Celebrity became an international industry in the late nineteenth century, and the English artist, author, and dandy Max Beerbohm (1872–1956) was at the center of it. From the 1890s through the 1920s, to be a celebrity meant the hope—and fear—of turning up in a drawing or a parody by "Max," as he was known in both Britain and the U.S. His brilliant skewering of famous people in his visual caricatures and of their writing styles in his satirical works made him a celebrity himself. This was an identity he enjoyed, but later shrank from. In essays and fiction, he explored the price in human terms of achieving and maintaining celebrity status in ways that still resonate with us now.

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MAX BEERBOHM: THE PRICE OF CELEBRITY

THE NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY

Max Beerbohm
The Price of Celebrity

Stephen A. Schwarzman Building
Sue and Edgar Wachenheim III Gallery, First Floor
October 20, 2023–January 28, 2024

Max Beerbohm: The Price of Celebrity

Text by Margaret D. Stetz
With Mark Samuels Lasner

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About the Exhibition

Max Beerbohm: The Price of Celebrity maps Beerbohm's career in relation to the idea of celebrity, following him from his early days in the social and artistic circles of Oscar Wilde and Aubrey Beardsley through his late career as a radio performer on BBC broadcasts during World War II. Drawn from across the Library's collections, as well as loans from private and institutional collections, the exhibition includes rare original caricature drawings, manuscripts, photographs, books from Beerbohm's library, and personal items, most on public display for the first time.

The exhibition is organized by The New York Public Library and curated by Margaret D. Stetz, Mae and Robert Carter Professor of Women's Studies and Professor of Humanities, University of Delaware, and by Mark Samuels Lasner, Senior Research Fellow, University of Delaware Library, Museums and Press, with the assistance of Julie Carlsen, Assistant Curator, Henry W. and Albert A. Berg Collection of English and American Literature, The New York Public Library.

Access the online exhibition and audio guide on Bloomberg Connects, the free arts and culture app, or on the NYPL website: **nypl.org/beerbohm**

Look for this symbol to identify items you can explore on the audio guide.

Max Beerbohm (1872–1956)

The English artist and writer Sir Max Beerbohm—or just “Max,” as he came to be known—felt the uneasiness about the power of celebrity that many of us feel today. He longed to be a celebrity himself: to be admired and sought after, to earn money and wield influence. From an early age, he fashioned an instantly recognizable public persona as a sophisticated London dandy in beautifully tailored suits. (This was unchanging, from his first success as a writer and caricaturist in late-Victorian London through his career as a BBC radio personality in the 1930s and 40s.) At the same time, he was aware of the dangers that cultlike worship posed. He worried, too, that unrelenting pursuit of popularity could destroy both art and its makers.

Beerbohm’s way of dealing with this conflict was to become famous for pricking the balloons of those who were famous. He parodied their writings. He exhibited and published caricatures making fun of their physical appearance. He produced essays and reviews that were amusing but sharply critical. He wrote comic fiction about people obsessed with becoming celebrities or being with them. Whatever he admired, he also questioned and mocked, including the concept of celebrity. Today, he offers an example of how art can address the world around us, yet also stand apart, especially through laughter. Contemporary comic writers, social commentators, and graphic novelists who deal in irony, visual humor, and pointed satire stand on his shoulders (though he would have asked them politely to stand somewhere else).

CRAFTING AND QUESTIONING AN IMAGE

1

Max Beerbohm (1872–1956)
Un Revers
Pencil, ink, and watercolor, 1909

This self-caricature sums up Beerbohm's complex attitudes regarding comedy, celebrity status, and his own talents. Titled *Un Revers*—i.e., a reversal or second thought—it depicts a 37-year-old artist whose reputation had soared. The playwright George Bernard Shaw (1856–1950) dubbed Beerbohm "the incomparable Max," and other public figures sang his praises. Here, however, he is droopy and distracted, dressed to the nines yet wearing carpet slippers. Discarded manuscripts litter the floor, signaling his dissatisfaction with his labors. He unhappily asks himself, both seriously and ironically, "They call me the inimitable, and the incomparable, and the sprightly and whimsical . . . I wonder if I am." The next year, he married and left London for a reclusive life in Italy.

Mark Samuels Lasner Collection, University of Delaware Library, Museums and Press

2

Alexander Bassano (1829–1913)
Photograph of Max Beerbohm
Cabinet card, 1886

Where does a dandy come from? Baby, he was born this way. Beerbohm's schoolboy dress prefigures his later immaculately tailored look. Seen here at age 14 but appearing younger, Beerbohm later added the ironic inscription, "*Primavero flore juventae*," meaning "In the springtime flower of youth," though his expression is already jaded. Around this time, Beerbohm started attending Charterhouse, an elite boarding school. There he explored his talents for writing and drawing, which he continued nurturing at Merton College, Oxford. He soon developed a personal and artistic style now identified as Camp, long before Susan Sontag defined this as "love of the unnatural: of artifice and exaggeration." Beerbohm's early self-caricatures exaggerated conventional signs of masculinity and femininity. The result was a distinctively queer public image, defying many Victorian social norms, as Beerbohm began his campaign to become a celebrity.

Henry W. and Albert A. Berg Collection of English and American Literature, The New York Public Library

3

Alvin Langdon Coburn (1882–1966)
Photograph of Max Beerbohm
Gelatin silver print, January 15, 1908

If Beerbohm, who first achieved literary fame at 21, was a sort of "infant prodigy," so was the acclaimed American photographer Alvin Langdon Coburn, who had a studio in New York City at the same age. Coburn traveled across the Atlantic to capture what he called, in a 1913 volume of 33 celebrity portraits, *Men of Mark*. Beerbohm was among the distinguished subjects, alongside William Butler Yeats, George Bernard Shaw, H.G. Wells, J.M. Barrie, John Singer Sargent, and the writer whom Beerbohm most revered, Henry James. What Coburn's camera recorded was Max's public persona: perfectly turned-out clothing, graceful pose, and an ambiguous, almost unreadable expression.

Henry W. and Albert A. Berg Collection of English and American Literature, The New York Public Library

4

A. & M. Wix Tobacco Company, manufacturer
MAX cigarette box and matches, 1950s
Formerly owned by Max Beerbohm

Like Oscar Wilde's character Lady Bracknell, Beerbohm believed that "[a] man should always have an occupation of some kind," meaning smoking. Holding cigarettes aloft in his slim fingers was part of his early dandified pose, and he continued to smoke throughout his life. In the 1940s and 50s, he of course found irresistible the A. & M. Wix Tobacco Company's brand MAX, along with its matchbook, though the name was merely a coincidence. No doubt adding to his amusement was the legend printed inside the cigarette box: "Whenever you want to throw more light on a subject—light a Max."

Mark Samuels Lasner Collection, University of Delaware Library, Museums and Press

5

Anderson & Sheppard, Ltd., tailors
Replica of suit worn by Max Beerbohm
Wool, silk, cotton, and horn, 1993

While a youthful literary notable in the 1890s, Beerbohm used formal evening wear, complete with a ubiquitous top hat, to forge a distinctive image as a sophisticated Aesthete enjoying London's nightlife. In later years, after withdrawing from English society for a quieter and more frugal life in Italy, Beerbohm continued dressing with great care, but turned three-piece suits with double-breasted vests into his signature garments. At every stage of his career, his style remained influential. His was a look studied and copied, even decades after his death in 1956. This reproduction of one of his most characteristic suits—its creation a mark of his ongoing celebrity—was made by a firm of Savile Row tailors.

Private collection

6

Max Beerbohm's walking stick
Wood, metal, silver, and ivory, ca. 1900

Beerbohm had no respect for material objects; they were toys to be played with, well into old age. To the dismay of his first wife, Florence, he painted the entrance to their villa in Italy with frescoes caricaturing celebrities whom he admired, such as the novelist Henry James, and friends such as the critic Edmund Gosse. He filled shelves with faux books mocking real authors. All his adult life, he was a dandy who sported an elegant walking stick, but not even that item was off limits. This one bears a silver band, engraved "Portrait of Mr. Alexander Teixeira de Mattos," and its top has been carved in the image of that writer's bulbous head.

