention, perhaps an in-joke connected with wine, of which Beardsley was extremely knowledgeable.

In 1914 the drawing was shown at the Ryder Gallery under the title *Frontispiece to Chopin's Third Ballade*. It was still in Holme's possession but, at a later date, perhaps at Holme's death in 1923, it was acquired by Morton Sands. The brother of the artist Ethel Sands, he was best known as an important patron of Sickert and Augustus John. But Sands evidently also had a less well-advertised taste for the exotic, as his collection included Beardsley's obscene *Lysistrata* drawings, probably acquired from Jerome Pollitt. Along with these the *Frontispiece* remained in Sands's possession and passed to his nephew, from whom it was acquired for the Tate; in the Beardsley literature the 1898 *Studio* plate has usually been reproduced.

The *Frontispiece* marked a fairly radical technical departure for Beardsley. The use of tonal washes was a new phenomenon in his work; his trademark 'blocked-out' approach was here abandoned in favour of a softer tonal style which anticipates later drawings such as the *Madame de Maupin* series. But certain passages, such as the horse's head and harness, are executed in very fine, meticulously modulated pen-and-ink lines that recall drawings of 1893 such as *How King Arthur Saw the Questing Beast* (Victoria and Albert Museum, London). The *Frontispiece*, therefore, occupies a pivotal technical position in Beardsley's output, looking both backwards and forwards.

¹¹ B. Reade: *Aubrey Beardsley*, rev. ed. Woodbridge 1998, no.320.

¹² R.A. Walker: *Some Unknown Drawings of Aubrey Beardsley*, London 1923, no.22.

¹³ See Sturgis, *op. cit.* (note 4), repr. between pp.308 and 309. Herbert Charles

Pollitt (1871–1942) went by the assumed first name of Jerome.

¹⁴ A. Beardsley: *The Story of Venus and Tannhäuser, or 'Under the Hill'*, London 1974, p.36.

Many of Beardsley's drawings make allusion to the works of others, and there are interesting pictorial references in the *Frontispiece*. For the rider Beardsley turned to his hero Burne-Jones whom he had first met in July 1891 when he visited Burne-Jones's studio uninvited, and bearing a portfolio of his own drawings. Burne-Jones was uncharacteristically encouraging, and even went so far as to make enquiries about the best art school for Beardsley to receive training.¹⁵ Beardsley considered Burne-Jones the greatest living artist, and many of his earliest pictures imitate his drawing style and technique. Although he soon found his own distinct voice, for the *Frontispiece* he returned to Burne-Jones. The face of his rider is adapted from the older artist's famous water-colour *Sidonia von Bork*, 1560 (1860–61; Fig. 26); the sharp nose and chin, determined mouth and brow, the coiffure of the hair in Beardsley's picture all appear to be derived from *Sidonia*, which Beardsley had seen when he visited the Burne-Jones retrospective at the New Gallery in 1892.

