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# Aubrey Beardsley as Schoolboy Artist: Drawings for "The Pay of the Pied Piper"

Eleanor M. Garvey

AUBREY BEARDSLEY'S precocity was first demonstrated to the public in 1893, when John Dent published *Le Morte Darthur* with illustrations by the twenty-one year old artist. This, however, was not his first appearance in print, for, like many another facile young draughtsman, his drawings were published in his school magazine — the Brighton Grammar School's *Past and Present*. Most of them are the caricatures of a clever youth, but one set displays a sureness of line and composition remarkable in a schoolboy.

This example of his youthful skill may be studied in ten drawings for *The Pay of the Pied Piper*, a gift from Mrs. Joseph M. Edinburg to the Department of Printing and Graphic Arts of the Harvard College Library.<sup>1</sup> Beardsley made eleven drawings to illustrate a play of this title included in the annual entertainment of the Brighton Grammar School, held in the Dome of the Royal Pavilion on 19 December 1888. They were reproduced by line block in the program and also in the February 1889 issue of *Past and Present*.<sup>2</sup> A copy of the latter was shown in the 1966 Beardsley exhibition at the Victoria and Albert Museum,<sup>3</sup> but the drawings have not been recently exhibited nor previously published.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Acc. no. \*72 M-19. The drawings are small, ranging in size from 30 x 110 mm. to 162 x 112 mm.

<sup>2</sup> Brian Reade, *Aubrey Beardsley* (New York, 1967), p. 311, no. 10 (illus.).

<sup>3</sup> London, Victoria and Albert Museum, *Aubrey Beardsley Exhibition*. Catalogue by Brian Reade and Frank Dickinson (1966), no. 110.

<sup>4</sup> Although the Pied Piper drawings are often referred to, reproductions have always been made from the line blocks. A full set of the eleven reproductions appears in *The Uncollected Works of Aubrey Beardsley*, Intro. by C. Lewis Hind (London, 1925), pl. 90-100. A. E. Gallatin listed but did not illustrate the eleven subjects in *Aubrey Beardsley, Catalogue of Drawings and Bibliography* (New York, 1945), no. 125-135. They are described but not illustrated in A. W. King, *An Aubrey Beardsley Lecture*, Intro. and Notes by R. A. Walker (London, 1924), p. 28. Charles B. Cochran published two of them in "Aubrey Beardsley at School," *The Poster*, I

Beardsley entered the Brighton Grammar School in 1885 and remained there until July 1888, leaving the month before his sixteenth birthday and returning to act in the December performance as an Old Boy.<sup>5</sup> This distinction is not made in the program, indicating that he made the drawings while still at school, aged fifteen. His name appears four times in the program: twice as actor, in two separate roles, and twice as designer. On the first page, listed with the authors and composers, who were his elders, the young artist's name is in equally large type: "The illustrations are original etchings [sic] by A. V. Beardsley, a present boy." On the verso of this leaf, the acknowledgments include the statement that "The illustrations are the perfectly original designs and drawings of a boy now in the School, A. V. Beardsley. Our regret is, that lacking experience in the preparation of Drawings for the photo-engraver, the reproductions should fall so far short of the original sketches." The line blocks (not etchings, but photo-engravings), are still at the Brighton Grammar School and were lent to the Victoria and Albert exhibition.<sup>6</sup> The printer is identified in the program as Tucknott's Steam Printing Works, Kensington Gardens.

The prominence with which Beardsley's name is featured indicates the esteem in which he was held. That he was not one of the recipients of the honor "Distinguished in Drawing" listed on page 16 of the program may be owing to the fact that he had already left school. While there, he had been especially encouraged by Arthur William King, Science Master and Senior House Master, who described their friendship in an illustrated lecture delivered at the Blackburn Technical Institute and published posthumously in 1924.<sup>7</sup> King was also the author of the prologue for the annual entertainment of 1888. These public performances were held at the Dome, the extravagant Indian-style stables built by the Prince of Wales in 1808 and later converted to a performing hall.

The young Beardsley was experienced in amateur theatricals, and

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(Aug.-Sept. 1898), 102-105, and Brian Reade illustrated two in his *Aubrey Beardsley*, p. 311, no. 10.

