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| **Your article** |
| **Plomer, William (1903-1973)** |
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| William Charles Franklyn Plomer, CBE, was a South-African-born British writer and editor, and a self-styled man of letters. Education at St. John’s College, Johannesburg and Rugby, England began a life of travel that informed his writing. Plomer briefly established himself as a farmer in South Africa in 1921, and utilised a national imaginary to inspire his first novel, *Turbott Wolfe* (1925), controversial in its criticism of white rule, and the equally antagonistic journal, *Voorslag* (1926-27), which Plomer founded with poet Roy Campbell. Plomer left for Japan in 1926, where he worked as a language teacher while publishing two collections of poetry, *Note for Poems* (1927) and *The Family Tree* (1929), and two collections of short stories, *I Speak of Africa* (1927) and *Paper Houses* (1929), all issued by Hogarth Press. His time in Japan had a lasting effect on his work and produced not only the Japanese stories of *Paper Houses* but also his second novel *Sado* (1931), issued after Plomer settled in England in 1929. In London, he befriended his publishers, Virginia and Leonard Woolf, who introduced him to members of the Bloomsbury Group. His reputation as a writer, and his work as editor for publisher Jonathan Cape from 1937 until his death in 1973, swelled the number of his literary acquaintances. His correspondences included John Betjeman, Elizabeth Bowen (who wrote fan letters to Plomer), Christopher Isherwood, and Edith Sitwell. He became close friends with E. M. Forster and Ian Fleming, for whom he acted as editor; he was instrumental in persuading Cape to publish Fleming’s first Bond novel, *Casino Royal* (1953). Anthony Butts (brother of writer Mary Butts) wrote to Plomer in 1928; meeting in 1929, they would become long-term lovers, and embarked on a tour of Europe that same year, spending a formative period for Plomer in Greece. His “Greek” poems in *The Fivefold Screen* (1932), *Visiting the Caves* (1936), and *Collected Poems* (1973), and short stories in *The Child of Queen Victoria and Other Stories* (1933) allowed Plomer to explore his homosexuality, which played an important part in his work, hinted at in his first novel, though expressed more fully in later works such as the *The Dorking Thigh and Other Satires* (1945). In 1942, Plomer published *In a Bombed House, 1941: Elegy in Memory of Anthony Butts*; Butts had committed suicide in 1941. Plomer later edited and published Butts’s novel, *Curious Relations* (1945), a satire of the Butts family, and wrote a sequel, *Museum Pieces* (1952), acerbic in its portrayal of Butts’s sister, Mary, whom Plomer greatly disliked. If his writings of the 1930s made Plomer’s name, with satire often giving his work its edge, then his role as editor of the three volume (1938-40) *Selections from the Diary of the Rev. Francis Kilvert (1870–1879)* brought him equal renown, and set the more sober tone found in his writings of old age. Though he stopped editorial work for Jonathan Cape during World War Two, while he worked for British Naval intelligence (1940-45), Plomer continued to write, and published an autobiography, *Double Lives*, in 1943. After the war, he wrote as a librettist, beginning a productive association with Benjamin Britten with the libretto for his opera *Gloriana* (1953). His last was for Britten’s *The Prodigal Son* in 1968. After *Collected Poems* in 1960, he produced two new collections, *A Choice of Ballads* (1960) and *Taste and Remember* (1966), and from 1968 to 1972 he was president of the Poetry Society. In 1973, Plomer, with Alan Aldridge, won the Whitbread Award for children's literature, for *The Butterfly Ball and the Grasshopper's Feast*, inspired by the 1802 William Roscoe poem of the same name. He was also awarded the Queen's Gold Medal for Poetry in 1963, and a CBE in 1968. The Plomer archive is held by the University of Durham; the New York Public Library also holds significant papers. |
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