Mark Samuels Lasner Collection, University of Delaware Library, Museums and Press

7

Douglas Glass (1901–1978)
Photograph of Max Beerbohm
Black and white photographic print, 1947

Apart from his stint as theater critic for *The Saturday Review* (1898–1910), Beerbohm avoided any form of work that bound him to a schedule or an employer's demands. As a result, although born into affluence, he was often living on a reduced income once his father died in 1892. But regardless of how unsuited he was to earning a salary, he was always stunningly well suited—literally. From 1910 to the end of his life, except for the periods of the two world wars when he returned to England, he resided in Italy and found tailors there to produce linen suits for summer and tweeds for winter. This portrait by the New Zealand-born artist and photographer Douglas Glass captures the splendor of the latter.

Mark Samuels Lasner Collection, University of Delaware Library, Museums and Press

8

Alfred A. Knopf (1892–1984)
Film of Max Beerbohm, November 1928

On a trip from Italy to England, Beerbohm stopped by the London offices in Bedford Square of the New York-based publisher Alfred A. Knopf, who helped to keep alive Beerbohm's transatlantic fame by issuing his book *A Variety of Things* in America in September 1928. Knopf took pleasure in filming his authors. Beerbohm played along, performing a rather Charlie Chaplin-like walk outdoors, though dressed with infinitely more care—and at greater expense—than the "Little Tramp" character.

Private collection

9

Max Beerbohm (1872–1956)
Sudden Appearance of Mr. Beerbohm in the New English Art Club
Pencil and wash, 1909

Beerbohm's comic sense was irreverent. Jesus Christ was the greatest of celebrities, worshiped by multitudes, so why not cast himself in that role when mocking his own fame? Producing a parody of *The Apparition of Christ* by the Dutch painter Jan Joest (ca. 1450–1519), Beerbohm created a scenario in which he, a benevolent and godlike figure in exquisite evening dress (instead of shining raiment), materialized before the assembled New English Art Club (NEAC). Like the earlier Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood, the NEAC was an avant-garde alternative to the Royal Academy. Its members included artists such as Augustus John (1878–1961) and Philip Wilson Steer (1860–1942), whose bust looks down from above the doorway in Beerbohm's group caricature.

Henry W. and Albert A. Berg Collection of English and American Literature, The New York Public Library

THE BOY WITH THE POINTED PEN

10

The Yellow Book: An Illustrated Quarterly, Volumes 1–2
London: Elkin Mathews & John Lane, April–July 1894

Unlike his friend Aubrey Beardsley (1872–1898), who used his art editorship of *The Yellow Book* to shock audiences, Beerbohm began his literary career by puzzling and confounding them. Beardsley's cover for the debut of this avant-garde magazine was proudly offensive, with a masked woman who was no lady and her sinister-looking companion. Beerbohm's contribution was instead sneakily and comically evasive and filled with ironies. His "A Defence of Cosmetics" appeared to champion artificial over natural beauty for all genders, in support of the Decadent movement's values, which rejected so-called healthy moral standards and defied conventional expectations in art and life alike. But it was also a parody that exaggerated Decadent style in order to laugh at it. Many journalists missed this subtlety. Taking the essay at (painted) face value, they denounced or ridiculed Beerbohm, turning him into a notorious Decadent celebrity at age 21. In the next issue of *The Yellow Book*, Beerbohm addressed these critics directly in a letter and scolded them for not recognizing that his had been "a very delicate bit of satire."

The New York Public Library

11

Drew & Sons, manufacturer
Max Beerbohm's drawing pad and pen
1900s

Beerbohm and his two friends Aubrey Beardsley and William Rothenstein were the *enfants terribles* of the British 1890s—all the same age and triple threats: gifted as artists, writers, and brilliant conversationalists. Each crafted a memorable persona to help achieve fame, and each succeeded. Beardsley died young of tuberculosis, while Rothenstein and Beerbohm lived on and eventually were knighted. But Beerbohm's goal was never celebrity alone; it was also, as he insisted, to create beauty, even in his most devastatingly satirical caricatures. His pen was in every sense a pointed one, but as we see here, an elegant one, accompanied by an expensive monogrammed drawing pad from the high-end manufacturers of leather goods, Drew & Sons, Piccadilly.

Mark Samuels Lasner Collection, University of Delaware Library, Museums and Press

12

Max Beerbohm (1872–1956)
Letter to Reginald Turner
February 22, 1895

When Sir Herbert Beerbohm Tree (1852–1917), the British actor-manager, embarked on an American tour in 1895, he brought along his half-brother, Max. It was Max's only U.S. visit, and in this letter to Reginald Turner (1869–1938), he described his time in New York as "charming[,]" saying that this "beautiful town … has given itself to me like a flower." He even expressed a wish "to settle here for some years[,]" perhaps to tease Turner, who was devoted to Beerbohm and awaiting his return. Like Beerbohm's close friend William Rothenstein, Turner, a novelist whose career never flourished, was Jewish. Unlike Rothenstein, Turner was gay, and in Oscar Wilde's immediate social orbit.

Houghton Library, Harvard University, Purchased by the Friends of the Library, 1959

13

Max Beerbohm (1872–1956)
"Dandies and Dandies"
In *Vanity: A Weekly Record*
New York: Vanity Publishing Co.,
February 7–28, 1895

Already a notorious transatlantic celebrity because of his contributions to *The Yellow Book*, Beerbohm added to his American fame while staying in New York in 1895. For *Vanity*, an aptly named (and short-lived) new weekly, he wrote a multipart essay about dandyism that contained personal reflections on fashionable men such as Beau Nash and Beau Brummell. He defined dandyism as a fine art ("the perfect flower of outward elegance") and dubbed Brummell a "single-minded" artist and "genius." The following year, Beerbohm reused sections of this publication for a more focused essay, also called "Dandies and Dandies," in the cheekily titled *The Works of Max Beerbohm*, his first book.

General Research Division, The New York Public Library

14

Max Beerbohm (1872–1956)
Margaret Armstrong (1867–1944), binding designer
The Works of Max Beerbohm
New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1896
Formerly owned by Margaret Armstrong

The London publisher John Lane is remembered for firing Aubrey Beardsley from *The Yellow Book* in the homophobic panic that surrounded Oscar Wilde's prosecution in 1895 for "gross indecency"—not for his sense of fun. Nevertheless, Beerbohm brought out his silly side. He both created and published a bibliography for this collection of essays, titled *The Works of Max Beerbohm*—as though by an elderly writer decades into his career rather than a 24-year-old—but not before Scribner's volume was issued in New York with its gorgeous, Art Nouveau cover by Margaret Armstrong. Her binding design incorporated butterflies, perhaps alluding to Beerbohm's dedication to achieving beauty in his prose and in his dandified self-display.

Mark Samuels Lasner Collection, University of Delaware Library, Museums and Press

15

Max Beerbohm (1872–1956)
Florence Kahn
Pencil and watercolor, 1912

Beerbohm's marriage to Florence Kahn (1876–1951) at the late age of 38 was the culmination of years of flirtations with—and even engagements to—a series of stage performers, from the music hall headliner Cissie Loftus to London's West End star Constance Collier. Each of these relationships featured Beerbohm's romantic talk and swoony letter-writing, but his biographers have speculated that none of his relationships with women were sexual. Women's beauty appealed powerfully to him, though in the same way as the faces of models in Pre-Raphaelite art. What attracted Beerbohm to Kahn was indeed her Pre-Raphaelite appearance, with the red-gold hair found in Dante Gabriel Rossetti's paintings. Beerbohm drew her as sylphlike and androgynous, in multiple poses reminiscent of Sir Edward Burne-Jones's painting, *The Golden Stairs* (1880).

Mark Samuels Lasner Collection, University of Delaware Library, Museums and Press

16

Zaida Ben-Yusuf (1869–1933), photographer
"Study of a Summer Girl"
In *The Metropolitan Magazine*
New York: Blakely Hall, August 1901

For late-nineteenth-century actresses, attaining celebrity status required working either on New York's Broadway or in London's West End. Florence Kahn, a Jewish girl from Memphis, Tennessee, went to both cities but achieved only minor success onstage despite years of striving. Three years before meeting Beerbohm in 1904, at what should have been the height of her career, she was still merely an anonymous model—a "Summer Girl"—in a 1901 glamour shot taken by the New York-based portrait photographer Zaida Ben-Yusuf. Then in 1910, she accepted Max Beerbohm's marriage proposal and money-saving plan to move to a small town in Italy for a life of relative social seclusion.

General Research Division, The New York Public Library

17

Max Beerbohm (1872–1956)
Photographs of Florence Kahn
Black and white photographic prints, 1913

Innately conservative and cautious, Beerbohm nonetheless embarked on a bold experiment in 1910, abandoning London for a more private (and cheaper) life in Italy with his wife, Florence. He also began toying with a new medium, photography, seen in these intimate photographs of Florence, who drew on her earlier experience as a photographer's model in New York. Over the next 40 years, she made only a few brief returns to professional acting, instead focusing her time on her husband and their social affairs. When she died in 1951, her responsibilities were assumed by Elisabeth Jungmann (1894–1958), Beerbohm's German Jewish secretary, whom he married in 1956 on his deathbed.