The setting in which Beardsley places his Pre-Raphaelite rider, however, alludes to a more modern, subjectless, abstract picture, in which mood, atmosphere and suggestion are all – Fernand Khnopff's *A Fosset. Sous les sapins* (1894; Fig. 28). Such a connexion might at first seem unlikely, but this was a picture with which Beardsley was familiar, having seen it at the second Salon of the Libre Esthétique in Brussels in 1895, where he himself exhibited his designs for the *Morte d'Arthur*. Khnopff was already a frequent visitor to London and from 1894 he was the Brussels correspondent for the *Studio*, which perhaps brought him into Beardsley's orbit. But whatever their level of familiarity, the attenuated, truncated trees stretching off into a limitless, gloomy, unknown forest in Khnopff's *A Fosset* appear to have been freely adapted by Beardsley for his *Frontispiece*, turning them into a frieze-like shallow screen which emphasises the stage-like appearance of the image. Khnopff was among the first to make such simplified forest landscapes of this type, but it quickly became a favourite sub-symbolist subject among European painters: Albijn van den Abeele's *Fir forest in February* (1897), for instance, is quite similar.¹⁶ At the moment of its penetration by industry, urbanisation and technology, the forest was once again a potent and suggestive symbol in European culture, its darkly threatening or magical recesses forming the backdrop to cultural forms as diverse as Grimm's *Fairy Tales*, which appeared in a complete edition in Britain in 1884 (although some stories had been translated much earlier), Humperdinck's operatic treatment of one of the stories, *Hansel and Gretel* (1894), performed in London for the first time in January 1895, Bram Stoker's novel *Dracula* (1897) or Burne-Jones's *Briar rose* pictures based on Charles Perrault's *Belle au bois dormant*. Beardsley had already used a tangled dense wood as the setting for his drawing of Hamlet searching for the ghost of his father for the *Bee* in 1891,¹⁷ and for this work he had undoubtedly had in mind Burne-Jones's *Briar rose* cycle, the large version of which had been shown to great acclaim at Agnew's in London in 1890. Beardsley accompanied Leonard Smithers to Brussels in February 1895 (where he saw Khnopff's *A Fosset*), a journey that has been characterised as 'a sudden whim'.¹⁸ But the chance of visiting the Salon of the Libre Esthétique must have contributed to his decision to go there, in view of his admiration of contemporary continental art and his desire to forge European contacts. In Brussels Beardsley smoked hashish for the first time and consorted with a girl, improbably named Rayon, before his health collapsed and he was filled with forebodings of mortality.



29. Frontispiece to John Davidson's *A Full Account of the Wonderful Mission of Earl Lavender*, by Aubrey Beardsley. (Ward & Downey, 1895).

These are the essential facts surrounding the history of the drawing and its sources. But its interpretation raises darker topics of domination and sado-masochism. Overall there is a strong undercurrent of violence running through the picture. The horse is rearing up, and is either being controlled by its rider or made to perform what is known in dressage as a *levade*. This, however, was originally a specifically military manoeuvre. In Beardsley's day cavalymen were still training their horses to rear up like this so that in combat they could pummel the heads of foot soldiers below. The subtext of violence which the *levade* suggests is given a specifically sexual slant by Beardsley's apparent choice of *Sidonia von Bork* as the model for his rider. *Sidonia* was a wicked young woman, a *femme fatale* who took perverse pleasure in ensnaring men and breaking their hearts, and who used the occult to achieve her evil ends. For Burne-Jones she represented the archetypal cruel temptress, and the story equally fascinated others in the Pre-Raphaelite circle. *Sidonia* was the anti-hero of Johann Wilhelm Meinhold's gothic shocker *Sidonia von Bork: Die Klosterhexe*

¹⁵ A. Beardsley to A.W. King, 13th July 1891, from 59 Charlwood Street, London (*Letters*, p. 22).

¹⁶ See R. Rosenblum, M. Stevens and A. Dumas: exh. cat. 1900: *Art at the Cross-*

roads, London (Royal Academy) 2000, p. 259, repr.

¹⁷ *Hamlet Patris Manem Sequitur*, 1891; Reade, *op. cit.* (note 11), no. 22, pl. 21.

¹⁸ Sturgis, *op. cit.* (note 4), p. 282.

(1847). This appeared in English in 1849 in a translation by Lady Wilde, the mother of Beardsley's friend Oscar Wilde, and was republished in 1893 by William Morris at the Kelmscott Press.

