



Bringing the Boy Back Home: Queer Domesticity and Egalitarian Relationships in Postwar London Novels

**Martin Dines
(Kingston University, UK)**

***The Literary London Journal*, Volume 10 Number 2 (Autumn 2013)**

<1>In his ground-breaking and wide-ranging study, *Queer London: Perils and Pleasures in the Sexual Metropolis, 1917-1957*, historian Matt Houlbrook maps the diverse spaces in the capital in which queer men sought sexual encounters and affective relations with other men. [1] As well as the numerous public spaces that many such men frequented, and which provided the bases for a visible queer subculture, Houlbrook's study also attends to the private, domestic environments provided by the metropolitan housing market. Although relatively difficult for the historian to account for, domestic privacy nonetheless provided a crucial resource for queer men in an often-hostile city. It was not, however, a resource that was distributed evenly or experienced uniformly. To be sure, different types of residential space afforded varying levels of privacy: the self-contained apartments of the most affluent almost guaranteed freedom from surveillance; in cheaper accommodation – such as a single furnished room in a subdivided house – attracting unwanted attention was a more likely occurrence (114-18). But if the boundary between public and private space was drawn differently depending on accommodation arrangements, it was also blurred by 'interactions [which] brought the city into the home' (130), such as when strangers were invited in from the street or from commercial establishments for casual sex or during open-door 'queer parties'. It would seem that for many queer men – particularly those hailing from the middle classes – this permeability was deeply troubling. The city, coded as dangerous, disorderly and disreputable, was anathema to the kind of domestic, stable companionate relationships that helped many men maintain a sense of respectability and self-worth. Nevertheless the sexual metropolis continued to exert a strong hold. Many middle-class queer men remained 'obsessively fascinated' by its enticements and depravities, and whilst they 'tried to distance [themselves] from queer urban life, [they] could never turn [their] gaze away' (215). This ambivalence is evinced in a number of novels published in the 1950s and 1960s. These fictions provide rare extended meditations on queer domesticity during this period; moreover, they articulate how the ambition to organise queer relationships within private, domestic settings was so often problematised by the inescapable presence of the city.

<2>Probably the best known narrative account of the oscillation between desire and disgust for queer London is Rodney Garland's 1953 novel *The Heart in Exile*, to which Houlbrook and others (Hornsey, Houlbrook and Waters) have paid close attention. In order to solve the mystery of a friend's suicide, the middle-class protagonist Anthony Page, a psychiatrist, is obliged to revisit the city's queer sites – pubs, cruising grounds, gentleman's clubs – some of which he frequented in a more dissolute period of his life before the war. Deeply knowledgeable of but apparently aloof from these habitats and their denizens, Page makes for an ideal guide to London's queer 'underground'. Yet his encounters with this degraded realm disturb him profoundly, as they threaten to rekindle desires which have been repressed in the process of forging a mature, respectable identity organised around domesticity and professional responsibility. These anxieties impel Page to retreat to the private space of his well-ordered home. Fortunately, a life of solitude is not to be Page's destiny; in the last pages of the novel he takes up with his housekeeper Terry, a conclusion which suggests that queer sexuality may indeed be successfully managed within a loving, monogamous and domestic configuration.

<3>Garland provides few details of the workings of this almost miraculous union (save to specify that Terry is reassuringly ruggedly masculine, whilst at the same time possessing 'feminine' traits in all the right ways – it seems Page will never have to worry about having to keep his apartment clean). Arguably the novel is beset by a problem of representation: the queer city, as fascinating as it is troubling, dominates the narrative; by contrast the domestic, companionate relationship is barely adumbrated. Page's relationship with his former servant is, quite simply, uninteresting – that is rather the point. But several subsequent, and hitherto critically disregarded, novels – James Courage's *A Way of Love* (1959), Martyn Goff's *The Youngest Director* (1961) and Rodney Garland's *Sorcerer's Broth* (1966) – do place domestic queer relationships centre stage. [2] Their primary motivation for doing so is the urgent need to present homosexual unions as analogous to heterosexual ones. By situating their homosexual protagonists firmly within bourgeois domesticity, these novels show that homosexual men could live respectable and productive lives, just like the rest of society, if only they were freed from the debilitating effects of punitive laws and misconceived prejudice. [3] The novels of Courage, Goff and Garland, then, are propelled by a liberal impulse: more or less explicitly, they make a case for the decriminalisation of male homosexuality.

<4>The writer Angus Wilson purportedly suggested that Goff's novel even altered the climate of opinion about homosexuality and helped pave the way for the partial decriminalisation of homosexual relations in 1967 (Walsh). If such a claim over-estimates the influence of these novels, undeniably they spoke in concert with the Wolfenden Report, whose findings, published in 1957, provided the framework for the Sexual Offences Bill that was passed into statute a full decade later. Certainly, Wolfenden's recommendation that only sexual relations between men which took place *in private* should be legalised found support in these novels' attempts at depicting orderly queer domestic life. In addition the novels reproduce the model of the 'respectable', private homosexual which dominated liberal reform rhetoric. Examples of this figure are in evidence in texts such as *The Homosexual and Society* (1952) by Gordon Westwood (actually the sociologist Michael Schofield) and *Against the Law* (1955) by Peter Wildeblood (convicted alongside the Peer Lord Montagu of Berliou for various homosexual offences in a high-profile trial that concluded in 1954), as well as in the cautious campaigning of the Homosexual Law Reform Society, established in 1958. Noticeably, however, the same kind of distinction was invoked repeatedly by those less

enamoured of reform. For some, decriminalisation was only palatable because it promised to keep city streets clear of more 'obvious' and unpleasant homosexual types. Said the Conservative MP Sir Hugh Linstead, 'if we no longer impose a legal code of behaviour which we do not extract from anyone else, we can surely expect homosexuals to accept the same responsibility as the rest of us [by] behaving in public' (Higgins 124). Thus reformers' emphasis on privacy and normalcy came with considerable risks and indeed costs. Notably, the 1967 act made it easier for the Police to arrest and convict men seeking sex in public places; conviction rates in the 1970s were three times higher than they were two decades previous (145-6).

