



INTERDISCIPLINARY JOURNAL OF DECADENCE STUDIES

Volume 6, Issue 2

Autumn 2023

‘Oh, London dear!’: Belated Decadence and the Queer City in Ronald Firbank’s
Vainglory and Caprice

Lucinda Janson

ISSN: 2515-0073

Date of Acceptance: 28 September 2023

Date of Publication: 18 December 2023

Citation: Lucinda Janson, “‘Oh, London dear!’: Belated Decadence and the Queer City in Ronald Firbank’s *Vainglory and Caprice*”, *Volupté: Interdisciplinary Journal of Decadence Studies*, 6.2 (2023), 177-89.

DOI: 10.25602/GOLD.v.v6i2.1763.g1873

volupte.gold.ac.uk



This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-ShareAlike 4.0 International License.

Goldsmiths
UNIVERSITY OF LONDON

‘Oh, London dear!’:
Belated Decadence and the Queer City in Ronald Firbank’s *Vainglory* and *Caprice*

Lucinda Janson

In his introduction to the *Oxford Book of Modern Verse, 1892-1935* (1936), W. B. Yeats famously declared that, after the so-called Yellow Nineties, ‘in 1900 everybody got down off his stilts; henceforth nobody drank absinthe with his black coffee; nobody went mad; nobody committed suicide; nobody joined the Catholic church; or if they did I have forgotten’.¹ Yeats’s remark is, of course, tongue-in-cheek. Still, Yeats had forgotten at least one writer, and very few people have remembered him since. Ronald Firbank, who wrote his best-known novels during, and immediately after, the First World War, stayed up on his stilts, half drank himself to death, converted to the Catholic Church, and was widely considered to be mad – or, at least, very eccentric. One person who did remember Firbank was E. M. Forster, whose 1929 article on Firbank was reprinted in the same year as Yeats’s *Modern Verse*. ‘[T]here is nothing up to date’ about him, Forster states: rather, Firbank is ‘*fin de siècle*, as it used to be called; he belongs to the nineties and the *Yellow Book*; his mind inherits the furniture and his prose the cadences of Aubrey Beardsley’s *Under the Hill*’.² Definitionally, decadence is always belated. But Firbank’s was doubly so, because he had missed out on the 1890s. He was too late to be belated when the men and women of the ‘Yellow Nineties’ had been feeling belated in exactly the same way that he would a few decades later.

It is significant that Firbank was remembered by the queer Forster, who no doubt saw something of a kindred spirit in the flagrantly queer writings of Firbank, and Forster who, in his own fiction, famously sought ways of imagining how queer lives might be lived in relative freedom. How, or, more precisely, *where*. Forster, in *Maurice* (written 1913-14) and in various posthumously published short stories, leads his queer protagonists to ‘the greenwood’: a pastoral refuge with a touch of the Hellenistic. Firbank’s queer utopia – as Forster’s invocation of Beardsley and *The Yellow Book* implies – was, conversely, an *urban* space. It was, in large part, the London of the

decadent Nineties, as well as all the previous Londons that existed, palimpsestically, beneath it. Beardsley, and publications such as *The Yellow Book* and the *Savoy*, were inextricably associated with the metropolis, where artists, authors, publishers, and readers congregated, many of them queer or otherwise marginalized in late-Victorian Britain. *The Yellow Book* itself was a glaring feature of London's shopfronts from its first publication in 1894. The poets Michael Field wrote in their diary that they were 'almost blinded by the glare of hell', and that their eyes seemed to be 'filled with incurable jaundice' upon seeing copies of the first edition on display at The Bodley Head in Vigo Street.³ Although Firbank would have been only eight years old at *The Yellow Book*'s initial publication, his abiding interest in the culture of the 1890s is evidenced when two characters in *Vainglory* (1915) have an assignation in Vigo Street.⁴

