“No Sense of a Tidy Ending”:

Resisting Closure

Narratives of same-sex desires at a time defined through heteronormativity, call into question the dominance of wartime scripts regarding gender segregation that follow Government propaganda. In challenging the authority of such stereotypical ideologies, Walter Baxter’s *Look Down in Mercy* (1951), Mary Renault’s *The Charioteer* (1953), Sarah Waters’ *The Night Watch* (2006) and Adam Fitzroy’ *Make Do and Mend* (2012)[1] disclose the fragility of patriarchal structures. *History’s Queer Stories* mediates between homosexuality and war and brings these presumably contradictory parameters into conversation. It also seeks to challenge hegemonic knowledge of the Second World War and its literary representation, in order to devastate assumptions of a coherent history grounded in heterosexuality and gender conformity. Through deconstructing an allegedly heteronormative past, claims for a conservative future lose their footing and credibility. The novels discussed in this thesis provide a starting point for future research into a non-heteronormative past to diversify our present.

Les Brookes describes his “Coda” to *Gay Male Fiction Since Stonewall* “as a tailpiece rather than a conclusion” because conclusion “is a problematic word: it suggests closure, when what most investigations uncover is a lack of closure”[2]. He states further that there is “no sense of a tidy ending”[3] regarding research into gender and sexuality because such studies try to channel rather than withhold the

1 Walter Baxter, *Look Down in Mercy*, [1951], (Virginia: Valancourt Books, 2014), Mary Renault, *The Charioteer*, [1953], (New York: Vintage Books, 2003), Sarah Waters, *The Night Watch* (London: Virago, 2006) and Adam Fitzroy, *Make Do and Mend* (UK: Manifold Press, 2012).

2 Les Brookes, *Gay Male Fiction Since Stonewall: Ideology, Conflict, and Aesthetics* (New York and London: Routledge, 2009), p. 186.

3 Brookes, (2009), p. 186.

fluidity, vicissitude and potential of their subject matter. Defying closure substantiates the possibility of creating a "place of ongoing, indeed permanent, contestation and disruption"[4]. This study, in particular, cannot end in a conclusion because it set out to retrieve and navigate a range of queer fictions with a conscious awareness that there may be many more novels of and about the Second World War that challenge dominant narratives but remain largely disregarded in current research. It was my aim to broaden the existing literary canon on world war fiction, and not to subsequently restrain my own research by compiling a set of handy findings that satisfy the desire for completion.

Instead I wish to draw attention to Han Suyin's narrative negotiations of her experiences during the Second World War in her novel *Winter Love* (1962)[5]. In doing so, I not only add a female voice to the auto-biographical narrative *The Naked Civil Servant* (1968) by Quentin Crisp with which this study began, I also buttress the necessity of correcting a homogenous narrative of the war that was created by a dominant readership with a specific idea of how the war should be represented in literature. Through repeatedly engaging with *Winter Love* in this chapter, I call to attention thematic rehearsals or discrepancies compared to other texts, in order to assemble and recap important features in the portrayal of wartime homosexuality in the four novels that have been in focus. The intersecting discourses of war and homosexuality, homophobia and subculture, freedom and setbacks are enthralling, but forever complicate a homogenous reading of these novels. I therefore follow Brookes in giving a "tailpiece" rather than a conclusion as an impulse to encourage further studies into a war that troubles assumptions regarding heterosexuality, masculinity, nationalism and patriotism.