<5>Clearly writers of the post-war period cannot have predicted all of the consequences of decriminalisation; nevertheless several novels noticeably strain the liberal and normative discourse of reform, demonstrating some of its limitations and contradictions. For while they typically situate their ideal homosexual protagonist – typically a rational, restrained professional man – in suitably private, domestic surroundings, these novels also seek to establish convincingly sexual relationships in the same households. They do so, once again, to demonstrate the full equivalence of homosexual and heterosexual partnerships, and to exhibit the sort of worthwhile lives legal reform would defend. However, the most readily available model of an actively sexual, queer relationship seems hardly to fit comfortably in these bourgeois settings, for it involves clear differentials in age and class. Further, these texts show that the privacy of the domestic sphere – regardless of the legal status of activities which take place there – is far from sacrosanct. Thus these narratives extol the virtues of domestic privacy while simultaneously showing that such privacy, for queer men, is unlikely ever to be secure. Furthermore, the novels make apparent that the processes involved in producing and consuming fiction blur such a clear distinction between public and private worlds: all manner of people, respectable or not, are shown to buy and read queer-themed novels, which appear in different guises, both worthy and insalubrious. Their protagonists are also wary of the tendency of these novels to show up in the wrong places; as such, they prove unreliable vehicles for presenting ordered, private queer lives. Hence, while *Courage's A Way of Love*, Goff's *The Youngest Director* and Garland's *Sorcerer's Broth* may aim to show how domesticised homosexual relationships are unremarkable, they make fascinating reading precisely for the ways in which they demonstrate the desire for queer domestic life to be burdened by a number of contradictory tensions.

<6>By exploring these manifold pressures and resulting anxieties, this article intervenes in current scholarly discussions concerned with contemporary and historical queer domesticities, both in London and beyond (e.g., Cook, Gorman-Murray, Jennings, Murphy, Oram, Pilkey). Much of this work has considered the extent to which queer people have challenged and transformed dominant, heterosexual paradigms of domesticity in their own home lives. Such scholarship has also tended to foreground the diversity among realisations of queer domesticity. If this article dwells mainly on the visions of a relatively privileged minority, it indicates how narratives of queer domestic life of the post-war period were so often shot through with differentials of power relating to age, class and wealth, even while they strove to depict egalitarian relationships. And as the next section demonstrates, the principal model for such domestic arrangements may well have been the middle-class heterosexual companionate marriage, yet superimposed on this is a distinctly queer configuration – the man and his boy lover – a contradiction which threatens to throw the more conventional ordering into disarray.

Even when they attempt to formulate the most normative of arrangements, then, these stories of domestic life remain irresolvably queer.

Vertical Affairs and Horizontal Friendships: Locating Male Homosexual Relationships

<7>As the 1950s and 1960s progressed, home spaces in queer novels by male authors became increasingly identified with, if not located in, the suburbs of London. [4] This outward movement seems motivated by a desire on the part of authors to distance their respectable protagonists from disreputable queer urban milieus, which were becoming increasingly visible and vilified. The press was probably responsible for a large part of this heightened scrutiny. Whilst the period saw an increase in discussion of sexual matters in British newspapers generally (particularly following the Kinsey reports), a number of sensational tabloid exposés helped focus public attention on the particular ‘problem’ of homosexuality, from Douglas Warth’s notorious ‘Evil Men’ articles for the *Sunday Pictorial* in 1952, to a number of subsequent court cases featuring prominent men convicted of importuning or for engaging in homosexual activities, often in London’s West End. In addition, many central London locations came under increased police surveillance; the late 1940s saw a considerable spike in queer incidents resulting in conviction. This intensification of police activity, Houlbrook observes, was though not experienced evenly, and ‘fell most heavily upon those who relied on public space for sex and sociability, because they were working class, young or married’. By contrast, those who ‘rejected the disreputable public realm could remain officially invisible’; often such a move was a measure of bourgeois privilege, in particular access to private space (37).

<8>The post-war rhetoric of urban renewal perpetuated the same dynamic. Projects which promised civic order – Patrick Abercrombie’s visions for rebuilding London for instance, or the Council of Industrial Design’s showcase exhibitions – helped raise suspicions about all manner of unregulated, unproductive and therefore antisocial uses of space in the capital city. At the same time, Richard Hornsey argues, the ascendancy of medical and psychological aetiologies over more behavioural models of homosexuality – which had understood queerness as ‘the sorry result of repeated capitulation to deadly metropolitan temptation’ – allowed for the emergence of a ‘conscientious homosexual [...] who turned away from such behaviour and sought his place within the egalitarian diversity of the postwar community’ (119). The overlapping discourses of renewal and reform thus offered space for a (bourgeois) homosexual citizen so long as his sexual practices were only ever carried out in private; public queer activity remained a sign ‘of a lack of purposive self-management’ of the kind that underpinned visions of post-war urban reconstruction (32).

<9>Certainly, the insistent location by queer authors of their protagonists in the middle-class home also corresponds to broader shifts in English bourgeois culture. As Alison Light has argued, the traumas of the Great War bred a newly anti-heroic strain of masculinity which forwent adventure for domestic contentment. Light understands the privacy of middle-class life to have taken on, in the interwar years, ‘a new public and national significance’, and she invokes ‘the suburban husband pottering in his herbaceous borders’ as a national figure who quite eclipses the likes of Tommy Atkins (8). [5] This idealisation in the first half of the twentieth century of the private, domestic man combined with an increased emphasis on physical intimacy as the basis for companionate marriage. What Marcus Collins has called the rise of ‘mutuality’ articulated

in marriage guidance texts such as Marie Stopes's *Married Love* (1918) and by the progressive intelligentsia in the inter-war period also helped shift the purview of masculine identity towards married life at home, which had become established as the 'primary arena for emotional expression and satisfaction' (Collins 93). During the same period and into the post-war years, middle-class queer men translated these ideals into their own lives. The journalist Anthony Grey, for example, who met his partner in the 1950s, remembers appreciating 'the enormous privilege and happiness of a settled relationship in a joint household with somebody who is absolutely a central part of my world' (quoted in Houlbrook 202).