The critical literature on Firbank is regrettably sparse, and scholarship has yet to consider Firbank as an urban novelist. Don Adams has characterized Firbank as a 'pastoral' novelist whose works are concerned with idealized, rural havens of tolerance.⁵ Alex Murray and Martin Lockerd have discussed the Firbankian impulses of Evelyn Waugh's fiction (Waugh was both an admirer and sceptic of Firbank), and have begun to trace a genealogy of the decadent Arcadian from Beardsley to Waugh's *Brideshead Revisited*.⁶ As has been documented by Brigid Brophy, who writes extensively about Firbank's cult of Wilde, and Ellis Hanson, who concludes his monograph on decadent Catholicism with a discussion of Firbank's religiosity, Firbank idolized and continually looked back to the 1890s, the decade of the queer city *par excellence*, peopled by Wilde's youthful aesthete Dorian Gray, Conan Doyle's homosocial pair Holmes and Watson, and, in his poem 'Plato in London', Lionel Johnson's time-travelling, street-walking Ancient Greek.⁷

That Firbank worshipped Wilde, in particular, is striking, given just how crucial London was to Wilde's own works and image. The libretto to Gilbert and Sullivan's opera *Patience* (1881), a satire on the Aesthetic movement, includes an oft-quoted line strongly associated with Wilde: 'If you walk down Piccadilly with a poppy or a lily in your mediæval hand'.⁸ The mention of Piccadilly cements the centrality of London to the Wildean mythos. At the same time, the reference to the

‘mediæval’ reveals, and does much to create, a popular association between Aestheticism and the Middle Ages. It suggests that aesthetes looked longingly back to a medieval past – as did Firbank’s characters. Like any good medieval saint, *Vainglory*’s society hostess Mrs Shamefoot dedicates her life to becoming vitrified in a ‘commemorative window to herself’ (p. 17). This is, in fact, reminiscent of another line from the same song in *Patience*, regarding the ‘stained glass attitudes’ adopted by decadent types.⁹ As she awaits her translation into stained glass, Mrs Shamefoot keeps a florist’s shop as a hobby, ‘just at the beginning of Sloane Street’ (p. 30). From the shop window, Mrs Shamefoot observes passers-by, many of whom are her friends, on their way to Holy Trinity, an Arts-and-Crafts church built in 1888-90, which features a large Morris and Co. window: an aestheticist retreat in the heart of London.¹⁰ This web of queer urban aestheticism is strengthened when one remarks that Mrs Shamefoot admits to having ‘tidied [her]self before the Virgin of the Rocks’ in the National Gallery on her way to the Savoy (p. 118), and that Sarah Siquier’s costumes for a London theatre in *Caprice* (1917) are praised for being ‘Renaissance, and ergo *à la mode*!’ (p. 361). These are both references to *Studies in the History of the Renaissance* (1873), the most famous work of the arch-aesthete Walter Pater, who taught Oscar Wilde, and was a prominent figure in London aesthetic circles of the 1880s and early 1890s.¹¹ Yet Joseph Bristow is certainly correct to remark that while Firbank was heavily influenced by Wilde (and, by extension, Pater), his project was one of ‘modernizing Wilde’, rather than of simply imitating him.¹²

Winsome Brookes, a young musician who lives with his male partner, an artist known in *Vainglory* only as Andrew, is a paradigmatic example of the Firbankian queer character for whom the London *both* of 1915 *and* of the past – specifically the 1890s – is a place of safety and community. Brookes and Andrew reside at the euphonious address of 13 Silvery Place. While Silvery Place does not seem to have existed outside *Vainglory*’s London, the similarly selenic Half Moon Street was not only the location of Algernon Moncrieff’s house in *The Importance of Being Earnest* (1895), but was also a real London street which remained a queer enclave into the 1920s.¹³ Much like Algernon’s rebaptism as Ernest for matters of convenience, Brookes flirts with the idea

of ‘changing his usual name’ to the ‘more promising’ Rose de Tivoli (p. 39). Like Wilde’s characters, moreover, the lives of Brookes and his circle are marked by movement between the city and country, and back again. Brookes follows his patron, Mrs Henedge, to the cathedral town of Ashringford, where he is soon stricken with a very decadent *ennui*, and a similarly Wildean distaste for the country. In *The Importance of Being Earnest*, Gwendolen peevishly remarks that ‘Personally I cannot understand how anybody manages to exist in the country, if anybody who is anybody does. The country always bores me to death.’¹⁴