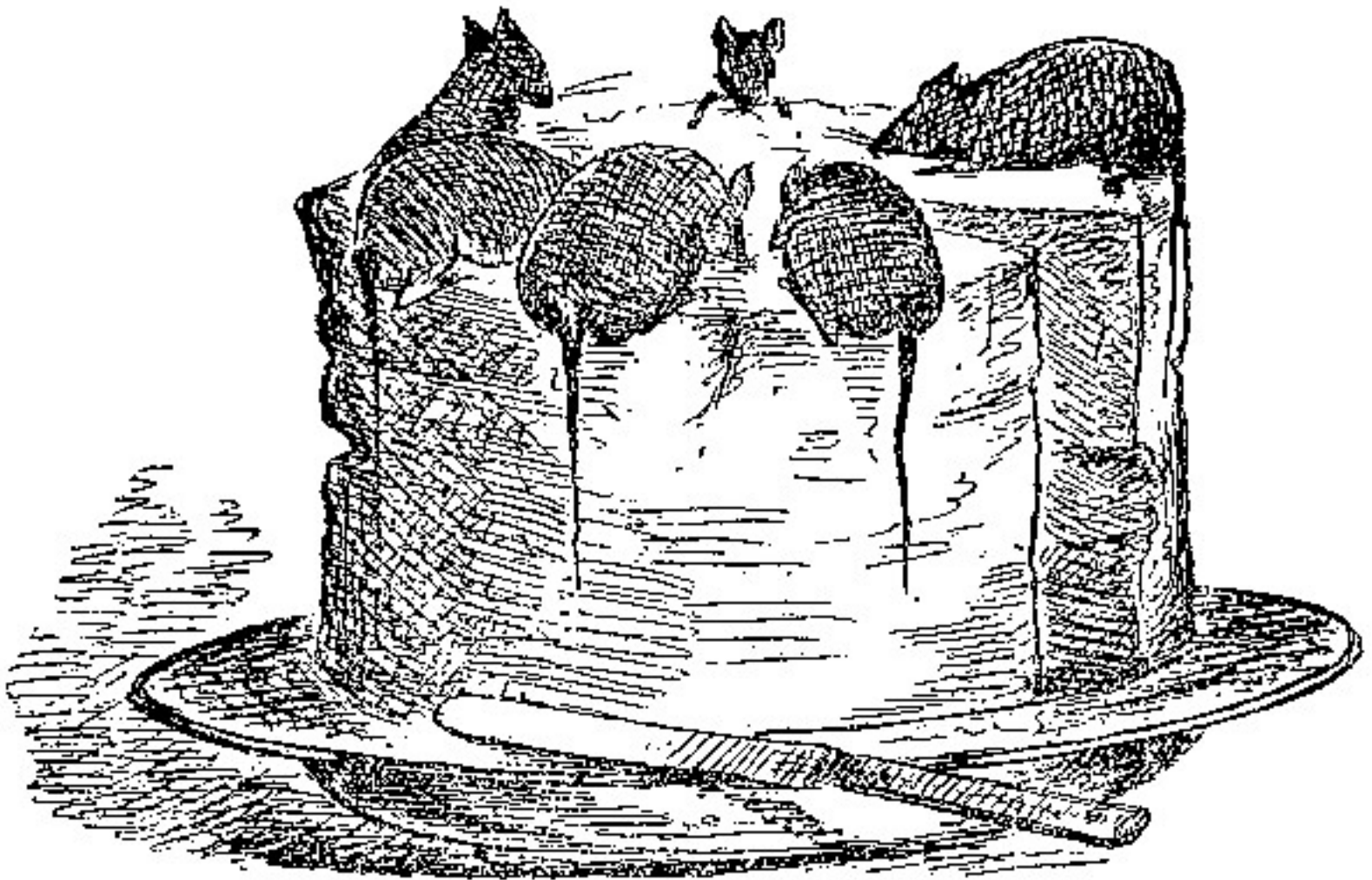
<sup>5</sup> Beardsley's appearance in school theatricals, including this one, is described in Stanley Weintraub, *Beardsley, a Biography* (New York, 1967), ch. 1. A. W. King also describes this occasion (King, *An Aubrey Beardsley Lecture*, p. 28).

<sup>6</sup> Victoria and Albert Cat., no. 110.

<sup>7</sup> King, *An Aubrey Beardsley Lecture*.