<10>Many queer novels of the 1950s and 60s, however, show that achieving and maintaining 'a settled relationship in a joint household' is no easy business. One reason for this has to do with the nature of the bourgeois home. Far from providing a safe retreat from opprobrium, these home spaces are shown to be distinctly vulnerable to outside surveillance and incursion precisely because domestic life is a measure of middle-class respectability. They are frequently also places of work, and therefore never fully private. And since these queer households are to a considerable extent modelled on the conventional bourgeois home, associations of 'normal' family life have the potential to disrupt and even scupper the queer relationships situated there. These novels show that behaving normally, for queers, is not without its risks.

<11>Queer companionate relationships also prove to be fraught thanks to their class dynamics. In these stories typically the bourgeois protagonist attempts to install his lower-class, younger lover – his 'boy' – in his own home. Such cross-class and age-differentiated liaisons were frequent in early twentieth-century London. Houlbrook has shown how such engagements were facilitated by differentials of wealth, which sometimes rendered them profitable for the younger man, and by dominant working-class ideals of masculinity, which rendered them permissible (so long as certain roles were maintained). Also, such interactions were prompted by the relative unavailability of female sexual partners to working-class men, due to there being few opportunities for socialisation between the sexes and because of the stigma attached to premarital sex and unwanted pregnancy. In the post-war years, however, age and class-differentiated queer relationships became less tenable as, amongst other things, public awareness of homosexuality increased, and working men came to be less in need of wealthy benefactors as their own living standards improved markedly, which in turn helped establish new geographies of sociability between young men and women (Houlbrook 167-94). An appreciation of this shift is captured rather sharply in a discussion which takes place in Rodney Garland's 1953 novel *Heart in Exile*: one character – an MP – complains that the problem is that 'there's now full employment'. He explains that before the war, boys

were yours for the asking. [They] accepted us because we were class; and not only that: they liked us because unlike women, we didn't cost them money. I suppose we made a fuss of them, which their girls didn't. Anyhow, today they can afford women, and if they don't want women, they have plenty of money for other amusements.
(Garland, *The Heart in Exile*, 99)

Thus, in part due to post-war prosperity, the non-egalitarian relationship is a formation that has become largely residual. For those like the MP who were heavily invested in such encounters, their demise is surely to be lamented. For the novel's protagonist,

however, its passing will leave more room for, and enable wider recognition of, 'respectable', companionate relationships. Yet, non-egalitarian modes continue to exert a persistent presence in queer post-war novels, and this is because of the difficulty in demonstrating how a convincingly sexual dynamic might organise egalitarian alternatives. It seems that as yet there is no conceptual model available for a sexy union between equals. But sexual intimacy must be worked into the picture somehow, in order to show that the relationship functions just as any successful heterosexual union should. Thus the apparently residual non-egalitarian formation is pressed into service – it seems the only appropriate model available.

<12>In their discussion of *The Heart in Exile*, Matt Houlbrook and Chris Waters conclude that the cross-class, age-differentiated relationship 'haunts' Garland's novel. *The Heart in Exile*, they contend, is in part 'shaped by an engagement with the past', and 'echoes themes established in an earlier queer cultural moment' (Houlbrook and Waters 163). Generally speaking, however, this kind of 'backward glance' is not what steers post-war novels which attempt to articulate a respectable mode of homosexuality whilst also presenting cross-class and age-differentiated relationships between men. The following from Martyn Goff's 1961 novel *The Youngest Director* is indicative. Regarding his strategies for managing his sex life, Goff's upper-middle-class protagonist declares: 'either you set out to emphasise your superior status and tried to establish a simple, vertical relationship (as he had done on many occasions in the R.A.F.); or you trod super-warily on every occasion and enjoyed the fuller horizontal friendship' (Goff 19). Admittedly, the protagonist looks back on his 'simpler' days in the military with a degree of nostalgia (87), but clearly, both approaches are options that have previously been entertained and which remain possibilities. While the egalitarian relationship might seem preferable because it is 'fuller', that is, more involving and long-lasting, it is shaded by inauthenticity: a carefully choreographed performance involving much self-censorship is required to establish this kind of 'friendship'. In this instance the narrator has just berated himself for speaking a little too breezily about his wealthy background while showing a young, working-class man around his comfortable home; evidently he is gunning for the latter kind of affair and is attempting to approach his lower-class visitor on an equal footing. Goff's novel is representative of a wider determination in post-war queer fiction to *manage* age and class-differentiated relationships. These texts show their continued desirability; at the same time, they display an awareness that the terms of such encounters, and the terrain in which they must be played out, has changed. Foremost, these novels demonstrate how the distinct aspirations of the younger, lower-class partner have to be recognised by the older man if he wants to hold on to him, yet the relationship must be situated in the older partner's home for it to conform to the requirements of a respectable, companionate relationship. But these two needs often do not square up, as the frequent hostility to the idea of being 'kept' from the younger partner demonstrates. Rather than being preoccupied with the past, then, these novels would be better understood as attempting to work through these contradictions, as struggling to reconcile two incompatible modes of queer life during this period of rapid socio-economic change.