Brookes would certainly concur with Gwendolen, as demonstrated by the following dialogue, in which he is discovered sleeping in the Bishop’s palace, having entered uninvited in search of some books for his patron. He says:

‘In the country one is always grateful to find anything to do.’

‘Have you been here long?’

‘Since yesterday. Already, I could howl for staleness.’

Mrs Shamefoot glanced at the Bishop.

‘Very likely,’ she said; ‘but to run away the moment you arrive, just because it’s the most appealing place on earth ... I should call it decadent!’

And indeed, after a few hours nearer Nature, perpetually it was the same with him. A *nostalgie du pavé* began to set in. He would miss the confidential ‘Things is very bad, sir,’ of the newspaper boy at the corner; the lights, the twinkling advertisements of the Artistic Theatre ... the crack of the revolver so audible those nights that the heroine killed herself, the suspense, the subsequent sickening silence; while the interest, on lighter evenings, would be varied by the ‘Call me my biplane,’ of Indignation as it flew hurriedly away. (p. 86)

Mrs Shamefoot is right in calling Brookes’ attitude ‘decadent’. His bombastic French phrase, *nostalgie du pavé*, recalls Charles Baudelaire’s phrase *Le spleen de Paris*, used as a title for his posthumous collection of prose poems, as well as Walter Pater’s description of the ‘fatigue du Nord’ felt by the queer German art historian Johann Joachim Winckelmann.¹⁵ Brookes’ ‘nostalgia for the pavement’ – as a literal translation of the French gives us – demonstrates not only a generalized decadent malaise, but also that he envisages a return to London as a return *home*. After all, a literal translation of ‘nostalgia’, taking into account the Greek origins of the word, would be ‘return home pain’.

It is notable that what Brookes misses about the city is, in large part, its modernity: the ‘twinkling advertisements’ and the ‘biplane’ are both conspicuous signs of new technologies of communication, transportation, and capitalism. Indeed, Firbank makes Brookes’ longing for the London of 1915 so up-to-date that some of his allusions are now impossible to decipher: ‘Call me my biplane’ could conceivably refer to a popular phrase – from some play or music hall act – now lost to oblivion. The reference to the biplane also anticipates, by some ten years, the famous ‘strong high singing of some aeroplane overhead’, whose flight over London – ‘the sound boring into the ears of all people in the Mall, in the Green Park, in Piccadilly, in Regent Street, in Regent’s Park’ – connects all the characters in Virginia Woolf’s *Mrs Dalloway* (1925). It also invokes cutting-edge technology, the war that had been and the war that everyone suspected was soon to come, and advertising. “‘It’s toffee,’” murmured Mr Bowley’, who had just been reflecting, ‘sentimentally’, on ‘orphans, widows, the War – tut-tut’.¹⁶

‘Nostalgia’ also implies a longing not only for the London of 1915, but also for the London, or Londons, of the past. The London theatrical world, whose ‘light’ and ‘twinkling advertisements’ Brookes misses, is also that of Wilde’s heyday in the first half of the 1890s, before his trials and imprisonment. ‘[T]he crack of the revolver so audible those nights that the heroine killed herself surely alludes to the suicide of the young actress Sybil Vane in *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1890-91). In fact, in *Caprice*, Firbank rewrites the Wildean trope of the tragic young London actress in a tragicomic vein. The novel follows the fortunes of Sarah Siquier, the daughter of a Westmorland canon who runs away to London to pursue her dream of becoming an actress, only to be killed by a mousetrap after her successful opening night as Juliet. Upon first arriving in London, Sarah stumbles, fortuitously, upon the Café Royal, in search of ‘some nice teashop’ or ‘cool creamery’ (p. 315). The Café Royal was famously frequented by fin-de-siècle decadents including Wilde and Beardsley, and continued to be a gathering space for artists and queer people into the twentieth century. Indeed, Sarah soon finds London to be just as much of a queer utopia as does Winsome