Beardsley sensibly abandoned the opulent dress Sidonia wears in Burne-Jones's water-colour and suitably clothed his dominatrix in a riding habit. But her apparel seems nevertheless fetishised. Holding a whip, she is tightly corseted, her waist made tiny, a constriction which seems perversely accentuated by the contrast to her billowing skirts, cravat and plume, and by the power of the large horse itself. The tiny, firmly enclosed foot also seems to nod towards fetishism, but its treatment actually gives rise to a visual ambiguity, which in view of Beardsley's sense of humour and phallic obsession¹⁹ is likely to have been wholly intentional. The foot could be mistaken for the phallus of the horse in a state of tumescent excitement. Crucial to an understanding of the true subject of the drawing, this suggests that the horse derives pleasure – and specifically sexual pleasure – from being ridden, a correlation to human sexual domination and submission. In the 1890s, as now, 'riding' was a common slang term for intercourse, while 'to horse' was a verb used for the same activity. But it also had a more specialist, sado-masochistic usage, as a term meaning 'to flog', derived from the name for the frame over which the victim is stretched, a piece of equipment then common in English public schools. In Victorian naval slang 'a horse' was, for the same reason, an officer who was a strict disciplinarian.

The young woman's mastery of the strong horse raises its own issues of female domination and control. Equestrian portraits are usually limited to men, as traditionally they are expressions of power, kingship or martial triumph. Pictures of women on horseback are more rare, especially reining in a horse. The few exceptions draw specifically male parallels, so that Sébastien Bourdon's rearing equestrian portrait of Queen Christina of Sweden (Museo del Prado, Madrid) represents her as a modern-day Alexander,²⁰ while Vigilius Eriksen's more sedate picture of Catherine the Great, now in the Hermitage, St Petersburg, nevertheless depicts her sitting astride and dressed as a man. Beardsley was undoubtedly unaware of these pictures; but he might perhaps have been influenced to a certain degree by Velázquez's equestrian portraiture. R.A.M. Stevenson's enormously influential and popular book on Velázquez appeared in 1895, the year of Beardsley's *Frontispiece*, and renewed critical appreciation of the Spanish old master for a whole generation. Beardsley might well have seen in the Wallace Collection – although not officially open to the public – the copies after Velázquez's mounted portraits of Philip IV, the Count-Duke of Olivares and Prince Baltasar Carlos.

In choosing a white horse for his drawing Beardsley may well have had in mind a popular slang phrase for a domineering woman, 'Riding the old grey mare', its phraseology insinuating both taking command and subverting male independence and power. While the image could equally be a celebration of submission to female dominance, it and similar imagery might be seen, as Linda Zatlin has suggested, as an articulation of male fears about the independence and power of the New Woman, and specifically the expression of her sexuality:

With sexual power . . . a woman could become dangerous. She could become partner in coition, synonymous in Victorian public opinion with a paid prostitute. And she could make



30. *The shrew tamed* ('The pretty horsebreaker'), by Edwin Landseer. c.1861. 84 by 128 cm. (Private collection).

demands on her husband for her own pleasure, thereby carving a redefinition of her sexual role in marriage. She could no longer be exploited sexually, a situation which could lead her to overthrow social subjection and appear reining in a bridled horse, the traditional representation of the (male) intellect controlling the passions.²¹

The 'Beardsley Woman', as Zatlin notes, was most often a cruel mistress, and Beardsley's interest in female domination found full expression in images such as his 1895 frontispiece to *A Full Account of the Wonderful Mission of Earl Lavender* by John Davidson (Fig. 29). Made in the same year as the *Frontispiece*, it depicts a statuesque, hieratic woman calmly administering a flogging to a kneeling youth before her. It accompanied a novel which characterised fleshly chastisement as sacramental and described the activities of a society of aristocratic flagellants seeking atonement for their luxurious lives.