Loving Animals: A Way of Love

<13>*A Way of Love*, written by the New Zealander James Courage and published in 1959 by Jonathan Cape, is the account of the middle-aged architect, Bruce Quantock, who tells of his two-year relationship with a young Cornishman, Philip Dill. Of the three

post-war novels examined here, *Courage's* is the least obviously political. The illegality of their love life, for instance, is never mentioned. Bruce declares his motivation for writing his account to be instead purely cathartic: his love for the departed Philip was like no other he has ever experienced. Yet while he insists that the story has no further significance, he gives voice to the opinions of other homosexual friends and acquaintances – including a novelist – who urge him to write, dismissing his reservations about the affair's 'ephemerality'. One friend presses the point by asking 'If it comes to that, how long would many an ordinary so-called normal marriage last [...] if there were no legal ties and no children to hold the partners together?' (*Courage* 249). There seems to be a fairly obvious subtext here: the institutions of marriage and family are what define 'ordinariness'; the lack of legal approbation renders queer relationships otherwise. Its narrator and putative author never explicitly endorses this line of argument, but by unabashedly presenting the two-year affair as its central story, *A Way of Love* (as its title indicates) does try to show that a queer relationship is in many ways equivalent to an 'ordinary' heterosexual union. Noticeably, the erotic dimensions of Bruce's narrative are not underplayed. Bruce is not ashamed of his sexual history and even demonstrates that he is 'no stranger to the land of Sodom' (53) after he picks up a wanton young thing at a queer party. Bruce's and Philip's mutual desire is emphasised several times, and there are allusions to the education of the younger man by his older lover in matters carnal. Indeed, their relationship is precipitated by a jolting moment of physical contact. At their first awkward meeting in a seat row in the Royal Festival Hall, their faces clash, and the encounter, which perhaps metonymises sexual congress, is repeatedly recalled in wistful fashion by both parties. Bruce and Philip navigate a queer way of love, but the older partner at least rarely forgets that the relationship's primary basis is erotic.

<14>The novel's strong emphasis on its protagonists' sexuality is though tempered by Bruce's bourgeois credentials. *A Way of Love* opens with a seemingly anodyne biographical introduction: 'My name is Bruce Quantock. I am an architect, forty-nine years old, a bachelor, living in my own small house north of Regent's Park in London' (9). In *The Spiv and the Architect: Unruly Life in Postwar London*, Richard Hornsey notes the significance of Bruce's profession, remarking that 'the postwar architect, of course, was the key cultural agent in urban reconstruction, poised to reform both the citizen's spatial environment and – by extension – his or her consensual orientation toward the performance of civic life' (Hornsey 17). An architect protagonist seems to promise the narrative's 'alignment with sanctioned codes of urban comportment' (29). Indeed, only two pages into the novel, Bruce describes how well he is able to manage his sexual instincts in public. Whilst at a concert, he is beset by a terrible thirst, which leads him on to thinking about the various needs of the body – 'that envelope of a man I honour for its pleasures and its carnal beauty and whose desires I have been far from despising' (*Courage* 10). They are though urges he is able to manage: 'a sensual pleasure could be postponed', he reassures himself (10). Thus while *A Way of Love's* protagonist admits to the potency of sexual desire, he promises its fastidious containment from London's new public spaces.

<15>Actually, Bruce's relationship with the capital is ambivalent. The location of the pair's first meeting is most significant: the Royal Festival Hall, the centrepiece of the 1951 Festival of Britain, is arguably the jewel in the crown of London's post-war reconstruction. The second time they meet, the younger man discloses that he has been returning there repeatedly to look out for Bruce; this is hardly the proper orderly use of space envisaged by its architects. Later, one of his clients remarks that Bruce, the

successful architect, 'seem[s] to belong so much to London' (46). Yet his work always takes him outside the city: to a planned school in Surrey, to private houses in Berkshire. If the Home Counties and more distant provinces are identified with 'normal' life, London for Bruce is irreducibly queer. Indeed it is for precisely this reason that the architect feels most at home in the city. While Bruce is envious of his sister's conventional familial existence in rural Suffolk, Philip's desire for an entirely domestic relationship isolated from the world (the presence of Bruce's dotting female housekeeper provides their set up further credence as a family of sorts) leads the more seasoned man to suffer a certain

homesickness for the company of [...] members of what I may call without exaggeration our immense league – members who were scattered and for the most part strangers to one another, but who shared a common erotic compulsion, [...] often a common glossary, and who rejoiced in the anonymity of cities. (145)

Such a frank admission of the need for, and even affinity with, a semi-public urban queer milieu is decidedly rare in post-war homosexual novels. *A Way of Love* indicates how the figure of the architect, that paragon of self-restraint and agent of civic order, is as liable as anyone else to engage in compulsive behaviour. Moreover, he cannot be relied upon to perform or even avow his public regulatory role; Bruce's 'homesickness' indicates how he might eschew conventional social distinctions for alternative alignments – not ordered, purposeful and public, but 'scattered', sensual and anonymous.

<16> Bruce's neat home, which is also mentioned in the novel's opening paragraph that establishes the protagonist-narrator's identity, similarly fails to provide secure respite from the queer city. Predictably, given his profession, Bruce's home life is simple and his tastes in interior decoration tend towards the modern. The flat of his friend Wallace, whose preferences accord with his own, features 'surfaces of pale wood', 'white carpets' and 'pictures by Braque and Hitchens' (36-7). This modern interior seems to promise a certain orderliness and stability: Wallace has lived there with his partner Martin for eight years. By contrast, the 'exuberant', 'indigestible' interior of Victor Hallowes's apartment – stuffed with 'plunder from several chateaux, not to mention a Venetian palace or two' (15-16) – corresponds with a much more louche lifestyle of frequent parties and a never-ending supply of boys fresh from the provinces or foreign countries. Even though Bruce refuses to denounce Victor's tendencies – in fact, Bruce insists he respects his friend and former lover for, amongst other things, 'his ability to enjoy a variegated love-life' (15) – a clear distinction has been drawn that suggests one domestic set up rather than the other is conducive to stable, long-term queer relationships. Yet Bruce's house is irreversibly disordered by the animal presence of his young lover. Indeed, much is made of the house's proximity to the Zoo. On one summer night Bruce remarks how 'London became like a tropical city. I could not sleep, or slept half naked, hearing in a doze the distant bark and cough of the leopards [...], the exasperated and disturbing cries of the cranes. The jungle it seemed, came nearer, an effluence of the darkness beyond the open windows' (203). The 'jungle' is Bruce's metaphor for the queer world, especially its purely sexual interactions (58). Tellingly, the promiscuous Victor is referred to in animal terms: 'feline' (15), 'cat-like' (20), 'reptilian' (195). But then, so is Philip: he is repeatedly deemed tigerish; the parallel foreshadows the relationship's demise. This jungle, evidently, cannot be brought safely into the home.