Brookes. She begins a relationship with another aspiring actress, Miss May Mant, bonding over their shared love of the stage:

‘Oh, isn’t it wonderful?’
‘What?’
‘Being here.’
‘It’s rather pleasant.’
‘Can you feel the boards?’
‘A little.’
‘They go *right* through me. Through my shoes, up my legs, and at my heart they sting.’
‘Kiss me.’
‘I love you.’
‘Pet.’
‘Do I look interesting?’
‘Ever so.’
‘Would you take me for a Cardinal’s comfort?’ (p. 351)

In ‘Foreign-Colony Street, Soho’, Sarah is introduced to another unambiguously gay male couple, reminiscent of Brookes and Andrew: the ‘versatile young men Harold Weathercock and Noel Nice’ (p. 338), a pair of actors who live together and who run a laundry business on the side to fund their theatrical endeavours. Their ‘fifth-floor laundry garden’ has brought ‘all Chelsea (and part of Paris)’ along with Sarah, ‘to study illusive atmospherical effects from the[ir] dizzying drying-ground’ (p. 338). London is here figured for Sarah, Harold, and Noel – as it was for Brookes and Andrew – as a utopia which can provide a haven for queer people. Their security is, however, precarious, as evidenced by Sarah’s swift demise, and Harold and Noel’s desperate turn from artistic pursuits to the laundry business. The ambience of the 1890s is heightened by the mention of Paris, whose absinthe and *fleurs du mal* made it the other quintessential city of decadence.

These attempts to find sanctuary in the city suggest that it is useful to situate *Vainglory* and *Caprice* within the genre of the ‘urban pastoral’. As Terry Gifford has demonstrated, traditional pastoral is written for and by city-dwellers, and is concerned with movements of *retreat* and *return*: retreat into the atemporal, paradisaical world of the countryside, and return to the busy, harried world of the city.¹⁷ In the classical Latin formulation, this is the distinction between *otium*, or leisure, and *negotium*, or business.¹⁸ Firbank’s novels collapse this dichotomy. Anticipating Joyce and Woolf, Firbank crafts almost plotless novels, in which *otium* takes precedence over *negotium*, whether in the

country or the city. In this, his work resembles the amphibious urban pastoral works of the eighteenth century, first produced by Jonathan Swift and John Gay.

The *Town Eclogues* (1715) of Swift's and Gay's associate, Lady Mary Wortley Montagu, are explicitly mentioned in Firbank's *Vainglory*, alongside her 'Epistle from Arthur Grey the Footman', which is quoted. The allusion comes early in the novel, at the London *soirée* hosted by Mrs Henedge at her dwelling 'just off Chesham Place' (p. 9). Here we learn that Brookes is writing an opera based on Montagu's works:

Through the wide windows of the drawing-room someone could be heard to say:
 'Town Eclogues! ... Epistle from Arthur Grey the Footman. Words by Lady Mary
 Wortley. Music by Chab-bon-nière.'
 'Delightful!
 'So suitable!
 'Ingenious!
 'Ingeniousness *is* so rare!
 'And so enchanting!' (p. 161)

The choice of Montagu's urban pastoral is significant for the queerness of Firbank's project: Montagu was known in Firbank's day as a queer figure, at least to a certain cognoscenti. In the 'Sexual Inversion' volume of his pioneering *Studies in the Psychology of Sex* (third edition, 1915), Havelock Ellis quotes Montagu's writings about Turkish women, in which she describes admiringly the 'majestic grace' with which they move at the Turkish baths, 'stark naked, without any beauty or defect concealed'.¹⁹ Montagu was rumoured to have had lesbian relationships, admired Sappho's works, and alluded to the Greek poet's 'Fragment 31' in her letters. John Hervey and Alexander Pope famously nicknamed her 'Sappho'.²⁰