Mark Samuels Lasner Collection, University of Delaware Library, Museums and Press

OSCAR WILDE AND HIS CIRCLE

18

Max Beerbohm (1872–1956)
Oscar Wilde
Pencil, ink, and watercolor, ca. 1895–1900

Oscar Wilde (1854–1900) was prosecuted by the courts and persecuted by the public not only because of homophobia, but also for being an Irishman who attained international celebrity by flouting British middle-class values. In Beerbohm's judgment, the price that Wilde ultimately paid—loss of career, family, possessions, and freedom—was unjust and outrageous. Nevertheless, to Beerbohm, a believer in restraint and good manners, Wilde's conduct leading up to his arrest in 1895 seemed appallingly self-indulgent and self-destructive. Its bad effects were written on his swollen face and dissolute body, as evident in this caricature. Although Beerbohm described Wilde in print as a "genius" and was closely allied with many members of Wilde's queer circles, he refused to overlook his literary idol's flaws.

Mark Samuels Lasner Collection, University of Delaware Library, Museums and Press

19

Max Beerbohm (1872–1956)
Oscar Wilde
Graphite with erasing and scraping, undated

Even before meeting Oscar Wilde through the actor-manager Sir Herbert Beerbohm Tree—Max's half-brother—young Beerbohm was under the spell of Wilde's exquisitely witty prose in *Intentions* (1891). He remained so throughout his undergraduate years at Merton College, Oxford. Decades later (probably around 1920), Beerbohm returned to Wilde as a subject, picturing him in the early 1880s, near the start of his career as a global celebrity. In those days, Wilde was an advocate for Aestheticism and for Beauty (capital "B"). That was how Beerbohm chose to draw him: as feminine and almost pretty, softened in memory by the haze of both cigarette smoke clouds and the passage of time.

George Arents Collection, The New York Public Library

20 Max Beerbohm (1872–1956)

"Had Shakespeare Asked Me..."
Ink and watercolor, 1896

Few artists and writers stood by Oscar Wilde during his 1895 prosecution and imprisonment for "gross indecency," the legal term for sex with other men. Beerbohm, however, attended the final trial and reported on it to his friend Reginald Turner. Another staunch supporter was the Irish-American author Frank Harris (1855–1931), who enjoyed a successful career in London as editor of *The Saturday Review*. Harris, who loved to brag about his heterosexual exploits, asserted at an 1896 luncheon that Wilde's genius made questions of sexuality irrelevant. Claiming to know nothing about homosexuality, he stated nonetheless that if Shakespeare had "asked" to sleep with him, he would "have had to submit." Beerbohm depicted this deliciously absurd scenario of time-traveling celebrity sex.

Mark Samuels Lasner Collection, University of Delaware Library, Museums and Press

21 Max Beerbohm (1872–1956)

Lord Queensberry
Ink and colored pencil, 1894

Given that John Sholto Douglas, Marquess of Queensberry (1844–1900), represented everything that Beerbohm loathed—bullying, boxing, and badgering his son, Lord Alfred Douglas, who was both Oscar Wilde's lover and Beerbohm's fellow undergraduate at Oxford, to be more "manly"—this drawing was not as vicious as it might have been. Then again, it was intended for publication in *Pick-Me-Up*, an illustrated comic weekly to which Beerbohm contributed celebrity caricatures. Had he shown in print the rancor that he felt toward this figure, who later engineered the downfall of Oscar Wilde, Queensberry might have paid a visit to Beerbohm's family's house, as he did to Wilde's, accompanied by a professional prizefighter and threatening violence.

George Arents Collection, The New York Public Library

22

Max Beerbohm (1872–1956)
A Peep into the Past (For the 1st No. of the "Yellow Book")
Manuscript, with ink and colored pencil, ca. 1894

Beerbohm was just as mischievous at the expense of Oscar Wilde as Aubrey Beardsley, who inserted caricatures of Wilde into the illustrations for Wilde's play *Salome* (1894). But Beerbohm's targets in *A Peep into the Past* were broader. They included Wilde, the Decadent world, and the "new journalism" that profiled and puffed famous people, along with the public's short memory and hunger for novelty. The resulting essay, in which Beerbohm pretended to speak from the distant future about Wilde as an aged, forgotten man who "at one time . . . was in his way quite a celebrity[,]" did not, however, appear in the April 1894 *Yellow Book*. Nor were Beerbohm's savagely funny drawings of Wilde that decorated the manuscript published.

Henry W. and Albert A. Berg Collection of English and American Literature, The New York Public Library

23

Richard Le Gallienne (1866–1947)
Limited Editions, A Prose Fancy: Together with Confessio Amantis, A Sonnet
London: Privately printed for Richard Le Gallienne, Elkin Mathews, John Lane and Their Friends, Christmas 1893
Formerly owned and "improved" with ink by Max Beerbohm

Richard Le Gallienne owed his transatlantic fame in the 1890s not only to his poetry and criticism, but also to the late-Victorian celebrity industry. Influenced when young by seeing Oscar Wilde lecture in Liverpool and then meeting him, as well as by Wilde's international publicity in the 1880s, Le Gallienne adopted the Irish Aesthete's "brand[:]" velvet suits, floppy ties, and long hair—lots of hair, in his case. Physically more attractive than his hero, he became a favorite subject of photographers and then a literary pinup through coverage in the press. To Beerbohm, who shared with him a publisher—John Lane, cofounder with Elkin Mathews of The Bodley Head publishing house—Le Gallienne was a Wildean Mini-Me, and he doodled unflattering caricatures throughout this copy of *Limited Editions*.

Rare Books Division, Princeton University Library

24

Max Beerbohm (1872–1956)
"Some Persons of 'The Nineties' Little Imagining, Despite Their Proper Pride and Ornamental Aspect, How Much They Will Interest Mr. Holbrook Jackson and Mr. Osbert Burdett"
Illustration from N. John Hall's *Max Beerbohm Caricatures*
New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1997
First published in *Observations*, 1925

Among Beerbohm's preoccupations was the relationship between past and present. Here caricatured figures associated with the British Decadent movement gather, unaware that someday they will be featured in *The Eighteen Nineties* (1913) by Holbrook Jackson—a work dedicated to Beerbohm, with a chapter devoted to "The Incomparable Max"—and *The Beardsley Period* (1925) by Osbert Burdett, its title taken from a remark young Beerbohm made in 1895, playing at outmodedness ("I belong to the Beardsley period"). To Beerbohm, though, "Persons" meant only "Men." He omitted contemporary women authors such as Ella D'Arcy, "Michael Field" (the joint pseudonym of Katharine Bradley and Edith Cooper), and "George Egerton" (Mary Chavelita Dunne), who were discussed in these two books.

The Miriam and Ira D. Wallach Division of Art, Prints and Photographs, Picture Collection, The New York Public Library

CELEBRITY TARGETS

25 Max Beerbohm (1872–1956)

"Topsy and Ned Jones, Settled on the Settle in Red Lion Square"
Illustration from *The Poet's Corner* [sic]
London and New York: The King Penguin Books, 1943
First published in *Rossetti and His Circle*, 1922

Beerbohm and his friend Aubrey Beardsley took inspiration in the 1890s from Pre-Raphaelite predecessors, particularly the painter Sir Edward Burne-Jones (1833–1898). Beardsley also adored the neo-medieval books designed by William Morris (1834–1896), whose nickname was "Topsy." Beerbohm found Morris's publications and textiles off-putting. Nevertheless, he included both figures—bullish Morris next to Burne-Jones folded up like a moth—in his book, *Rossetti and His Circle* (1922), which treated out-of-fashion Victorians as celebrities. Although Beerbohm depicted Burne-Jones and Morris in London's Red Lion Square, in lodgings the two artists shared when young, both looked middle-aged. The mocking contrast between a hyper-Aesthetic chair that Morris created and the otherwise bare, prison-cell-like room was Beerbohm's poke at Morris's myopic socialist vision.