<17> If queer sexuality unsettles Bruce's vision of home life, class differences between the older and younger man serve to make their living together a difficult business. An

evening of domestic contentment leads Philip to delight in the idea of 'us together as though we were married' (124). Bruce speaks too of 'relax[ing] into the private persons we essentially desired to be' (137). However, the younger man quickly feels stifled: 'I've got to think of [...] my future as a man'; 'I'm your boy [...] but that's hardly a career' (130). Being transformed into a middle-class spouse also feels inauthentic: Philip balks at the idea of being kitted out by Bruce's tailor, declaring 'I don't know what he might turn me into' (144). Bruce thinks he understands the problem – after all, he shares Philip's inauspicious provincial beginnings, and recalls the years of application that brought him his current standing. But in giving space for his lover's ambitions for self-improvement, Bruce is only confirming their differences: he feels that Philip is an investment, his 'creation' (206); he seems most pleased that Philip's first work placement, as a landscape gardener, hardens the younger man's muscles and even, when he returns home in his soiled work gear, that he could conceivably be mistaken for an 'unknown young navvy' (189). Probably the reinstalling of class distinctions is reassuring for the likes of Bruce: at one point he is reminded that he has made a habit of harbouring young men who then outgrow him, acknowledging that 'medical students grow into qualified doctors' (39).

<18>Thus *A Way of Love* shows that housing the queer relationship in the middle-class home is beset with contradictions. As an orderly, private space, the home offers a retreat from the disreputable queer world but also threatens stifling isolation from it. As a bourgeois space it both elides and accentuates class differentials. The narration of this domestic relationship is itself conundrum. Bruce is motivated to write a first-person account which shows how queers may love like 'ordinary' people, yet his account inevitably depicts failure. This is in part because a successful, comfortable relationship does not make for interesting storytelling – for instance, Bruce feels obliged to compress a period of contentment into the single banality 'all went well' (124). But the failure also results because Bruce cannot both pursue an affair and write about it – as either activity places exhaustive demands on his private life. As Wallace puts it, a choice must be made between 'book or bed' (112). In the end, the pressures of domestic life prove too much for Philip. He leaves Bruce because he fears he cannot prevent himself from turning into someone like Victor but also because he comes to see their togetherness as aping 'normal' family life: the relationship is too near that of father and son. After they split up, Philip vows he will marry; Bruce's sense of responsibility leads the older man to harbour his own nephew. Bruce signs off bitterly by insisting his avuncular role to be no substitute for what he had with Philip. This coda carries an admonitory message about the comforts of homosexual 'married life': if one seeks to base one's relationship on 'normal' family life, it seems to suggest, then one may as well *be* normal.

From Chelsea to Chingford: *The Youngest Director* and *Sorcerer's Broth*

<19>*The Youngest Director*, published by Putnam in 1961, appeared after the *Lady Chatterley trial*, which probably allowed its author Martyn Goff to make his attack on the injustices faced by homosexuals more forcefully than *Courage*. Goff is even prepared to provide a few details about his protagonists' sex lives: their preferred roles and how they deal with occasional frustrations experienced between the sheets. Such revelations are there as further evidence that a domesticised homosexual relationship is fully equivalent to its heterosexual opposite. Otherwise Goff's novel reprises the age- and class-stratified queer relationship seen in *A Way of Love*. The novel is focalised through the thirty-four-year-old Leonard Bissel, a company director in a powerful import-export corporation.

Leonard meets the young John Cramer, a hotel porter, and quickly moves him into his small but well-appointed house in a gentrified street in Chelsea. Leonard's home, though, is identified with the suburbs, most notably in the single instance in the novel that leaves Leonard's perspective:

Sunday's weather sent the small cars pouring out of London for the coast [...] one side of each of the main roads was occupied by a solid line of family saloons [...] Just off the main roads, thousands of other cars stood outside the trim villas and trimmer maisonnettes while their owners anointed them with water, detergents and polish.
(Goff 142-3)

Leonard scoffs at the constant slow stream of traffic along the Kings Road – but he is himself washing his car (and John is inside washing the dishes). Yes, their motor is an MG roadster, not a family saloon, but Leonard is actually preparing to leave for a meal at his parental home in Surrey. The message is reasonably clear: the queer couple is distinct, yet their habits and needs are quite familiar and ordinary. And the imagined proximity of Leonard and John's home to suburban normalcy is underlined by an even more vociferous distancing of their milieu from the queer denizens of 'the seedier districts of London [...] where disordered sexual lives spilled into even more disordered daily ones' (45).

<20>The orderliness of Leonard and John's life together has an explicit model: 'I want a relationship just like a heterosexual marriage', opines Leonard. The problem with the age-structured kind is that it is too identified with the queer world, hence Leonard's insisting 'John's not my fancy boy, but an equal partner!' (93) Again, such equality is easily claimed, difficult to achieve. The novel deals with many of the tensions that might arise from denying a relationship's basis in difference: Leonard is frustrated by how John spends his leisure time unproductively, John anguishes that he's just a possession; it is the younger man, however, who seems more ready to admit that his partner's different carriage and means are alluring. As with Quantock's reimagining of Philip as an 'unknown young navvy' in *A Way of Love*, Goff shows how the sheer sexiness of differentials in class, age and indeed power continually reasserts itself. As Alan Sinfield has argued, it may ultimately be futile to evade these differentials since they structure our psychic lives just as they organise the societies in which we live.