Firbank is plainly keen for his readers to make the connection between Montagu and her Sapphic appellation, since the *soirée* is being held in honour of an 'original fragment of Sappho' which has been discovered by Mrs Henedge's acquaintance Professor Inglepin (p. 7). Although the fragment itself turns out to be bathetically anti-climactic in content – we are only given the English translation, 'Could not, for the fury of her feet!' (p. 22) – Firbank makes it clear that the *soirée* is to be viewed as Sapphic in the adjective's fullest range of meanings. While Professor

Inglepin requests that, stylistically, ‘severity might be the key’ at the *soirée*, Mrs Henedge disobeys him ‘in everything’, particularly his injunction against flowers (p. 9). She fills her drawing-room with ‘white and dark mauve stocks’, and during dinner she ‘scatter[s] violets indiscriminately into the glasses and over the plates’ (pp. 10 and 15). The recurrence of shades of purple is important to note here. Mauve was well known as a homosexual colour in the period, while violets, thanks to the Sappho poem, were associated with lesbians.²¹ Firbank and his circle were well-versed in such colour symbolism: in a memoir of his friend, the American author Carl Van Vechten writes that Firbank’s colour was ‘magenta’, while Wilde’s was green.²² Mrs Henedge’s guests are patently aware of such subcultural meanings: they ‘remember Sappho’ (p. 15) as they spread the violets, and the talk around the dinner table turns before long to Mitylene, the capital of the Greek isle of Lesbos where Sappho famously ‘loved and s[a]ng’.²³

Yet Firbank does not allow his audience to forget that as much as Mrs Henedge attempts to cultivate a ‘Greek’ atmosphere; her salon is, in fact, held in London in or about 1915. Thus, we learn, parenthetically, that the Lesbian wine which the guests consume is ‘from Samos. Procured, perhaps, in Pall Mall’ (p. 15). This is just one of many examples of Firbank letting his characters almost reach the pastoral Greek, before undercutting the moment by a return to the contemporary, and, particularly, to the contemporary city.

For the city is still not the perfect utopia for queer people, just as it was not at the turn of the century. It was, of course, in the London of 1895 that Wilde was arrested on charges of gross indecency; it was in the Green Dragon on Fleet Street in 1902 that thirty-five-year-old Lionel Johnson, partly plagued by the ramifications of his homosexuality, drank himself to death; it was in a London workhouse in 1905, after multiple convictions over the previous decades for soliciting sex in public toilets, that Simeon Solomon died. The decadents of the nineteenth century had looked back to other historical moments: to Ancient Greece, to the Renaissance, to the eighteenth century. But in the absence of those, for Firbank as for Wilde and his circle, the best alternative was still the modern metropolis.

Given such tarnished histories, it is perhaps not surprising that Firbank's engagement with the world of 1915 has its limits. While his contemporaries from Cambridge such as Rupert Brooke (incidentally, the model for Winsome Brookes) were writing poetry about their experiences in the trenches of France, Firbank, who was excused from military service on the grounds of ill health, spent the war in Oxford, living in Oscar Wilde's old rooms on High Street.²⁴ As Firbank sought to escape wartime London, so do his novels of the period rarely mention the Great War. The only reference to it in *Vainglory* occurs in an offhand, highly satiric conversation between Lady Anne, wife of the Bishop of Ashringford, and her secretary, the aptly named Miss Madge Hospice:

'I was wondering what had become of you,' Lady Anne had said to her as she came in. Where on earth have you been?'

'...Wading through fields of violet vetch. It's so delicious out.'

'Had you forgotten today?'

'I don't think so: I've told Gripper again to sponge the stretchers, but he's so lazy, you know he never will.'

