Ronald Firbank (17 January 1886 – 21 May 1926) was an innovative British novelist. His eight short novels, partly inspired by the London aesthetes of the 1890s, especially Oscar Wilde, consist largely of dialogue, with references to religion, social-climbing, and sexuality.

**BIOGRAPHY**

Arthur Annesley Ronald Firbank was born in Britain on 17 January 1886, at Clarges Street in London, the son of MP Sir Thomas Firbank and Lady Firbank (nee Harriet Jane Garrett). He had an older brother, Joseph Sydney (born 1884), and a younger brother, Hubert Somerset (born 1887), and sister, Heather (born 1888).[1]

At the age of ten he went briefly to Uppingham School (September 1900 to April 1901)[2] and then on to Trinity Hall, Cambridge. He converted to Catholicism in 1907. In 1909 he left Cambridge without taking a degree.

Living off his inheritance, he travelled around Spain, Italy, the Middle East, and North Africa. Openly gay[3] and chronically shy, he was an enthusiastic consumer of alcohol and cannabis. He died of lung disease in Rome, aged 40, and is buried in the Campo Verano cemetery.[4]
FIRBANK'S PUBLISHED WORKS

EARLY PUBLICATIONS

An Early Flemish Painter, in The Academy; 73 (28 September 1903), p. 948 (about Jan Gossaert).


"Souvenir d'automne. A Poem In Prose". Supplement to The King and His Navy and Army; 21 (2 December 1905).

Odette d'Antrevernes And A Study in Temperament (1905) [separate large-paper edition].


"A Study In Oph", in Granta; 21 (2 November 1907).

CRITICAL RECEPTION

His novels have been championed by many English novelists including E. M. Forster, Evelyn Waugh, Alan Hollinghurst and Simon Raven. The poet W. H. Auden praised him highly in a radio broadcast on the BBC Third Programme in June 1961 (the text of the broadcast was published in The Listener of 8 June 1961). Susan Sontag named his novels as part of "the canon of camp" in her 1964 essay "Notes on 'Camp". In her 1973 critical biography, Prancing Novelist, Brigid Brophy examines Firbank's cult of Oscar Wilde.

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POSTHUMOUS PUBLICATIONS

The Artificial Princess ... With an Introduction by Sir Coleridge Kennard (novel, 1934) [written c. 1915].
"Lady Appledore's Mesalliance", in Cornhill Magazine; 172 (story, summer 1962), pp. 399–425 [written c. 1908].
The New Rythum And Other Pieces(novel fragment, 1962) [incl. extracts from The Mauve Tower(play written c. 1904), A Disciple From The Country(play), "The Widow's Love" and "A Tragedy in Green"].
The Wind & The Roses ... Introduction by Miriam J. Benkovitz, privately printed (poem, 1966)
Ronald Firbank Far Away ... Note by Miriam J. Benkovitz (1966) [written 1904].
Ronald Firbank - When Widows Love & A Tragedy in Green ...Introduction by Edward Martin Potoker (1980).

NOTES

FURTHER READING

Davis, Robert Murray (1964). The Externalist Method in the Novels of Ronald Firbank, Carl Van Vechten and Evelyn Waugh(University of Wisconsin).

EXTERNAL LINKS

Works by or about Ronald Firbank at Internet Archive
Works by Ronald Firbank, at Unz.org
Ronald Firbank at Find a Grave
Sorrow in Sunlight
Ronald Firbank: An Inventory of His Collection at the Harry Ransom Center

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Arthur Annesley Ronald Firbank was born to privilege on Mayfair's Clarges Street. His father was MP Sir Thomas Firbank. Aged ten he was sent to Uppingham and won a place at Trinity Hall, Cambridge though he did not complete his degree. During his tenure at Trinity Hall, Firbank converted to Catholicism in 1907. In his online biography Concerning the Eccentricities of Ronald Firbank, James J. Conway writes 'A Bright Young Thing before his time, Firbank was born blushing. Ronald Firbank. Biographical note. British novelist. His novels have been championed by many English novelists including E. M. Forster, Evelyn Waugh, Alan Hollinghurst and Simon Raven. The poet W. H. Auden praised him highly. Susan Sontag named his novels as part of "the canon of camp" in her 1964 essay "Notes on "Camp". Works.