<21>Once again, though, the problem is not so much the dynamics of the queer relationship as the home itself. Certainly, just as in Courage's novel, the domestic environment of the bourgeois homosexual protagonist promises a certain degree of order and decorum. Leonard's tastes, however, sit uncomfortably between the clean modernism of Bruce and the dissolute eclecticism of Victor; indeed, he feels the need to guard 'carefully against the more obvious outbursts of *chi-chi*' (Goff 10). The problem with the private home for the likes of Leonard Bissel, whose social and professional lives are equally demanding, is that it is hardly private at all, and as such threatens to be revealing. To push the point his house is laden with mirrors; we catch Leonard perusing his reflection, concerned that those brown suede shoes of his 'gave something [...] away' (10). That one of these mirrors at the novel's opening is smashed not only warns of troubles ahead but identifies their precise locus. Leonard is a corporation man and is under pressure from his boss to marry. Marriage, various American studies are said to show, make for more productive workers, and just as importantly, homes with wives are required to host clients. It becomes painfully obvious to Leonard that whilst he needs the

job to keep the house and to keep the boy, the house minus boy plus wife is required to keep the job. Leonard is finally sacked after an envious closeted homosexual colleague informs on him. The bourgeois home then affords no private retreat for queers, no matter how orderly and otherwise normative their lives may be. The 'privacy' of the domestic sphere, Goff's novel shows, is ineluctably a public concern. Even the decriminalisation of homosexuality, which the Wolfenden Report recommended to be private acts between consenting adults (and, noticeably, John is at the threshold age of twenty-one) would seem to afford little respite from the various pressures placed upon the queer home described by Goff's novel.

<22>Rodney Garland's *Sorcerer's Broth*, published by W. H. Allen in 1966, appeared just before decriminalisation. What is especially noteworthy about this novel, though, is that it is told from the perspective of the lower-class character – a conceit which does not become commonplace until the recent rise of queer historical novels, such as Sarah Waters's *Tipping the Velvet* (1998) and Jonathan Kemp's *London Triptych* (2010). Also, the protagonist of *Sorcerer's Broth* is emphatically suburban: he hails not from Chelsea but Chingford. The young Don Apps works as a floorwalker in a West End Gentleman's outfitters. The story begins with Don's meeting with a customer who is clearly interested in procuring more than just an overcoat; Don quickly becomes romantically involved with this man, one Major Ray Watkinson. Of all the novels discussed here, *Sorcerer's Broth* is the most vociferous about steering clear of queer urban milieus; Don is particularly scandalised by the idea of visiting a queer pub. Indeed, perhaps by association the whole of the West End is considered dubious – where Don and Ray meet for a second time, next to the site of a skyscraper under construction, is dismissed as a 'sordid backwater' (Garland, *Sorcerer's Broth* 9). (The building in question is probably Centre Point.)

<23>As in the earlier novels, much of the action in *Sorcerer's Broth* takes place in the older man's home. But Ray's dwellings aren't quite the respectable habitats of the architect and the company director – their opulence invites suspicion. Ray's 'mysterious', 'almost sinister' demeanour render him as something of a bluebeard figure, though he is all the more alluring for it. Ray too is a company director, but he also robs banks. Indeed, he sees himself as an outlaw: his criminal activities are a vengeful assault on a society which affords him no place, though it becomes clear that his behaviour is really an anguished response to being abandoned by his upper-class lover at the end of the war. The age- and class-differentiated relationship is blamed throughout the novel. A former schoolmaster of Don's encourages him to take up with Ray and gives a homily on the benefits of such arrangements to both parties (31). But then, he is later convicted of interfering with minors. Further, Ray and Don's relationship is marked by somewhat sadomasochistic turns. Don later takes up with Benjy, a bank clerk who receives a gunshot wound from Ray during his final job. The sensitive, perspicacious young Benjy is evidently a more appropriate partner. What is more, he even lives in Chingford, and their relationship flourishes in the parlours of their suburban homes. Noticeably, though, Chingford is marked as a place of lower-middle-class aspiration; Don's mother is herself the offspring of a cross-class relationship, something which enables her to claim status. These attitudes certainly rub off on Don, who is pretentious and fixated on material possessions to the end. Indeed, ultimately it seems Don's lovers are in some sense interchangeable, for they are frequently reduced to their materiality: he fixates on their eyes, Ray's steel greys and Benjy's china blues. Also, Don suggests he will continue to learn from Benjy, and so rather reinstalls himself as the junior partner in the relationship. Once again, relocating the queer relationships to bourgeois domesticity –

even in one located in the far-flung suburbs – fails to neutralise entirely their less reputable aspects.

Reading the Queer Novel and the Return to the City

<24> 'Rodney Garland' was actually a pseudonym. In the early fifties it was employed by the Hungarian émigré Adam de Hegedus, who penned *The Heart in Exile*, followed by *The Troubled Midnight* in 1954, a novel inspired by the defection of Guy Burgess and Donald Maclean to the Soviet Union. De Hegedus was an ex-diplomat and journalist who also published several works of fiction and non-fiction under his own name, though none of these attracted as much attention as *The Heart in Exile*. The details of de Hegedus's later life are uncertain. He is reputed to have committed suicide in west London in 1958, though no records have been found which confirm this. If true, then the three novels attributed to Rodney Garland published in the 1960s, *Hell and High Water* (1962), *A World without Dreams* (1963) and *Sorcerer's Broth*, were almost certainly written by somebody else. (They are very unlikely to have been written earlier: a number of references, including to Gagarin and 'President Johnson', firmly locate the latter in mid-60s.) But the re-use of the Garland moniker just goes to show that the publisher W. H. Allen considered there to be a market for these 'human stor[ies] with a homosexual theme' (flyleaf of *Sorcerer's Broth*); this and the particular success of the first Garland novel, which was reprinted four times in six months, suggests a queer readership. The novels themselves are conscious of this potential readership. In *The Youngest Director*, two characters are reading Angus Wilson. *A Way of Love* and *Sorcerer's Broth* both conclude with their protagonists determined to write their own stories, which is rather a way of saying these otherwise invisible, respectable queer lives merit being written and read about; they have pedagogical value. However, rather like the treacherous nature of bourgeois domesticity, the contexts of these novels' production and consumption unsettle the presumption that they will reproduce orderly queer lives. Leonard of *The Youngest Director* may take succour from reading Murdoch and Wilson, but his amoral counterpart Dave has a copy of Wilson's *Hemlock and After* on his coffee table. Also, the claimed intent of publishers to address such serious issues as homosexuality was almost certainly combined with an awareness of more prurient interest on the part of the general public. [6] Furthermore, many of these apparently serious novels were reproduced as mass-market paperbacks with often sensationalist taglines. Garland's *The Troubled Midnight* receives the most extreme repackaging for a 1956 American paperback edition, and is explicitly labelled as a thriller. (The image of the coshing represents about the only thrilling moment in the novel, however.) Perhaps even more surprisingly, *The Youngest Director* is repackaged as a romance in a 1967 British paperback edition by Mayflower Dell, replete with locket motif and the line 'His business success seemed assured ... but for his forbidden love'. Cheap and often gaudy, these books would have been plucked off shop carousels on street corners in the city centre. Hornsey goes as far as saying that 'firmly embedded within the ordinary spaces of metropolitan life [...] Garland's novel existed to be looked at, to be cruised and picked up within its natural urban habitat' (Hornsey 194). Thus, by the time queer relationships in private were given legal sanction, these novels which steadfastly argue for a retreat from urban queer milieus had quite literally made a return to the disreputable city.