FIGURE 1  
ENTRANCE OF COUNCILLORS, HEADED BY READLE



SONG (*Burgomaster.*)

WHAT SHALL WE DO WITH OUR RATS?

1.

You all of you know that a terrible clond  
Has settled on Hamelin town,  
In the shape of a ravenous horde of rats  
From the blackest of black to brown.

With rats on the tables,  
And rats on the chairs,  
And rats in the stables,  
And rats on the stairs,  
Oh what shall we do with our rats?  
With rats, etc.

CHORUS.

2.

Now the thought has lately occurred to me,  
Can we manage to make some *use*  
Of the active little foe with the shining little teeth  
Which we visit with such abuse.

With rats in the dairy,  
And rats in the mill,  
And rats in the *airey*,  
And rats in the till,  
Oh what shall we do with our rats?

3.

If we were a town besieged you know,  
We should gobble them up in pies,  
No doubt they'd be good as rat-tail soup,  
But bless you! nobody tries.

FIGURE 2

THE PRINTED PROGRAM, PAGE [24]

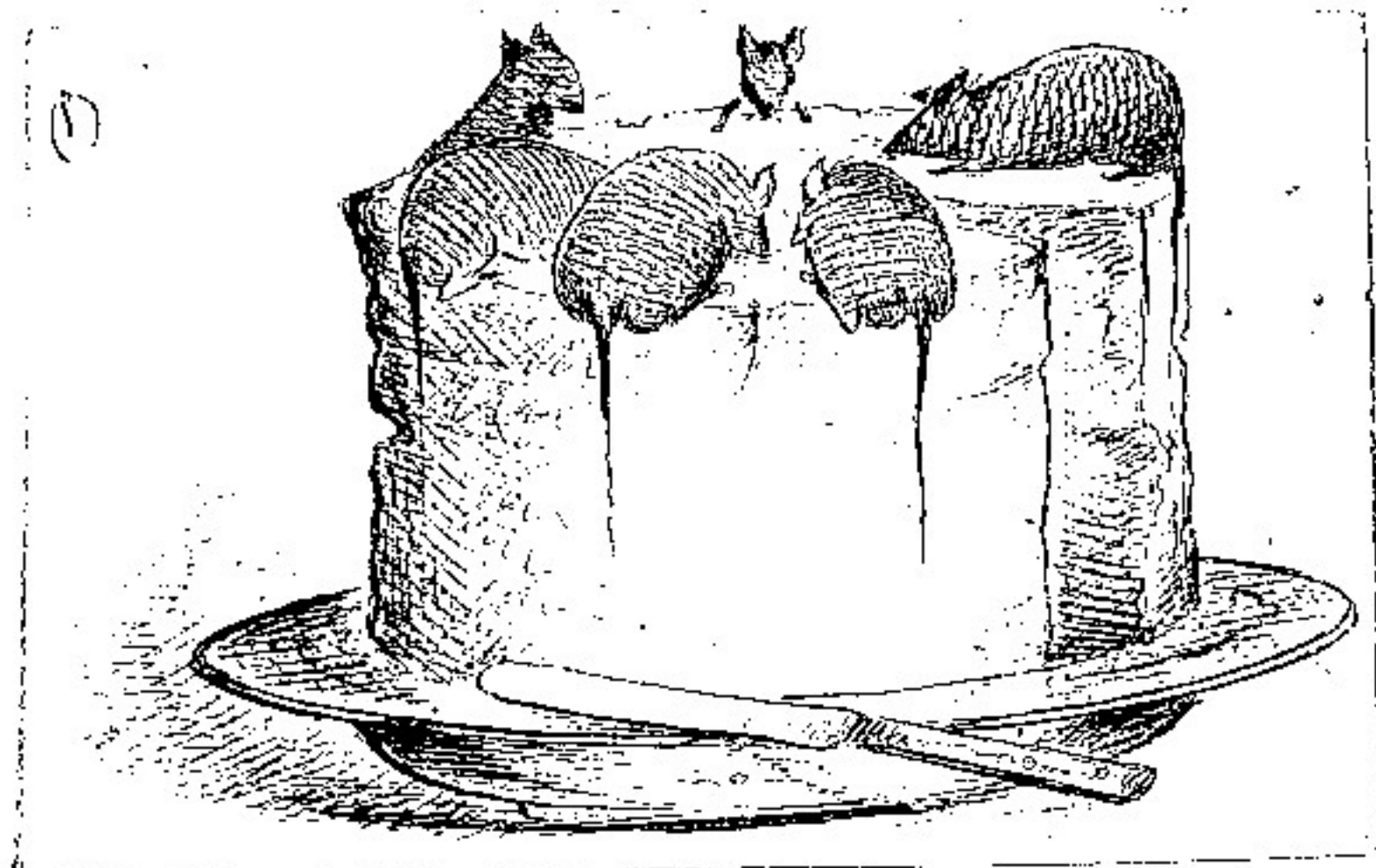