Seeing a picture of a sharply dressed young woman mastering a powerful stallion, contemporaries are likely to have made other connexions too. The 'Pretty Horsebreakers' of Hyde Park's Rotten Row were prostitutes and courtesans of varying levels in the hierarchy who plied their trade on horseback. They were well known for their fashionable and sometimes outrageous attire, and reached their apogee in the 1860s. Crowds would come to the Park to watch the spectacle, and in particular to see Catherine 'Skittles' Walters. A modern anti-heroine, she was the subject of poems and prose which celebrated her beauty, independence and self-confidence, as well as her sexual availability, and in many ways she was a forerunner of the New Woman of the 1890s. As their name suggested, the 'Horsebreakers' were particularly known for their specialisation in domination and flogging, for which there seems to have been an extensive clientele in Victorian London. So much a part of the London scene were the 'Horsebreakers' that they were even admired as arbiters of fashionable dress by as sedate a publication as the *Englishwoman's Domestic Magazine*, which breathlessly noted that the tight lacing of the riders' costumes could induce a 'delightful sensation', and 'the secret stimulus of the hidden steel [i.e. the spur] is more frequently resorted to than some fair ladies would like to admit'.²²

¹⁹ Calloway, *op. cit.* (note 3), p.167.

²⁰ See A. Danielson: 'Sébastien Bourdon's Portrait of Queen Christina of Sweden – Addressed to "His Catholic Majesty" Philip IV', *Konsthistorisk Tidskrift* 58 (1989), pp.95–108.

²¹ L.G. Zatlin: *Aubrey Beardsley and Victorian Sexual Politics*, Oxford 1990, p.132.

²² Vols.5–9, 1868–70, quoted in R. Pearsall: *The Worm in the Bud: The World of Victorian Sexuality*, London 1983, p.310.

²³ *The Times*, 4th May 1861, p.12.

²⁴ *Annual Register*, 1861, pp.65–66.

²⁵ Sturgis, *op. cit.* (note 4), p.142.

Even Queen Victoria's favourite painter, Sir Edwin Landseer, referred to the 'Horsebreakers'. Shown at the Royal Academy in 1861, his picture *The shrew tamed* quickly became known as *The pretty horsebreaker* (Fig. 30). This depicted a young woman reclining in a stable with a horse she has broken beside her; a thick leather strap lies nearby, indicating the method of subjugation she has employed. Yet the term 'shrew' in the title suggests it is not simply the horse that has been tamed, and that the rosy-cheeked woman herself, lying exhausted in the hay, has also experienced some release. Choosing to ignore the implicit perversity of the subject, *The Times* reacted with horror at what it saw as the picture's underlying sexual politics: 'The lady reclines against [the horse's] glossy side, smiling in the consciousness of female supremacy, and playfully patting the jaw that could tear her into tatters, with the back of her small hand. For horses read husbands, and the picture is a provocation to rebellion addressed to the whole sex.'²³ Other critics were more specific, or literal, and the *Annual Register* recognised the picture as a direct reference to 'one of the social scandals of the hour', the 'Pretty Horsebreakers' of Rotten Row.²⁴ It was widely believed at the time that this was a portrait of 'Skittles' Walters herself, which would have made it a particularly shocking encounter at the Royal Academy.

In tandem with the sexual elements of his picture, Beardsley was also, it would appear, concerned with the current fashion for synaesthesia. The 'equivalence' or 'correspondence' between different physical sensations was a topic of much contemporary debate and experiment in creative circles, especially in Paris, which Beardsley had again visited early in the year he made the *Frontispiece*. The relationship between word, image and sensation had been investigated by poets such as Baudelaire, Verlaine and Mallarmé, while musical equivalents were pursued by Debussy, Satie and Saint-Saëns, and Scriabin took the process to its extremes with his investigation of the potential for musical sounds to be experienced as colours. Synaesthesia was primarily a phenomenon of continental Symbolism, although in Britain Whistler had established the practice of giving his pictures the musical titles of Nocturne, Harmony and Symphony. Beardsley may have come into contact with ideas about synaesthesia on his visits to Paris, but in the summer of 1895, the year he made the *Chopin Ballade* drawing, he was in Dieppe and there passed hours in incessant discussion about art and literature with Arthur Symons, and their plans for the *Savoy*, a new journal of decadence. Through Symons, Beardsley was introduced to Leonard Smithers at Dieppe, the man who later spurred him to produce his most obscene and extreme designs.