<25> These queer narratives, which seek to locate respectable homosexuality in domestic space, were produced in a relatively narrow historical window. They were facilitated by the rise in the mid-twentieth century of progressive psychiatric thought

which rationalised the homosexuality of many individuals as an inherent disposition that became firmly established by adolescence. If inherent and incurable, homosexuality was not blameworthy, so long as one extricated oneself from the turpitude of the public queer world of the city, which was now under increased scrutiny from a number of agencies. By insisting that the middle-class home was central to the life and identity of the respectable homosexual, these narratives sought to contribute to the case for legal reform. However, after decriminalisation, male queer authors largely turned their attention away from these private, domestic settings. This was most obvious in theatre: no longer restricted by theatre censorship (which ended in 1968) and energised by the demands of gay rights campaigning, playwrights were able and more willing to directly address queer audiences. It is hardly surprising that new issues, typically more public concerns such as gay parenthood (Colin Spenser's 1968 play *Spitting Image*) and coming out (Gay Sweatshop's 1975 production of *Mister X*), provided more urgent material than the depiction of stable domestic monogamy.

<26>Houlbrook and Waters warn against attempting to read Garland's *The Heart in Exile* merely as a precursor to contemporary *gay* culture; to do so would obscure some of the very different, complex ways in which sexuality was conceived and experienced at that particular historical moment (142-4). Sexual identities and practices in the early post-war period were not uniform but to a considerable extent still stratified by class, age and gendered department. The concerns and formations produced by the three post-war queer novels discussed above are certainly 'of their time'. Yet, by indicating some of the difficulties that emerge from attempts to domesticise queerness and to accommodate class difference, these narratives do suggest to readers and writers of more recent times some of the limitations of similarly normative projects. The impulse to present a respectable, domestic mode of homosexuality in contradistinction to a disreputable urban subculture has recurred elsewhere, notably in the US during the AIDS crisis in the late 1980s (see Dines 2009). Alan Sinfield has demonstrated how persistent are anxieties about relationships structured by difference; indeed, such concerns have become even more pronounced in gay subcultural material as egalitarian ideals have become fully established. By relating these observations I do not mean to assert that the formations and concerns articulated by these post-war texts are not discrete and distinct, and certainly I do not mean to 'appropriate' these representations as a means to better understand current circumstances and identities. Rather, I hope to have shown that these narratives not only exhibit the extraordinary difficulties involved in presenting egalitarian, domestic queer relationships in the postwar period, but also how the same texts provide a perhaps surprising source of critical material for which to consider cognate situations in other times and places.

Notes

[1] I follow Houlbrook in using the term 'queer' to 'denote all erotic and affective interactions between men and all men who engaged in such interactions' (Houlbrook xiii), while remaining conscious that not all queer men employed the term in the same way to describe either themselves or other men. (But then, as Houlbrook demonstrates, the same went for the term 'normal' against which 'queer' was defined (6-7).) If the literature under scrutiny here articulates the distinct figure of the 'homosexual', I argue that the same material to a considerable extent complicates that configuration; hence the term 'queer' remains the most conceptually appropriate term. [[^](#)]

[2] Other novels with homosexual protagonists situated in domestic settings within the capital include Michael Nelson's *A Room in Chelsea Square* (1958) (though the eponymous room is in fact a hotel suite) and Goff's *Indecent Assault* (1967). [[^](#)]

[3] Throughout this article I use the adjectives 'bourgeois' and 'middle-class' interchangeably. [[^](#)]