FIGURE 3  
RATS FEEDING UPON A CHEESE



FIGURE 4  
CHILD ESCAPING FROM THE RATS

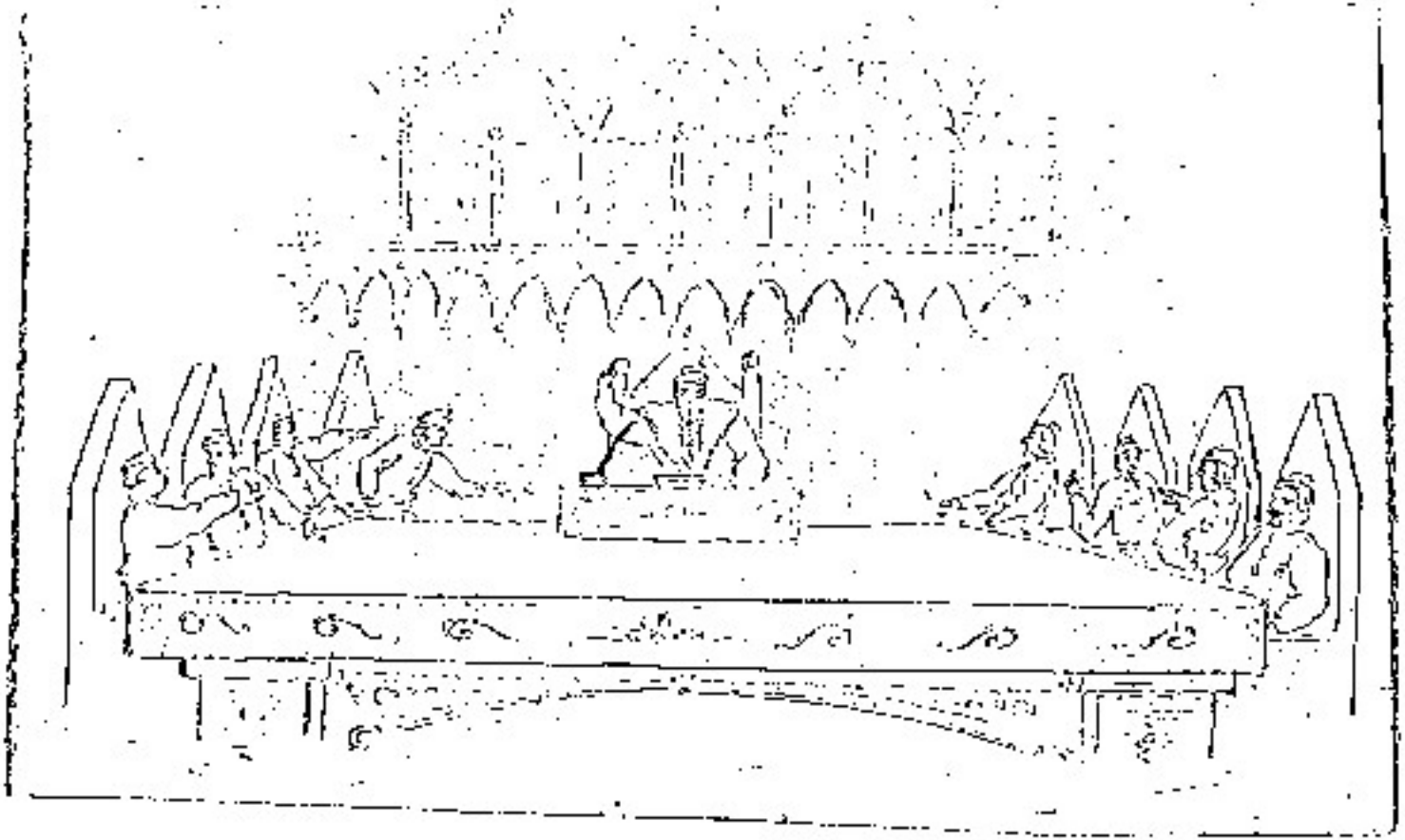


FIGURE 5  
THE SITTING OF THE COUNCIL



FIGURE 6  
DEPUTATION OF LADIES

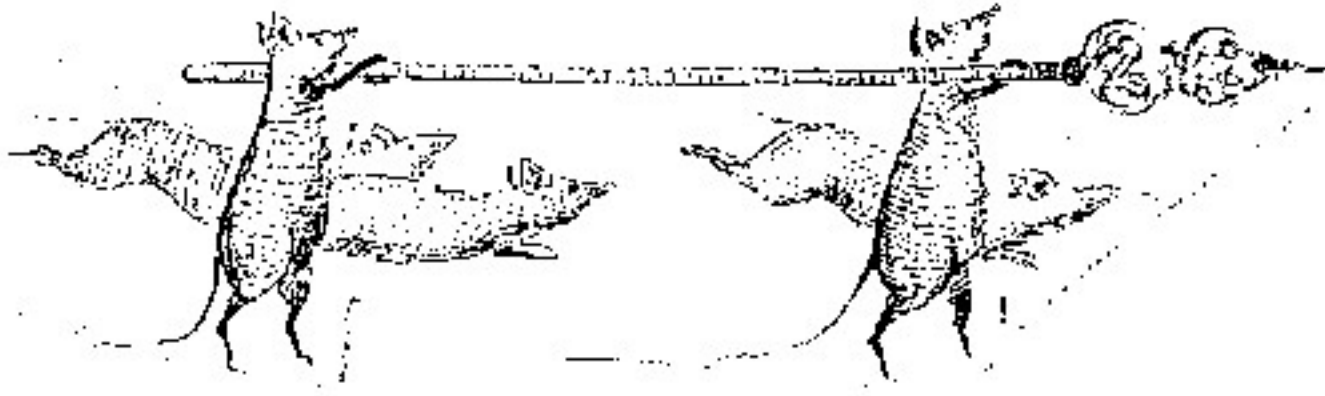


FIGURE 7  
RATS CARRYING OFF THE BEADLE'S MACE



FIGURE 8  
MEETING OF BEADLE AND THE PIPER





The wonderful music with shouting and laughter.

FIGURE 9  
ILLUSTRATION BY KATE GREENAWAY FOR BROWNING'S  
*The Pied Piper of Hamelin* (1888)