Beardsley was already well acquainted with the key texts and authors representative of continental synaesthesia. He read French literature voraciously, and particularly admired Baudelaire, whose poem 'Correspondance' in *Les Fleurs du Mal* was for French Symbolists at the heart of synaesthetic inspiration. At a dinner party given by Whistler in Paris in 1893 he met Stéphane Mallarmé, one of the central figures of French Symbolism; so impressed was he

by Mallarmé's *L'Après-Midi d'un Faune* that Beardsley decorated his copy with drawings.²⁵ He read in the original French the novels of Flaubert, whose *Salammbô* and *La Tentation de Saint Antoine* were admired in Paris both for their decadence and for their range of sensory spectacle, and Beardsley depicted a volume of *Les Fleurs du Mal* on Salomé's bookcase in his first, censored, onanistic version of *The toilet of Salomé* (1894). For the second, published, version he changed the selection of books, but nevertheless included a volume of the Marquis de Sade and *Nana* by Zola, both authors reviled in Britain. He also greatly admired J.-K. Huysmans's *A Rebours*, a novel which explores synaesthesia through the depraved experiences of its central character, Baron des Esseintes. To a certain extent Beardsley may have identified with him, for he copied the black-and-orange colour-scheme of des Esseintes's house in his own Pimlico rooms, and *Under the Hill*, his excursion into writing, bears the clear marks of *A rebours*, although many descriptive passages also owe an obvious stylistic debt to Flaubert's *Salammbô*.

For *Chopin's Third Ballade*, Beardsley offered a more daring, purely synaesthetic vision. Both the 'rhythm' of the drawing and the movement the horse is making are a visual equivalent of the syncopation of the music's second subject. More surprisingly, the actual finger movements required in playing this passage are reminiscent of the sequential movement of a horse's legs while at canter.²⁶ Beardsley was familiar with these for, as a child learning the piano, Chopin was the principal composer his mother made him study, perhaps a further connexion to the theme of female domination. When the drawing was first published it was accompanied by six bars of the music reproduced below the image.²⁷ It is easy to imagine the rhythm of a cantering horse from hearing Chopin's music, and this may have been an image that sprang to Beardsley's mind. Gleeson White, however, considered 'that it is doubtful whether any listener had formed such an image of its meaning before. Some who saw it (when the original was exhibited) say they will never hear the music again without picturing his interpretation in their minds.'²⁸ In his picture Beardsley was carrying a stage further the process of synaesthetic transformation actually started by Chopin. The Third Ballade was a translation into music of a poetic form, and specifically was a setting of the poem 'Ondine' by Chopin's compatriot Adam Mickiewicz (1798–1855). Beardsley now took this and transformed it into a third medium.

The drawing's twin strands of sado-masochistic sex and domination, and synaesthetic equivalence initially seem irreconcilable. But the plethora of pornographic texts centring on flogging which appeared in the late Victorian period often revolve around the submissive partner's discovery that pain can lead to feelings of intense pleasure.²⁹ What Beardsley may be slyly suggesting is that this process too is a synaesthetic one: that one sensation can either lead to, or even be experienced as another, that pain can lead to pleasure.

²⁶ Beardsley may have had in mind Muybridge's influential images of *The Horse in Motion* (1882–83), which had been acclaimed on his visit to London in 1882.

²⁷ *Studio* 13 (1898), p. 257.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 262. However, White continued, 'Speaking personally, neither the Wagner nor the Chopin themes seem directly inspired by the music, any more than

are most of the "Morte d'Arthur" drawings by Mallory's text'. White's confirmation that the drawing was exhibited reinforces the argument that the *Frontispiece* is the drawing shown at the Society of Portrait Painters.

²⁹ See Pearsall, *op. cit.* (note 22).