The Miriam and Ira D. Wallach Division of Art, Prints and Photographs, Picture Collection, The New York Public Library

26 Max Beerbohm (1872–1956)

Rossetti's Courtship
Pencil and watercolor, ca. 1916

Important Victorian painters such as Dante Gabriel Rossetti (1828–1882) fell out of favor with critics in the early twentieth century. To distract himself from the miseries of World War I, Beerbohm began playfully drawing them. The results, when published in Beerbohm's *Rossetti and His Circle* (1922), bestowed a new celebrity status on the artists known as Pre-Raphaelites. They were a loosely knit coalition of rebels against hidebound authority in art and life. Beerbohm identified with Rossetti's unconventionality but did not share his sensual appreciation of women. Rossetti's relationship with the famously red-haired model and artist Elizabeth Siddal (1829–1862) was torrid, though not in Beerbohm's decorous portrayal. Here, both are so high-minded that they ignore the mouse scampering past them.

Mark Samuels Lasner Collection, University of Delaware Library, Museums and Press

27

Max Beerbohm (1872–1956)
"Dante Gabriel Rossetti in His Back Garden"
Color lithograph from *The Poets' Corner*
London: William Heinemann, 1904

This is one of Beerbohm's most extraordinary artworks. Here, he parodied his own group celebrity caricatures. The painter and poet Dante Gabriel Rossetti actually did keep a menagerie of exotic animals, from peacocks to wombats, at his London house. In this drawing, however, Beerbohm gives celebrity status to a kangaroo, a pelican, a tortoise, and a snake. They interact as equals with Rossetti's famous friends and contemporaries, including a pint-sized James McNeill Whistler (1843–1903) sporting top hat and cane, as Beerbohm himself would in the 1890s; the poet and designer William Morris reading aloud and gesturing dramatically; and the art and social critic John Ruskin (1819–1900) literally sticking his big nose into the proceedings.

Private collection

28

Max Beerbohm (1872–1956)
Mr. Swinburne
Ink and wash, 1899

By 1899, when Beerbohm met Algernon Charles Swinburne (1837–1909), one of his idols, the British poet bore little resemblance to the flame-haired young sensualist who had lived in Dante Gabriel Rossetti's house (and who was later commemorated in Beerbohm's *Rossetti and His Circle*). As Beerbohm wrote in "No. 2. The Pines" (1914) the once wild, bold, hedonistic figure had retired to quiet suburban life. Yet he was still, according to Beerbohm, "noble and roguish," with "the smile of an elf" and a fey quality that this drawing captured. Beerbohm's caricature made it easy to see why Swinburne reveled not only in shocking audiences with erotic verse, but also in parodying his own poetry.

Mark Samuels Lasner Collection, University of Delaware Library, Museums and Press

29

Max Beerbohm (1872–1956)
Aubrey Beardsley
Pencil and red chalk, late 1890s

United in loving beauty, dandified dressing, art that undermined authority, writing that violated moral prohibitions, and silly jokes, Beerbohm and his friend Aubrey Beardsley were divided by fate. Beerbohm was fated to live to an advanced age of 83; Beardsley, who contracted tuberculosis as a boy, was fated to die at 25. Both, however, fulfilled their ambitions to become famous when young and did so simultaneously in 1894, thanks to *The Yellow Book* magazine, to which Beerbohm was a contributor and of which Beardsley was art editor. They were also dueling celebrity caricaturists. Beardsley gave Beerbohm an enormous phallic head in a drawing in *Bon-Mots* (1894), while Beerbohm portrayed the wispy, angular Beardsley with limp hands and the tiny arms of an upright lizard.

Manuscripts Division, Princeton University Library

30

Max Beerbohm (1872–1956)
Mr. Whistler
Pencil and watercolor, ca. 1908

Everything about James McNeill Whistler, the expatriate American artist, pleased Beerbohm. He admired his paintings, his skills as a conversationalist, and especially his witty prose. As Beerbohm put it in "Whistler's Writing," an essay filled with praise, "his style never falters." What inspired him most, however, was Whistler's self-presentation. Whistler's was the kind of celebrity image that Beerbohm aimed to recreate for himself, with a perfect façade maintained through deployment of dress and accessories, including top hat and walking stick. Nevertheless, for Beerbohm, hero worship never stood in the way of wicked caricature. He depicted Whistler as akin to a squat eagle, with a beaklike nose and winged eyebrows, trailed by a shadow suggesting the plumage of a tail.

Houghton Library, Harvard University, Gift of A.E. Gallatin, Esq., 1949

31

Max Beerbohm (1872–1956)
John Singer Sargent
Pencil and wash, 1928

John Singer Sargent (1856–1925) was in some ways Beerbohm's double, yet in many more his opposite, which made him fascinating to Beerbohm, who caricatured him often. Like Beerbohm, Sargent was a cosmopolitan figure—London-based and a lover of Italy, though with American rather than English roots—whose success was in celebrity portraiture. But his preferred medium, unlike Beerbohm's, was oil painting, and his portraits were always made to flatter sitters, never to mock them. He worked, too, on a large scale, producing life-size or larger-than-life images of aristocrats, captains of industry, writers, artists, and stage performers, while Beerbohm was essentially a miniaturist. Beerbohm made fun of this gigantism by depicting Sargent with the biggest possible body and the smallest possible head.

Private collection of James B. Sitrick

32

Max Beerbohm (1872–1956)
Letter to Virginia Woolf
December 30, 1927

Beerbohm anticipated one of Virginia Woolf's arguments in *A Room of One's Own* (1929): that expressions of anger in a writer's work were defects. This mutual shrinking from anger in literature was a rare point of agreement. On the subject of writing fiction, they were at odds. In this letter, Beerbohm said that Woolf's novels gave him no pleasure, and instead "beat me—black and blue. I retire howling, aching, sore . . ." though he appreciated the "erudition" and "wit" of her essays. But Woolf dealt with many (male) literary celebrities and knew how to butter them up. In a letter of January 29, 1928, she gushed, telling him how thrilling it was to receive his compliments, while calling Beerbohm "immortal[:]" and placing him "far, far above" all ordinary writers such as herself. Woolf then passed lightly over his critique of her novels, saying, "I can't write other than I do."

Manuscripts Division, Princeton University Library

33

Max Beerbohm (1872–1956)
Mr. Beerbohm Reading Mrs. Woolf
On the verso of a letter to Miss Peyton
Ink, February 19, 1928

When it came to what he called "authoresses," Beerbohm was never to be trusted. Two months after sending a letter to Virginia Woolf, praising her *The Common Reader* (1925) and saying that in *Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown* (1924),"your powers shine out to me at their very best[,]" he wrote to Miss Peyton, the woman who had sent him the latter book. While describing it as "delightful," Beerbohm also drew himself reading it… and falling asleep. This image was a parody of the actual dust jacket that Vanessa Bell, Woolf's artist sister, designed for the book's publication by the Hogarth Press, the publishing imprint of Woolf and her husband, Leonard.

Mark Samuels Lasner Collection, University of Delaware Library, Museums and Press

34

Virginia Woolf (1882–1941)
Diary entry for December 18, 1928
Manuscript

On a visit to London from Italy, Beerbohm met Virginia Woolf at a dinner that Ethel Sands, the queer painter and society figure, hosted. Woolf reported afterwards in her diary that the conversation with Beerbohm had been an "interesting, flattering, charming kind of talk." At the time, he was even more of a celebrity than she was, and she recorded his response to her calling him "immortal[:]" "In a small way, he said; but with complacency." Years later, when Woolf's diary was published posthumously, Beerbohm told his friend S.N. Behrman, the playwright and *New Yorker* magazine columnist, how much he disliked reading it. "Her perpetual concern with herself was distasteful to him," Behrman recalled.

Henry W. and Albert A. Berg Collection of English and American Literature, The New York Public Library

35

Max Beerbohm (1872–1956)
Miss Rebecca West As I Dimly and Perhaps Erroneously Imagine Her
In a letter to George Bernard Shaw
Pencil, ink, and watercolor, June 28, 1918

Decades of friendship with the comic novelist Ada Leverson (1862–1933) did nothing to alter Beerbohm's lifelong prejudice against intellectual women. While comfortable with gender-fluid men, he preferred women to be conventionally feminine—decorative, domestic, and devoid of professional ambition—unless they were stage performers acting out a man's ideas. Before meeting the politically outspoken feminist critic and writer Rebecca West (1892–1983), who in 1916 published a study of Beerbohm's hero, Henry James, Beerbohm chose in a letter to George Bernard Shaw to "imagine" her as Shaw's cross-dressed double. West and Beerbohm finally met in 1929 at a party filled with celebrities. As she later reported, Beerbohm told her outright that he disliked "literary ladies." No wonder she labeled him "the little dragon."