[4] Representations of lesbians, and of lesbian domestic life in particular, were far scarcer during the post-war period, though important examples include Shirley Verel's *The Dark Side of Venus* (1960), set partly in London and its suburbs, Frank Marcus's *The Killing of Sister George* (first performed in 1965), which depicts both the fraught home life of a lesbian couple and elements of London's lesbian social scene, and Maureen Duffy's landmark novel *The Microcosm* (1966), whose 'mosaic style' (Duffy, afterward in Virago ed., 290) involves the juxtaposition of experiential fragments of numerous women-identified women living in London, past and present. Before the mid-1960s, however, there were very few explicit references in literature to lesbianism in Britain outside sexological or sociological studies. This absence was in part filled by American material such as the lesbian 'pulp' romances of Ann Bannon, Valerie Taylor and others, which were either imported or reissued as mass-market paperbacks by British publishers. These works though tended to suggest that the city held the promise of a viable lesbian subculture and possibilities for personal transformation. To reach this more benign habitat, conventional family and home life in the provinces or the suburbs had to be left behind. (However, Amy Murphy has suggested how some pulps do point to a settled, domestic life beyond the bars once a suitable partner has been found.) The relative absence in the post-war period of suburban and domestic settings in narratives depicting queer women compared to those depicting men might in part be attributed to the legal status of lesbians. Since lesbian sexuality was not criminalised there perhaps was not same imperative to court public opinion by attempting to marshal a favourable image which emphasised the 'normality' of homosexuals. But as Rebecca Jennings's study of Britain's first lesbian magazine *Arena Three* (1964-71) shows, many lesbian women were especially concerned to do just the same. The magazine avowed 'to seek ways of improving the public image of the Lesbian' and, particularly during the first few years of its publication, the nightclubs of London and other cities, as well as the working-class and masculine lesbians who were understood to frequent them, were considered a threat to the reputation of the 'civilised' majority (Jennings 158). An emphasis on domesticity to undergird this notion of normality, however, was rarely made, and this was surely because in the decades after WWII such ground was so solidly occupied by the figure of the married housewife. It seems there was little imaginative space for an alternative lesbian domesticity, a situation exacerbated by government housing policy which focused almost entirely on building and restoring homes for single families, leaving limited and poor quality housing for single women or couples (102). In any case, from the early sixties onwards, the feminine ideal of domesticity began to come under attack by an emergent feminist movement, whose early voices (such as the Housebound Wives Register and the National Housewives Register) decried the home as a form of female incarceration or exile. Some cohabiting lesbians echoed these criticisms as a way of articulating their disquiet about butch/femme roles, or indeed as they strove to realise more egalitarian relationships than the kind encouraged by mainstream, patriarchal society (93-4). [[^](#)]

[5] John Tosh and Leonore Davidoff et al have shown that the privatisation of masculinity had been on going since the nineteenth century, as a consequence of a radically changing public city coupled with the expansion of white-collar employment. [[^](#)]

[6] Recently, Ebury revived W. H. Allen as an imprint with the aim of publishing challenging works on politics, society and history. Its press release invokes W. H. Allen's

heritage of publishing provocative but serious writers, including Nixon and Sillitoe (Ebury). What is not mentioned is that it also published Jackie Collins's first novels, and that much of its list in the 1950s and 60s comprised thrillers, westerns and romances as well as popular material on espionage, policing and justice. [△]

Works Cited

- Collins, Marcus. *Modern Love: An Intimate History of Men and Women in Twentieth-Century Britain*. London: Atlantic, 2004.
- Cook, Matt. *Queer Domesticities: Homosexuality and Home Life in Twentieth-century London*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, forthcoming.
- Courage, James. *A Way of Love*. London: Jonathan Cape, 1959.
- Davidoff, Leonore, Megan Doolittle, Janet Fink and Catherine Holden. *The Family Story: Blood, Contract and Intimacy, 1830-1950*. London: Longman) 1999.
- Dines, Martin. *Gay Suburban Narratives in American and British Culture: Homecoming Queens*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan. 2009.
- Ebury. 'WH Allen'. Nd. <http://www.eburypublishing.co.uk/whallen.asp>. Accessed 18 August 2012.
- Garland, Rodney. *The Heart in Exile*. London: W. H. Allen, 1953.
- . *Sorcerer's Broth*. London: W. H. Allen, 1966.
- Goff, Martyn. *The Youngest Director*. (1961). London: Mayflower Dell, 1967.
- Gorman-Murray, Andrew. 'Homeboys: Uses of Home by Gay Australian Men'. *Social and Cultural Geography*. 7.1 (2006). 53-69.
- Higgins, Patrick. *Heterosexual Dictatorship: Male Homosexuality in Postwar Britain*. London: Fourth Estate, 1996.
- Hornsey, Richard. *The Spiv and the Architect: Unruly Life in Postwar London*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010.
- Houlbrook, Matt. *Queer London: Perils and Pleasures in the Sexual Metropolis, 1918-1957*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006.
- Houlbrook, Matt, and Chris Waters. 'The Heart in Exile: Detachment and Desire in 1950s London'. *History Workshop Journal* 62 (2006). 142-65.
- Jennings, Rebecca. *Tomboys and Bachelor Girls: A Lesbian History of Post-war Britain, 1945-1971*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2007.
- Light, Alison. *Forever England: Femininity, Literature and Conservatism between the Wars*. London: Routledge, 1991.

Murphy, Amy T. 'Reading the Lives between the Lines: Lesbian Literature and Oral History in Post-war Britain'. Unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Glasgow. 2013.

Oram, Alison. 'Sexuality in Heterotopia: Time, Space and Love between Women in the Historic House'. *Women's History Review* 21.4 (2012). 553-51.

Pilkey, Brent. 'LGBT Homemaking in London, UK: The Embodiment of Mobile Homemaking Imaginaries'. *Geographical Research* 51.2 (2013). 159-65.

Sinfield, Alan. *On Sexuality and Power*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2004.

Tosh, John. *A Man's Place: Masculinity and the Middle-Class Home in Victorian England*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2007.

Walsh, John. 'Martyn Goff: Secrets of the Booker King', *The Independent* Thursday, 27 April 2006.

To Cite This Article:

Martin Dines, 'Bringing the Boy Back Home: Queer Domesticity and Egalitarian Relationships in Postwar London Novels'. *The Literary London Journal*, Volume 10 Number 2 (Autumn 2013). Online at <http://www.literarylondon.org/london-journal/autumn2013/dines.pdf>.

About The Literary London Journal

The Literary London Journal is the free, online, open-access journal of the Literary London Society. Founded in 2003 by Lawrence Phillips, who edited the journal between 2003 and 2011, it is the first and only journal to provide a common forum for scholars and students engaged specifically in the study of London and literature. From the start, *The Literary London Journal* has aimed to publish the best new research relating to London and literature.

The journal is online at <http://www.literarylondon.org/london-journal/>

The Literary London Journal is fully peer-reviewed. It is published twice a year, in spring and autumn, and is indexed by the MLA International Bibliography. For past issues and information about submissions, please visit the journal home page.

ISSN: 1744-0807 | <http://www.literarylondon.org/london-journal/>