FIGURE 10  
RATS FOLLOWING THE PIPER

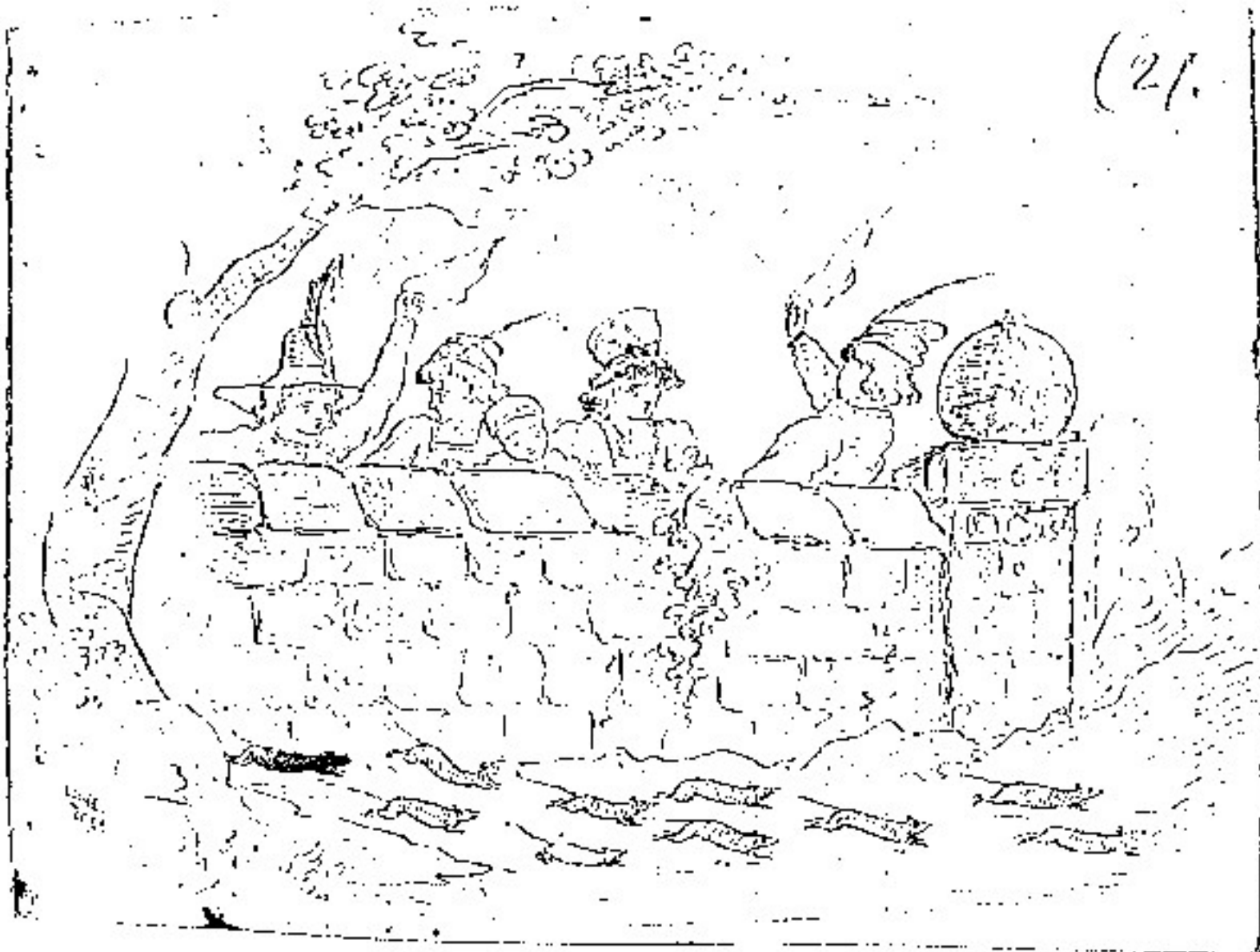


FIGURE 11  
CITIZENS REJOICING AT DEPARTURE OF THE RATS



FIGURE 12  
THE PIPER ENTICES THE CHILDREN

his friend and schoolmate Charles B. Cochran, the theatrical impresario, credited Beardsley with shaping his own career: "Beardsley dispelled all my doubts as to what my future career should be. He not only revived my interest in acting, but filled me with the desire to read all the great and many unimportant plays. . . . We did a lot of amateur acting together at school, performing all sorts of plays during the year. We also gave one big public performance annually in the Dome, Brighton. Beardsley thus had a great influence in my life."<sup>8</sup> In reminiscing about his school days, Cochran recalled Beardsley's literary sophistication and his musical and theatrical gifts, which drew the two boys together. They went to the theatre whenever possible, organizing raffles to raise money for tickets and inventing excuses to get away on matinee days. King encouraged them in weekly performances at school, in which Beardsley shone as a character actor and demonstrated his originality in the facial make-ups he applied with watercolor and brush.<sup>9</sup>

Beardsley's theatrical skills enabled him to play two diverse roles in the 1888 entertainment. He appeared as a town councillor in *The Pay of the Pied Piper* and as Mercury in King's prologue, a tribute to the sturdy virtues of the British Empire. In this part the young actor had to declaim that "Britannia, if united would be blest/ By something worth fighting for, — the rest/ Would be indeed secure, and safe as fate,/ For such a people must predominate" (p. 14). Although Beardsley wrote to King the following month from London that "Your prologue was much admired here,"<sup>10</sup> the boys in the audience must have restlessly awaited the conclusion of the prologue and prize-giving and the beginning of "The Pay of the Pied Piper," a comic opera in the Gilbert and Sullivan manner, with "choruses of town councillors, ladies, rats, children." The author, Fred Edmonds, was an Old Boy of the school and C. T. West, the composer, an "old colleague and well-tryed friend" (preface). Beardsley played Herr Kirschwasser, one of the councillors, and Cochran was Herr Seidlitz, another councillor. Unlike the traditional tale of the Pied Piper popularized in England by Robert Browning's version, this play has a happy, practical ending, for the children are returned by the Piper, who finally re-

<sup>8</sup> Charles B. Cochran, *I Had Almost Forgotten* (London, 1932, 4th ed.), p. 32.