Mark Samuels Lasner Collection, University of Delaware Library, Museums and Press

36

Max Beerbohm (1872–1956)
Mr. George Bernard Shaw—Capitalist
Ink, graphite, and wash, 1901

The almost universal shunning of Oscar Wilde after his 1895 conviction for "gross indecency" opened the way for another Irishman, George Bernard Shaw, to become Britain's most famous, controversial playwright. He and Beerbohm thought highly of each other, but disagreed over everything from Shaw's worship of Henrik Ibsen as a social reformer to his support of feminism and women's suffrage. Beerbohm especially disapproved of Shaw's left-wing political activism. He delighted in pointing out the irony of someone calling himself a socialist and denouncing the middle classes, while becoming a rich celebrity thanks to popularity with bourgeois theatergoers. Beerbohm caricatured the lean, plainly dressed Shaw as a supersized tycoon, expensively bedecked for a night out.

George Arents Collection, The New York Public Library

37

Archibald Henderson (1877–1963)
George Bernard Shaw: His Life and Works
London: Hurst and Blackett, 1911
Formerly owned and "improved" with ink, wash, and scraping by Max Beerbohm, and presented by him to William Archer

When did naughtiness shade into nastiness? When Beerbohm was creating "improved" books that only he and his friends saw—taking existing printed works and altering and/or adding images and text, often quite maliciously. It did not matter, for instance, that he thought well of George Bernard Shaw; Beerbohm turned this study by an American academic into a riotous lampoon of everything from Shaw's politics to his physical appearance. He then presented it to William Archer (1856–1924), the critic and translator, who was Shaw's close associate. The green hat placed on Shaw's head was part of Beerbohm's fabricated tale involving a gift from Eleanor Marx, Karl Marx's daughter, but might also have alluded to Shaw's Irishness.

Henry W. and Albert A. Berg Collection of English and American Literature, The New York Public Library

38

Max Beerbohm (1872–1956)
Let Justice Be Done
Pencil and watercolor, ca. 1924

The English journalist Clement K. Shorter (1857–1926) was best known as a magazine editor, but his special enthusiasm was for adding to the posthumous celebrity of the Brontë sisters, about whom he wrote several books. Beerbohm poked fun at what seemed to him over-the-top fandom, picturing Shorter haranguing the Duke of Brontë, Sir Alexander Nelson Hood (1854–1937)—who was actually no relation of the Brontë family—and urging him to "get Lottie and Em and Annie made Duchesses in retrospect." Looming behind is Beerbohm's caricature of the famous portrait of the Brontë writers: Anne (1820–1849), Emily (1818–1848), and Charlotte (1816–1855), painted by their brother, Branwell (1817–1848).

Mark Samuels Lasner Collection, University of Delaware Library, Museums and Press

39

Max Beerbohm (1872–1956)
Arthur Conan Doyle
Pencil, ca. 1900
Accompanied by a fragment of a letter by Arthur Conan Doyle

The year 1897 saw Beerbohm tangling repeatedly with Sir Arthur Conan Doyle (1859–1930) in an arch, yet heated, exchange in London's *The Saturday Review*. "Doctor Conan Doyle," as Beerbohm pointedly called him, emphasizing his expertise in medicine rather than in cultural history, had published *Rodney Stone* (1896), a mystery set during the early nineteenth century that contained a portrayal of a Regency dandy. Beerbohm, who was committed to dandyism and had studied earlier models of it carefully, called out a series of inaccuracies in the novel, but Arthur Conan Doyle would not admit error. Neither writer got the last word in print, but Beerbohm did have it by later caricaturing the creator of Sherlock Holmes as an anti-dandy—a disheveled mess.

Private collection of James B. Sitrick

40

Max Beerbohm (1872–1956)
Mr. Thomas Hardy
Pencil, ink, and wash, ca. 1902

Thomas Hardy (1840–1928) was a writer who, Beerbohm believed, fully deserved his celebrity status. He greatly admired his novels such as *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* (1891). Following Hardy's death, Beerbohm wrote to Hardy's widow, expressing his "great sorrow" at the loss of "that illustrious and beloved man" whom he had met on numerous occasions, and who had always displayed "very beautiful manners[.]" Beerbohm also mentioned Hardy's eyes—how, even in company, "something" in them "betrayed that his thoughts were perhaps a-roving to other and higher matters of his own[.]" In fact, when Beerbohm drew Hardy, it was as a figure with eyes barely visible—squinting and almost shut, as though eager to make the world around him vanish.

Mark Samuels Lasner Collection, University of Delaware Library, Museums and Press

41

Max Beerbohm (1872–1956)
"Walt Whitman, Inciting the Bird of Freedom to Soar"
Color lithograph from *The Poets' Corner*
London: William Heinemann, 1904

Had Beerbohm visited the U.S. a few years earlier, rather than in 1895, he might have made a pilgrimage from New York City, where he was based for a month, to Camden, New Jersey. There he could have seen in person a true literary celebrity: Walt Whitman (1819–1892). Beerbohm knew well that Oscar Wilde had done just that during his lecture tour of America in 1882. It is doubtful, however, that Beerbohm would have boasted afterwards, as Wilde did, of having "the kiss" of Whitman "still on my lips." Beerbohm's caricature for his 1904 volume, *The Poets' Corner*, showed an animated, high-kicking Whitman unable to rouse this "bird of freedom," perhaps because it was not a bald eagle, but more likely a hawk.

Private collection

42

Max Beerbohm (1872–1956)
Celtades Ambo
Ink, 1899

Celtades Ambo, meaning "Celts Both," was Beerbohm's title for this drawing of Edward Martyn (1859–1923) and William Butler Yeats (1865–1939), who were often in each other's company, dedicating themselves to the creation of a distinctively Irish national drama. Early on, they were joined in this project by fellow dramatist Lady Isabella Augusta Gregory (1852–1932), but she is not pictured here, because Beerbohm considered it ungentlemanly to caricature living women. Like Yeats, Martyn was a playwright, but he was also an activist, serving as the first head of the political party Sinn Féin. He remained far less of a celebrity than the strikingly handsome Yeats. Beerbohm, of course, stripped Yeats of that glamorous appearance to render him wraithlike, skeletal, and almost ghoulish.

Manuscripts Division, Princeton University Library

43

Max Beerbohm (1872–1956)
Mr. H.G. Wells Foreseeing Things
Pencil and watercolor, 1931

In the 1890s, Beerbohm and H.G. Wells (1866–1946), soon to be famous for *The War of the Worlds*, both contributed to *The Yellow Book*. They had little else in common. Beerbohm, an Aesthete, dedicated himself to Art (capital "A") and to addressing educated, discerning readers. Wells became a celebrity author, churning out bestsellers geared toward mass audiences. Beerbohm refused to embroil himself in politics; Wells was an active socialist and political reformer. Beerbohm idealized women, often from afar; Wells was a notorious womanizer, and Beerbohm spoke of him as a "bounder." What they shared was a talent for writing fantasy, though Beerbohm mocked Wells's claims to be a visionary and disdained his ideas of what the future would and should hold—his "foreseeing things."

Private collection of James B. Sitrick

44

Max Beerbohm (1872–1956)
Mark Twain
Ink, wash, and pencil, 1908

What fan of transatlantic humor would not have loved to listen in when George Bernard Shaw, J.M. Barrie, and Beerbohm had lunch with Samuel Clemens (1835–1910)—better known, of course, as Mark Twain? Unfortunately, there is no record of this conversation, which took place when Twain was visiting London. What does remain is Beerbohm's visual impression of the elderly Twain. In this caricature, Twain looks rather like Beerbohm's drawing of his British contemporary, Thomas Hardy, with the addition of an enormous sweep of white hair, like the mane of the literary lion he was. So celebrated in Britain was Twain that he received an honorary doctorate from Oxford University in 1907.

Collection of Harry Ransom Center, University of Texas at Austin

45

Max Beerbohm (1872–1956)
Sketch for *The Nobel Award*
Pencil and wash, ca. 1907

By 1907, when he was awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature, Rudyard Kipling (1865–1936) was such an international celebrity that he abandoned his house in the English village of Rottingdean for a remote country estate, to escape the crowds of tourists trying to peer at him over the garden wall. Almost everyone considered him Britain's most important literary voice—everyone but Beerbohm, who loathed him. While recognizing Kipling's genius, Beerbohm viewed him as a sellout, whose desire for popularity and money led him to write nationalist propaganda, which Beerbohm considered vulgar. Beerbohm hated, too, Kipling's hyper-masculine public persona and fierce support of British imperialism. In more than two dozen caricatures, Beerbohm emphasized Kipling's short, stubby body and need for eyeglasses, countering this manly image.