The bi-weekly Ambulance classes at the Palace, (so popular socially), were, it must be owned, on a parallel with the butter-making at Trianon. (p. 62)

Trianon, of course, was the rustic retreat built for Marie Antoinette in the grounds of the Palais de Versailles. Marie Antoinette's requested specifications included meadowland and a farmhouse, accoutrements which were designed to create a rural ambience around the palace.²⁵ Its appearance in the same sentence as the Ambulance classes is striking when we consider that Marie Antoinette was, by the twentieth century, a sapphic icon, and the World War One ambulance corps were notoriously full of lesbians: both feature, the latter heavily, in Radclyffe Hall's *The Well of Loneliness* (1929), which draws on Ellis, and which many hold to have defined the twentieth-century lesbian.²⁶

Both Trianon and the Ambulance classes, then, are queer havens, and both are allied to the urban: while the Ambulance classes take place in the country, the motorized vehicles herald both the obliteration of rural Western Europe in the War, and the incipient overrunning of cities by cars; meanwhile, Trianon is a pastoral paradise for city dwellers, built entirely artificially, like the gardens painted on screens in Beardsley's illustrations for Pope's *Rape of the Lock*. Both, moreover, are fractured utopias. The ambulance corps were a by-product of the unprecedented

horror that was the Great War, and also one that had to disband with, coincidentally, the Treaty of Versailles, as Hall movingly chronicles. Trianon too is blemished, since it was supposedly there that Antoinette was first alerted to the beginning of the French Revolution, which would ultimately, of course, land her on the guillotine.

In his refusal to draw attention to the War, Firbank prefigures Virginia Woolf's well-known comment in *A Room of One's Own* (1929) about the relative importance ascribed to the battlefield and the salon:

This is an important book, the critic assumes, because it deals with war. This is an insignificant book because it deals with the feelings of women in a drawing-room. A scene in a battlefield is more important than a scene in a shop – everywhere and much more subtly the difference of value persists.²⁷

Like Woolf, Firbank privileges the salon, the drawing-room, and the shop, over the battlefield: indeed, over the field of any variety. Whereas classical warfare was city-based, such as in the Siege of Troy, the First World War was rural, fought in poppy-strewn Flanders fields. The rural was thus no longer the site of otiose luxury: the days of Roman generals retiring from command to the *otium* of the countryside were long gone. Whatever escape might be possible, it was to be found for Woolf, as for Firbank, in the city.

It should come as no surprise that Woolf, celebrated London author, wrote to a friend in May 1929 about reading Firbank's works 'with some unstinted pleasure', while she was working on *A Room of One's Own*.²⁸ In that book, London appears as the site of creative freedom – the room of one's own – for women of her own time, in opposition to the stultifying and restrictive atmosphere of 'Oxbridge'. In the fifth chapter, Woolf discusses at length a new type of female novelist, one who writes about women and their relationships with other women, past and present. Woolf imagines the potential subjects of this new kind of novel as denizens of London, and writes of feeling, in the streets of London, 'the pressure of dumbness, the accumulation of unrecorded life' of its women.²⁹ This attention to past Londons is already Firbankian, but Woolf goes further, positing that her new female novelist would write about queer relationships between women. In a

famous passage, Woolf adopts a playful Firbankian tone as she declares that, in this new kind of novel, “Chloe liked Olivia...” Do not start. Do not blush. Let us admit in the privacy of our own society that these things do sometimes happen. Sometimes women do like women.³⁰ Some fourteen years earlier, Firbank’s female novelist, Mrs Asp, describes her novel in the following way:

‘There’s no plot,’ Mrs Asp, who seemed utterly unable for continuity, was confiding to a charmed few, ‘no plot exactly. It’s about two women who live all alone.’
‘You mean that they live just by themselves?’
Mrs Thumbler was unable to imagine a novel without a plot, and two women who lived so quietly! ... She was afraid that poor, dear Rose was becoming dull.
‘I wonder you don’t collaborate!’ she said.
‘Oh no ... Unless I were in love with a man, and *just as a pretext*, I should never dream of collaborating with anybody.’
‘You would need a sort of male Beatrice, I suppose?’ (p. 19)