<sup>9</sup> Cochran, "Aubrey Beardsley at School."

<sup>10</sup> Aubrey Beardsley, *Letters*. Ed. Henry Maas, J. L. Duncan, and W. G. Good (Fairleigh Dickinson University, 1970), p. 16.

ceives his payment for ridding the town of rats and cheerfully renders a receipt for the transaction, for "I am a business man."

Beardsley's eleven drawings for the Pied Piper for many years belonged to A. W. King, passing from his estate to a London dealer, and in 1924 the ten now at Harvard were in the hands of Gabriel Wells, the New York dealer.<sup>11</sup> In 1954 they were sold from the collection of Ogden Goelet of Paris at the Parke-Bernet Galleries, New York, and purchased by the family of the donor.<sup>12</sup> The ten drawings at Harvard are the first nine and the eleventh of the series; there is no present record of the tenth drawing, "The Piper Is Dismissed by the Beadle" (p. 40 of the program).

The ten drawings [Figures 1, 3-8, 10-12] variously depict the cast of characters listed in the program — "town councillors, rats, children": (1) Entrance of Councillors, Headed by Beadle; (2) Rats Feeding upon a Cheese; (3) Child Escaping from the Rats; (4) The Sitting of the Council; (5) Deputation of Ladies; (6) Rats Carrying off the Beadle's Mace; (7) Meeting of Beadle and the Piper; (8) Rats Following the Piper; (9) Citizens Rejoicing at Departure of the Rats; and (10) The Piper Entices the Children. They are drawn in ink with sparse, light shading, with a few traces of preliminary pencil. They vary in interest and individuality, some dense with the abundant detail customary in illustration of the seventies and eighties. There are still echoes of Kate Greenaway, and it is probable that the young artist had seen Routledge's recent 1888 edition of *The Pied Piper of Hamelin* [Figure 9] with thirty-five illustrations by Kate Greenaway engraved and printed in color by Edmund Evans. Several of the details of costume, architecture, and composition suggest this source. These feminine little drawings emphasize the pathos of the story, whereas Beardsley brought out the humor. The best of his drawings depart from convention and are executed with a sharp, incisive line, darkened to emphasize the foreground figures. They are the most mature of his schoolboy drawings and suggest the linear, simplified style to follow in a few years.

These illustrations, displaying an unevenness not surprising in a youthful hand, have often been summarily dismissed as scribbling and classified with Beardsley's boyish caricatures, which are, indeed, un-

<sup>11</sup> King, *A Beardsley Lecture*, Intro., p. 9.

<sup>12</sup> Parke-Bernet Galleries, Inc., New York, Cat. 1552 (23-24 November, 1954), lot 111 (10 drawings laid in a copy of the program); lot 98 (original program).

remarkable. Joseph Pennell, friend and champion of the artist, commented that "like all geniuses, Beardsley's early work was not worth a cent."<sup>13</sup> Haldane Macfall, admirer and biographer, referred to the Pied Piper as "feeble puerilities" and added that "the altogether incredible fact about all of Beardsley's early work is that it was such unutterable trash."<sup>14</sup> The Pied Piper has been judged by the reproductions in the program and the magazine, where the line is rigid and coarse [Figure 2]. The actual drawings are vastly superior, and, as the first tentative steps towards Beardsley's mature style, they are of real interest. Robert Ross, friend to so many men of the nineties, called them "delightful and racy little sketches." It was he who observed, "Several people have claimed to discover Aubrey Beardsley, but I think it truer to say that he revealed himself."<sup>15</sup>

<sup>13</sup> Joseph Pennell, *Aubrey Beardsley and other Men of the Nineties* (Philadelphia, 1924), p. 20.

<sup>14</sup> Haldane Macfall, *Aubrey Beardsley* (New York, 1927), pp. 32, 30.

<sup>15</sup> Robert Ross, *Aubrey Beardsley* (London and New York, 1907), pp. 13-14.

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