Henry W. and Albert A. Berg Collection of English and American Literature, The New York Public Library

46

Max Beerbohm (1872–1956)
The Nobel Award
Pencil, ink, and watercolor, 1907

In this caricature, Beerbohm raised to lofty heights of glory two older writers whose poetry he admired: George Meredith (1828–1909) and Algernon Charles Swinburne. Meanwhile, he made Rudyard Kipling, whose aggressively jingoistic writings he found revolting, pay the price of mockery for winning the 1907 Nobel Prize in Literature instead of these more deserving authors. Beerbohm showed Kipling waving what he valued most, in Beerbohm's estimation—a moneybag—while a nearby toy soldier represented his absurd militarism. The other figure subjected to ridicule was the popular novelist Thomas Hall Caine (1853–1931), seen displaying resentment at not having received such an award himself.

Mark Samuels Lasner Collection, University of Delaware Library, Museums and Press

47 Max Beerbohm (1872–1956)

"The Jolly Corner"

Pencil, ink, and watercolor, ca. 1908

To many readers, including Beerbohm, Henry James (1843–1916) was simply "The Master" and unequalled as a writer of fiction. Beerbohm's literary worship may even have influenced his positive response in 1895—the year he met his hero in person—to New York City, James's birthplace (though James had left long ago and settled in England). The issue of place as determining destiny received Beerbohm's comic treatment. This caricature's title came from James's 1908 story about a man returning to his childhood home and encountering the ghost of his alternative self. In Beerbohm's version, it is James who meets "the ghost of himself as he would have been if he had never left America"—an equally corpulent and aggressive-looking plutocrat.

Mark Samuels Lasner Collection, University of Delaware Library, Museums and Press

48 Max Beerbohm (1872–1956)

Notes and fragmentary drafts for projected essays

Manuscript, undated

As he aged, Beerbohm increasingly resembled characters in fiction by authors he admired: erudite, hyper-sensitive, and seemingly asexual Aesthetes like Cecil Vyse in *A Room with a View* (1908), by E.M. Forster. He also emulated a variety of Henry James's protagonists: observers of life, rather than active participants, and expatriates by choice. Were these likenesses a fan's tribute or examples of unconscious identification? Beerbohm disapproved of Freudian self-analysis; nonetheless, he did pay close attention to the male characters in James's work. In these notes he copied out passages about Spencer Brydon in "The Jolly Corner" (1908) enjoying "a dim secondary social success—and all with people who had truly not an idea of him."

Henry W. and Albert A. Berg Collection of English and American Literature, The New York Public Library

49

Max Beerbohm (1872–1956), author and former owner
A Christmas Garland
London: William Heinemann, 1913
"Improved" with ink and wash by Max Beerbohm

During both world wars, Max Beerbohm and Florence Kahn left Italy for England. World War II saw Beerbohm contributing to public morale with his BBC radio broadcasts focused on London life 50 years earlier, allowing listeners an escape from present-day horrors. Midway through World War I, he had already used his celebrity status for charitable purposes, creating a unique copy of his *A Christmas Garland* with wash-and-pencil drawings of the writers parodied—all but Henry James. Christie's auctioned it in April 1916 at a sale to benefit the Red Cross. Among the caricatured figures was the Polish-British novelist Joseph Conrad (1857–1924) as a Hamlet-like "Master" of "Tragedy" holding a skull, with a snake nearby, smiling, at the start of Beerbohm's parody, "The Feast by J*s*ph C*nr*d."

Mark Samuels Lasner Collection, University of Delaware Library, Museums and Press

50

Max Beerbohm (1872–1956)
"A Recollection by Edm*nd G*sse"
Manuscript of a parody published in *A Christmas Garland,* ca. 1912

The concept of Beerbohm's *A Christmas Garland* was simple: each Christmas-related story imitated and exaggerated the style of a celebrated contemporary. Parody offered Beerbohm a vehicle for settling scores or paying affectionate tribute.
In the score-settling category was a tale as written by Rudyard Kipling about Santa Claus, with a Cockney police officer frog-marching him to jail for entering houses via the chimneys. Gentler mockery informed Beerbohm's parody of a memoir by the British poet and critic Edmond Gosse (1849–1928). With faux modesty, Gosse tells of just happening to be intimate with famous writers. During an imaginary scene in Venice, Robert Browning reads Gosse his poetry, and Henrik Ibsen improbably performs Nora's tarantella dance from his play *A Doll's House*.

Henry W. and Albert A. Berg Collection of English and American Literature, The New York Public Library

51

Ellen Terry (1847–1928)
The Story of My Life
London: Hutchinson & Co., 1908
Formerly owned and "improved" with ink and pencil by Max Beerbohm

Through his half-brother, the theatrical celebrity Sir Herbert Beerbohm Tree, Beerbohm when young met the leading figures of the London stage, including the legendary star Dame Ellen Terry, who grew up in an acting family. Beerbohm thought it ungentlemanly to exhibit publicly or to publish caricatures of women. All bets were off, though, when it came to his private antics. He loved to "improve" books in his library, drawing on their pages and altering the images reproduced in them. In his copy of Terry's autobiography, he savaged her face and her sister's, giving this beautiful pair bad teeth and big noses for his own amusement, much as a mischievous teenager might vandalize an advertising poster in the street.

Mark Samuels Lasner Collection, University of Delaware Library, Museums and Press

52

Mr. Noel Coward
Proof color lithograph, touched with watercolor, 1931

Many of the writers whom Beerbohm held in highest esteem in the 1920s were queer men. These included the Bloomsbury-connected Lytton Strachey and E.M. Forster. On the West End stage, the dominant star was Noël Coward (1899–1973)—playwright, actor, director, and composer of songs. Beerbohm, a fan of his brittle wit, helped to enhance Coward's fame with a suite of drawings related to the 1929 musical hit, *Bitter Sweet* (set partly in the late nineteenth century). His image of Coward emphasized celebrity, featuring an Art Deco design of crisscrossed spotlights and lightning bolts, but also suggested cross-dressing with Coward's belled, full-skirted coat.

Mark Samuels Lasner Collection, University of Delaware Library, Museums and Press

53

Max Beerbohm (1872–1956)
Mr. J.M. Barrie in a Nursery—Telling a Story About a Little Boy Who Wished Oh, How He Did Wish!—To Be a Mother; and How the Fairies Sent the Stork to Him with a Baby; and How He Mothered It, and His Mother Grandmothered It; with Many Other Matters of a Kind to Make Adults Cry and, Crying, Smile Through Their Tears
Ink and wash, 1908

Given his childlike qualities and receptivity to fantasy, Beerbohm was surprisingly cool toward *Peter Pan* (1904), which made a global celebrity of J.M. Barrie (1860–1937). He was more enthusiastic about Barrie's play *The Admirable Crichton* (1902), about incompetent aristocrats stranded on a desert island where their "natural" superior, a smart and capable butler, becomes ruler. It mirrored Beerbohm's own hostility toward the British class system and dislike of having servants (though he employed them anyway). Beerbohm recoiled from the sentimentality of *Peter Pan* and mocked it by drawing Barrie telling stories in a nursery. There, adults neglect the actual children surrounding them, too busy weeping over another of Barrie's heartrending, nostalgic inventions.

Mark Samuels Lasner Collection, University of Delaware Library, Museums and Press

54

Max Beerbohm (1872–1956)
Edmond Rostand
Pencil, ink, and watercolor, 1910

To maintain celebrity status in London at the beginning of the twentieth century required money and social labor. Cash-strapped, Beerbohm served reluctantly as drama critic for *The Saturday Review* for 12 years, but grew to resent watching performances every night, mixing with temperamental theatrical personalities, and having non-negotiable writing deadlines. His retreat to Italy in 1910 entailed a loss of excitement and ego-stroking adventures, but it also brought freedom and creative leisure of the kind Beerbohm depicted in this caricature of the French playwright Edmond Rostand (1868–1918). Beerbohm pictures him lazily conjuring up images of the stars of his stage triumphs—*Cyrano de Bergerac* (1897), *Chantecler* (1910), and also *L'Aiglon* (1900), with "The Divine Sarah" Bernhardt (1844–1923) in her cross-dressed role as Napoleon II—all while decoratively reclining.