This is, of course, exactly the kind of novel that Firbank himself was writing: a novel ‘without a plot’, populated by women and queer people, about whose private lives and urban havens few books had then been written. That Firbank anticipated some of Woolf’s most famous formulations is fitting for an author who, as we have seen, is perpetually out-of-time, both looking back, in an Arcadian manner, to past Londons, and reaching forward, to the utopian promise of future, freer metropolises. Indeed, Firbank planned to set the novel he was working on at his death, *The New Rythum*, in New York, a city whose queer culture fascinated him, although he would never visit it.³¹ The optimism inherent in this creative decision is a testament to the power Firbank saw in the queer metropolis as a liberating space.

In 2019, Ellis Hanson wrote of his hope that ‘the centenary of Firbank’s novels brings a long overdue reappraisal of his significance’.³² As we are, in fact, fast approaching the centenary of Firbank’s untimely death in 1926, this project seems more urgent than ever. I have sought to contribute to this reappraisal, by placing Firbank within the context of queer, decadent Londons of the past, especially of the 1890s and the eighteenth-century, and also by seeking to locate him within his twentieth-century context. Firbank is radical in many ways, not only for his anticipation of Modernism, but also for his situating of queer lives, and queer joy, in the metropolis. Firbank’s

belatedness – his decadent turning back to past queer urban spaces and cultures – is in many ways an enabling force, allowing him to imagine utopian queer futures. Firbank’s urban pastoral constructs the city as a queer haven, albeit an occasionally precarious one, looking forward to later accounts of more liberated queer cities, by authors such as Edmund White, writing about New York; Armistead Maupin, writing about San Francisco; and Alan Hollinghurst, whose novels about gay London are inflected by his doctoral work on Firbank. There may have been, according to E. M. Forster, nothing ‘up to date’ about Firbank in 1936, but that is surely not the case in 2023.

¹ W. B. Yeats, ‘Introduction’, in *The Oxford Book of Modern Verse, 1892–1935*, ed. by W. B. Yeats (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1936), p. xi.

² E. M. Forster, ‘Ronald Firbank’, in *Abinger Harvest* (London: Edward Arnold, 1936), pp. 135-41 (p. 137).

³ Marion Thain and Ana Parejo Vadillo, eds, *Michael Field, the Poet: Published and Manuscript Materials* (Peterborough: Broadview Press, 2009), p. 261.

⁴ Ronald Firbank, *Vainglory with Inclinations and Caprice*, ed. by Richard Canning (London: Penguin, 2012), p. 86. All future references to *Vainglory* and *Caprice* are taken from this edition, with page numbers given in text.

⁵ Don Adams, ‘Ronald Firbank’s Radical Pastorals’, *Genre*, 35.1 (2002), 121-42; Don Adams, *Alternative Paradigms of Literary Realism* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), pp. 75-94.

⁶ Martin B. Lockerd, ‘Decadent Arcadias, Wild(e) Conversions, and Queer Celibacies in *Brideshead Revisited*’, *Modern Fiction Studies*, 64.2 (2018), 239-63 (p. 253); Alex Murray, ‘Decadence Revisited: Evelyn Waugh and the Afterlife of the 1890s’, *Modernism/Modernity*, 22.3 (2015), 593-607 (pp. 597-600).

⁷ Brigid Brophy, *Prancing Novelist: A Defence of Fiction in the Form of a Critical Biography in Praise of Ronald Firbank* (London: Macmillan, 1973), pp. 243-338; Ellis Hanson, *Decadence and Catholicism* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997), pp. 354-64.

⁸ W. S. Gilbert, *Patience* (Cambridge: Chadwyck-Healey, 1994), Act I, No. 6: Recit. & Song (Bunthorne) ‘Am I alone...?’

⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰ Matthew Bradley, ‘Sinful Cities and Ecclesiastical Excuses: The “Churches for Art’s Sake” Movement from the Century Guild to Eliot’, *The Yearbook of English Studies*, 37.1 (2007), 193-208 (p. 201).

¹¹ Lene Østermark-Johansen, ‘Character and Caricature’, in *Walter Pater’s European Imagination* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2022), pp. 158-205 (pp. 191-94).

¹² Joseph Bristow, *Effeminate England: Homoerotic Writing after 1885* (Buckingham: Open University Press, 1995), p. 105.

¹³ Matt Houlbrook, *Queer London: Perils and Pleasures in the Sexual Metropolis, 1918-1957* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2005), p. 114.

¹⁴ Oscar Wilde, *The Importance of Being Earnest*, in *The Complete Plays*, ed. by H. Montgomery Hyde (London: Methuen, 1988), pp. 213-90 (Act II, Scene 1, p. 265).

¹⁵ Walter Pater, ‘Winckelmann’, in *Studies in the History of the Renaissance* (London: Macmillan and Co., 1873), pp. 146-206 (p. 148).

¹⁶ Virginia Woolf, *Mrs Dalloway*, ed. by Elaine Showalter (London: Penguin, 1992), pp. 4 and 21-23.

¹⁷ Terry Gifford, *Pastoral*, 2nd edn (Abingdon: Routledge, 2020), pp. 2-5.

¹⁸ Peter V. Marinelli, *Pastoral* (London: Routledge, 2018), p. 59.

¹⁹ Havelock Ellis, *Studies in the Psychology of Sex*, 3rd edn, 3 vols (Philadelphia: F. A. Davis Company, 1915), II, p. 142.

²⁰ Alison Winch, ‘“Drinking a Dish of Tea with SapP?ho”’: The Sexual Fantasies of Lady Mary Wortley Montagu and Lord Byron’, *Women’s Writing*, 20.1 (2013), 82-99 (p. 84).

²¹ On the significance of mauve see, for example, Charlotte Ribeyrol, ‘John Singer Sargent and the *Fin de Siècle* Culture of Mauve’, *Visual Culture in Britain*, 19.1 (2018), 6-26.

²² Carl Van Vechten, ‘Ronald Firbank’, in *Ronald Firbank: Memoirs and Critiques*, ed. by Mervyn Horder (London: Duckworth, 1977), pp. 161-65 (p. 162).

- ²³ Lord Byron, *The Complete Poetical Works*, ed. by Jerome McGann, v: *Don Juan* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986), III. 87. 2 (p. 188).
- ²⁴ Miriam J. Benkovitz, *Ronald Firbank: A Biography* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1970), pp. 143-45.
- ²⁵ Meredith Martin, 'Marie-Antoinette and the Hameau Effect', in *Dairy Queens: The Politics of Pastoral Architecture from Catherine de' Medici to Marie-Antoinette* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2011), pp. 158-213 (pp. 160-64).
- ²⁶ Terry Castle, *Noël Coward and Radclyffe Hall: Kindred Spirits* (New York: Columbia Press, 1996), pp. 46 and 67.
- ²⁷ Virginia Woolf, *A Room of One's Own and Three Guineas*, ed. by Michèle Barrett (London: Penguin, 1993), p. 67.
- ²⁸ Nigel Nicolson, ed., *Leave the Letters till We're Dead: The Letters of Virginia Woolf*, 6 vols (London: The Hogarth Press, 1980), VI: 1936-1941, p. 526.
- ²⁹ Woolf, *Room of One's Own*, p. 81.
- ³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 74.
- ³¹ Kate Hext, 'Rethinking the Origins of Camp: The Queer Correspondence of Carl Van Vechten and Ronald Firbank', *Modernism/Modernity*, 27 (2020), 165-83 (p. 177).
- ³² Ellis Hanson, 'The Queer Drift of Firbank', in *Decadence in the Age of Modernism*, ed. by Kate Hext and Alex Murray (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2019), pp. 118-34 (p. 120).