Mark Samuels Lasner Collection, University of Delaware Library, Museums and Press

55

Max Beerbohm (1872–1956)
The Prince of Wales in New York
Pencil and watercolor, 1924

The lion is the king of beasts. "Lion-hunting," in slang terms, involved the pursuit of celebrities for social gatherings. Therefore, the height of successful celebrity-hunting meant bagging an actual king—or a future one. Beerbohm satirized this in his depiction of Edward, Prince of Wales (1894–1972)—who would briefly be Edward VIII before his abdication in 1936—about to be literally torn in half on a visit to America. Two imaginary society hostesses with ridiculous names address him "shrilly" and "raucously" as each grabs him with her oversized fists. The prince, meanwhile, is a passive, well-dressed stick figure. In his essay "Some Words on Royalty," Beerbohm suggested that the royals could be replaced with mechanized wax dummies. This prince seems like a handsome mannequin.

The Frederick R. Koch Foundation

56

Max Beerbohm (1872–1956)
"Mr. Winston Churchill"
Lithograph from *The Bystander*
London: Illustrated London News Ltd.,
May 22, 1912

Declaring openly his indifference to matters such as whether Britain retained its empire and to British political issues as a whole, Beerbohm was fascinated nonetheless by politicians in their guise as celebrities. Even after moving in 1910 to Italy, where life was cheaper and his social obligations far fewer, he continued to draw British prime ministers and prominent figures in Parliament. (This was also a financially shrewd strategy, as he depended on the profits for selling his caricatures, and the market for images of British politicians was strong.) Beerbohm's version of Winston Churchill, with rounded back and fur-trimmed overcoat, highlighted his resemblance to a gigantic, anthropomorphized mole, straight out of Kenneth Grahame's *The Wind in the Willows* (1908).

Mark Samuels Lasner Collection, University of Delaware Library, Museums and Press

57

Max Beerbohm (1872–1956)
His Majesty King Edward VII
Pencil and watercolor washes, undated

Rarely did Beerbohm make fun of ordinary people. He reserved comic deflation for the famous. The greater, more powerful the target, the more vicious his attack. But when British royalty was involved, Beerbohm paid the price for mocking celebrity. He often caricatured Edward VII (1841–1910), whom he despised. In 1923, London's Leicester Galleries exhibited a group of eight Beerbohm drawings of the late king. So fierce was the backlash in the press that they were removed from display. The Royal Family purchased the drawings, presumably to hide them from the public. But other images of Edward VII remained in circulation, such as this view of him as sharp-beaked and cold-eyed, like a bird of prey.

Private collection of James B. Sitrick

58

Max Beerbohm (1872–1956)
Mr. Tennyson Reading In Memoriam to His Sovereign
Pencil and wash, 1904
Inscribed by Max Beerbohm to William Nicholson and Mabel Pryde

Beerbohm's satirical 1912 poem, "*Ballade Tragique à Double Refrain*," was about an attendant to King George V who preferred suicide to serving a monarch so very, very dull. Such lack of spirit, Beerbohm implied, was inherited from the dreadfully boring Queen Victoria, who grew doubly tiresome in her long and excessive mourning for Prince Albert, her husband and Prince Consort. She was said to have found comfort in "In Memoriam A.H.H." (1850) by Alfred, Lord Tennyson (1809–1892), an elegy to a close friend. Beerbohm chose to imagine Tennyson the Poet Laureate declaiming it dramatically to the rigid, shrouded monarch in a room ghoulishly papered with skull-and-bones designs.

Manuscripts Division, Princeton University Library

59

Max Beerbohm (1872–1956)
Letter to Holbrook Jackson
October 30, 1913

Beerbohm's letter to Holbrook Jackson (1874–1948)—the author who had dedicated his book, *The Eighteen Nineties*, to Beerbohm—offered opinions about those deserving celebrity or worthy of scorn. Among the former were Oscar Wilde, Aubrey Beardsley, and Henry James, and Beerbohm supplied recollections of Wilde's witty remarks. Beerbohm's example of someone best forgotten was Rudyard Kipling. He recoiled from "the sort of person" Kipling was and said his poetry belonged in the "waste-paper basket." Then Beerbohm unleashed his final insult: "futurity will give him among poets a place corresponding exactly" with that "for Theodore Roosevelt among statesmen." To Beerbohm, no politician was more loathsome than Roosevelt, whom he considered a boor and a brute.

Manuscripts Division, Princeton University Library

60

Victoria, Queen of Great Britain
(1819–1901)
More Leaves from the Journal of a Life in the Highlands, from 1862 to 1882
London: Smith, Elder, & Co., 1884
Formerly owned and "improved" with pencil and watercolor by Max Beerbohm

The "main good of royalty," Beerbohm once wrote, was that it satisfied the public's "idolatrous instinct." Beerbohm himself had little of that instinct and none at all when it came to Queen Victoria. If monarchs were the ultimate celebrities, he was the ultimate celebrity debunker, quite heartlessly defacing his copy of Victoria's memoir of her retreat to Scotland following the death of her husband, Prince Albert. Although he sometimes showed his "improved" books to friends visiting him in Italy, these exercises in wicked satire were largely for his own entertainment. Here he took sadistic, yet unsurprising, pleasure in turning someone he viewed as oppressively dull into a piece of overstuffed furniture, indistinguishable from a tufted round ottoman.

Mark Samuels Lasner Collection, University of Delaware Library, Museums and Press

61 Max Beerbohm (1872–1956)
“Ballade Tragique à Double Refrain”
Manuscript, 1930

Beerbohm felt free to be as cruel (and honest) as he liked, hardly ever facing any consequences for caricaturing or satirizing celebrities. The exception was when he took aim at the British royals, dead or living. When in 1923 the Leicester Galleries withdrew from exhibition several highly unflattering images of the late Edward VII and one of Edward VIII, Beerbohm learned to keep his naughtiest assaults for “private circulation.” But the lesson came late. George V and Queen Mary were said to know about Beerbohm’s 1912 “*Ballade*,” where two attendants argue to the death over which of these two royals is duller. Nonetheless, George VI knighted Beerbohm in 1939.

Mark Samuels Lasner Collection, University of Delaware Library, Museums and Press

FICTIONAL CELEBRITIES

62 Max Beerbohm (1872–1956)
Letter to Bohun Lynch
June 18, 1921

Beerbohm responded in a panic—though, as always, in a tone of mock panic, reflecting his habitual style of comic irony—to the news that he was the subject of a forthcoming book by Bohun Lynch (1884–1928). Lynch was, like Beerbohm, a fiction writer and an artist specializing in celebrity caricature. His *Max Beerbohm in Perspective* (1921) analyzed Beerbohm's visual works and writings, and his conclusions about the latter were not unreservedly positive. While praising Beerbohm as "the personification of the civilized world[,]" Lynch harshly criticized Beerbohm's novel, *Zuleika Dobson*, declaring it a failure. In his letter to Lynch, Beerbohm had insisted, "My gifts are small," perhaps hoping to head off with a display of diffidence and modesty just such negative judgments.

Mark Samuels Lasner Collection, University of Delaware Library, Museums and Press

63 Max Beerbohm (1872–1956)
Notes for essays on contemporaries
Manuscript, ca. 1915

Drawing a line between fact and fiction was impossible for Beerbohm. His artworks and essays regularly blurred and crossed it, especially in his series of fanciful visual portraits of famous men as "Old and Young Selves," who were confronted with imagined embodiments of their past identities. In this notebook, Beerbohm listed celebrity writers, artists, and politicians whom he planned to write about and/or to caricature. Dating these notes and sketches is difficult, but they may be earlier than 1915, as there is a reference to "No. 2. The Pines" which became the title of his 1914 reminiscence about the "fleshly" Victorian poet Algernon Swinburne in old age. Unusually, too, Beerbohm mentions a woman: "Lady Cardigan," who scandalized her Victorian contemporaries with her love affairs outside of marriage.

Henry W. and Albert A. Berg Collection of English and American Literature, The New York Public Library

64

Max Beerbohm (1872–1956)
"'Excuse—Permit Me,' He Said Softly"
Illustration for "Enoch Soames"
Pencil, ca. 1919

For someone who scoffed at Freudian psychology, Beerbohm certainly understood the power of compulsions, even when he treated these comically. *Seven Men* (1919), a collection of five of Beerbohm's short stories, was filled with fictional figures driven to self-destruction—none more so than in "Enoch Soames," a story first published in the New York-based *Century Magazine*. The titular character, a failed Decadent poet desperate for fame, is the pitiable victim of celebrity culture, and he pays an eternal price. In Beerbohm's unused illustration for the 1919 volume, the devil approaches Soames and the story's narrator (a Beerbohm self-caricature) in 1897, offering to send Soames forward 100 years, where the British Museum's library catalogue will reveal his future glory. Soames discovers instead that he remains a perpetual nonentity, and the devil takes his soul.

Collection of Harry Ransom Center, University of Texas at Austin

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Max Beerbohm (1872–1956)
George Hand Wright (1872–1951), illustrator
"Enoch Soames" in *Century Magazine*
New York: The Century Co., May 1916

Several short stories in Beerbohm's volume *Seven Men* appeared first in *Century Magazine*. For its American debut in 1916, "Enoch Soames" was illustrated by the Philadelphia-born artist, George Hand Wright, who also worked for *The Saturday Review*. Beerbohm disliked the results. Wright's devil, for instance, seemed insufficiently large and overbearing, while his Soames was not as haggard or hapless-looking as Beerbohm's inspired fictional take-down of Decadent wannabes. Though it satirized untalented *poseurs* who longed for adulation, "Enoch Soames" also paid tribute to actual 1890s celebrities, including Beerbohm's great friend William Rothenstein, and Henry Harland, literary editor of *The Yellow Book*—and, though ironically, to Beerbohm himself.

General Research Division, The New York Public Library

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Max Beerbohm (1872–1956)
Zuleika
Pencil, ink, and watercolor, 1912

Only after resigning from *The Saturday Review* as theater critic, marrying, and retreating from social life in London to Rapallo, Italy, did Beerbohm finally complete his sole novel, *Zuleika Dobson, or, An Oxford Love Story* (1911). It is a comic fantasy about a young woman whose arrival at Oxford University inspires the all-male undergraduate population to commit mass suicide out of despair at not possessing her. Her talents—she does magic tricks—are unexceptional, and her beauty, too, is unremarkable, as is clear from Beerbohm's later drawing of her feline face and elongated figure. What she has is an undefinable magnetism or star quality, and what the men experience is a mass obsession akin to mania. This was Beerbohm's most outrageous satirical commentary on celebrity culture and its self-deluded followers.

Mark Samuels Lasner Collection, University of Delaware Library, Museums and Press

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Max Beerbohm (1872–1956)
Zuleika Dobson, or, An Oxford Love Story
London: William Heinemann, 1911
Formerly owned and "improved" with ink, pencil, watercolor, and pasted-in material by Max Beerbohm

The protagonists of Beerbohm's *Zuleika Dobson*—the narcissistic Zuleika, the dandified Duke of Dorset who kills himself because he cannot have her, and the lemming-like undergraduates who follow the fashion he sets for suicide—are all unlovable comic characters. Nonetheless, this is, as the subtitle indicates, an Oxford love story. It is Beerbohm's romantic tribute to the university where he had been enrolled at Merton College in the early 1890s, though he never finished his degree. Also a labor of love was this copy of the novel, which Beerbohm filled with elaborate drawings of the fictional figures, including the slyly cat-like Zuleika, as well as self-caricatures.

The University of Tulsa, McFarlin Library, Department of Special Collections & University Archives

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Max Beerbohm (1872–1956)
Diary entries for October 24–29, 1911
Manuscript in binder's dummy for
Zuleika Dobson

Though occasionally interrupted by visits from friends on holiday, or by literary tourists making pilgrimages to Italy in hopes of meeting him, Beerbohm's daily life in Rapallo from 1910 onwards was placid to the point of dullness. As the diary he kept intermittently for 20 years attests, his main activity on some days was a stroll or drive into town. But autumn 1911 was greatly enlivened by letters from William Heinemann, the publisher of Beerbohm's *Zuleika Dobson*, reporting the success of the novel with readers and critics, and by the arrival of copies of British newspapers containing enthusiastic, favorable reviews. Not everyone recognized it as a take-no-prisoners assault on the foolishness of celebrity worship; some enjoyed it instead as a charming love letter to Oxford.

Henry W. and Albert A. Berg Collection of English and American Literature, The New York Public Library

CELEBRITY AFTERLIVES

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Cecil Beaton (1904–1980)
"Cecil Beaton's 'Photobiography'"
In *Vogue*
New York: Condé Nast Publications,
June 1951

With a long career as a designer for stage and film, Cecil Beaton nevertheless enjoyed greatest renown as a photographer, particularly for his celebrity portraits of actors, artists, and the British royals. In 1951, *Vogue* magazine published a photospread with highlights from his career. Among them was his portrait from the late 1930s of Beerbohm, who was unhappy with Beaton's choice of a backdrop, but apologized for being "so fussy." In *Self-Portraits with Friends* (1979)—selections from Beaton's voluminous diaries—Beaton described his final meeting with Beerbohm, in Italy in 1953. Beerbohm "was still, in spite of his eighty years, the perennial dandy."

General Research Division, The New York Public Library

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J.R.R. Tolkien (1892–1973)
Letter to J.G. Riewald
August 20, 1948

One person's celebrity could be another's non-entity. J.G. Riewald (1910–2006), the author and editor of several books on Beerbohm, began collecting information on his idol in the 1940s by contacting those likely to have personal stories about him. His query to J.R.R. Tolkien, who was later the author of *The Lord of the Rings*, did more than draw a blank; it produced a rebuff from the distinguished fantasy novelist. Tolkien held a professorship at Merton College, Oxford, where Beerbohm had been an undergraduate. He claimed to know little about Beerbohm, who was made an honorary Fellow there—only that Beerbohm's "published cartoons . . . amuse me[,]" while his literary work "usually fails to amuse me."

Mark Samuels Lasner Collection, University of Delaware Library, Museums and Press

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S.N. Behrman (1893–1973)
"Conversations with Max"
In *The New Yorker*
New York: The New Yorker Magazine, Inc., March 19, 1960

New York-based collectors such as the artist A.E. Gallatin (1881–1952) were among the first to take Beerbohm's visual work seriously. Today, collectors such as James B. Sitrick continue to do so. Some of the most important biographical writings have been by New Yorkers, including N. John Hall and his predecessor, S.N. Behrman, whose reminiscences of Beerbohm were first serialized in multiple issues of *The New Yorker* magazine before being published as *Portrait of Max* in 1960. More recently, the critic and essayist Adam Gopnik profiled Beerbohm in 2015 in *The New Yorker*.

General Research Division, The New York Public Library

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David Levine (1926–2009)
Max Beerbohm
Lithograph from *David Levine's Gallery*
New York: New York Review of Books, 1974

Beerbohm has influenced generations of celebrity caricaturists. Many of them have been based in the world of New York journalism, associated with publications such as *The New York Times*, *Vanity Fair*, and *The New Yorker*. Of these, none has been compared to Beerbohm more often than David Levine, a longtime artist at *The New York Review of Books*. Several issues have included Levine's own drawings of Beerbohm. This one reflects Beerbohm in the 1950s, when Cecil Beaton memorialized him as "a dandified little figure, with his cane and straw boater worn at a rakish angle," intent always on appearing stylish.

Mark Samuels Lasner Collection, University of Delaware Library, Museums and Press

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Gerald Scarfe (b. 1936)
"I Have Nothing to Declare but My Flippancy"
Ink and watercolor, ca. 2002

The history of British celebrity caricature in the twentieth century and beyond is the record of artists who not only learned from Beerbohm but openly paid tribute. This roster of fans—mainly men—includes Gerald Scarfe, who is best known for creating the visual design of Pink Floyd's *The Wall* (1979). Few, though, ever dared to do what Scarfe attempted: to revisit one of Beerbohm's own subjects and work a "flippant" variation on it. Scarfe's drawing of Oscar Wilde was inscribed with his acknowledgment that it was done as homage to Beerbohm's version of Wilde: "thanx Max."

Mark Samuels Lasner Collection, University of Delaware Library, Museums and Press

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Celebrity became an international industry in the late nineteenth century, and the English artist, author, and dandy Max Beerbohm (1872–1956) was at the center of it. From the 1890s through the 1920s, to be a celebrity meant the hope—and fear—of turning up in a drawing or a parody by "Max," as he was known in both Britain and the U.S. His brilliant skewering of famous people in his visual caricatures and of their writing styles in his satirical works made him a celebrity himself. This was an identity he enjoyed, but later shrank from. In essays and fiction, he explored the price in human terms of achieving and maintaining celebrity status in ways that still resonate with us now.

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MAX BEERBOHM: THE PRICE OF CELEBRITY

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Max Beerbohm
The Price of Celebrity

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