Similar to the novels discussed at length, Han Suyin's *Winter Love* devastates dominant wartime writings, because the narrative contradicts expectations of the soldier poet describing the war at the front. Suyin, born in 1917 as Rosalie Matilda Kuanghu Chou to a Chinese father and a Belgian mother, moved from China to London in 1942 where her husband was stationed as a soldier. She completed her education at the Hunter Street School of Medicine for Women in London, which provided "her first awareness of the possibilities of sexual love between women"[6], according to Alison Hennegan. "[A]spects of the institution itself [...] provide the setting for her 1962 novel *Winter Love*"[7]. Thus, drawing on personal experiences, Suyin creates a first-person narrator, Red, who recalls the

4 Brookes, (2009), p. 186.

5 Han Suyin, *Winter Love*, [1962], (London: Virago Press, 1994).

6 Alison Hennegan, "Introduction" in Han Suyin *Winter Love*, [1962], (London: Virago Press, 1994), p. Viii.

7 Ibid., p. Viii.

late war years when she first met Mara – a well-off woman who is bored with married life and starts studying at Red's college. The central storyline focuses on how these two women become first close friends and later lovers, and Red's struggle to accept that Mara continues to be married to her husband, Karl. War action or Blitz experiences figure as side-effects framing the more important plot on lesbian love. I am incorporating aspects of *Winter Love* in this last chapter in order to not only grasp a broader picture of homosexuality during the Second World War composed by an author with first-hand experience, but mainly because Suyin's text is a fascinating composition that reflects on many issues discussed in this study. The fate of Red after the war when she becomes a married woman also allows me to rehearse the extraordinary circumstances of wartime and the return to 'normality' in central Europe on May 8, 1945.

At the outset of this study I introduced Quentin Crisp's *The Naked Civil Servant* as a narrative that illustrates, like *Winter Love*, personal experiences rather than the grand narrative of destruction. Instead of trying to capture the atrocities that threatened London from the sky in earnest language following the tradition of realist wartime writings by soldiers representing battlefield experiences, Crisp's text is filled with humorous passages to distract from the dangers of his time.

> Perhaps it was because the First World War had left me so unmoved that I did not take the second one very seriously. When news reached me in 1940 that London was burning I was sitting in a cottage outside Basingstoke with a pregnant actress. I had nothing to lose but my aerograph and my typewriter but, explaining that I ought to spread my brooding pinions over these, I rushed home. The truth was that I couldn't bear to miss the great drama of my time. (152)

Typical of his style of writing, Crisp characterises the war as hardly worth mentioning. In fact, he gives more attention to negligibilities like the pregnant actress, the small cottage and the aerograph and typewriter that need covering, than to the fact that the Blitz is destroying England's capital. Moreover, whereas other people leave the city to save their lives, Crisp returns to watch "the great drama of [his] time". And a great drama it was indeed: "The Blitz transformed the relationship between home front and front line by forcing civilians to fight like soldiers and soldiers to watch and wait like civilians"[8]. The great scale of events made everyone a prime witness, but because Crisp had experienced so much hostility brought against him on account of his effeminate looks and deviating

8 Kristine A. Miller, *British Literature of the Blitz: Fighting the People's War* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), p. 5.

desire, he describes the war as merely one more threat to his life. This exaggerated indifference – which, of course, is another way of coping with the events – paints the war in a new light. Not focusing on the soldier's struggle to survive or the civilian who defends their city, Crisp's disinterest marginalises the war and its effects, thus challenging the dominant narrative of total devastation. He represents the war as "a 'preposterous' experience, by implication absurd and topsy-turvey [sic], rather than a fundamental threat to life"[9]. In this way his autobiography and Suyin's *Winter Love* are extraordinarily similar, for Suyin, too, emphasises Mara and Red's relationship in 1944 rather than the dominant images of wartime destruction. The two texts share an ability to concentrate on how life at the home front bore as many new possibilities as old setbacks.

Crisp gleefully states that "[n]ever in the history of sex was so much offered to so many by so few" (160), and Red reflects that whereas other winters were chiefly unpleasant, "about this winter, Mara's winter, I continue to feel its substance, the wrench of its happiness like a pain" (26). Combining markers of cheerfulness and misery, Red highlights the paradoxical time of war that simultaneously facilitated her brief romance with Mara but took it away from her when Mara's husband begins to question his wife's faithfulness. Red struggles to grasp her muddled emotions of "vampire memories of the past which suck meaning out of every hour of my existence; memory of love sharp and sweet and nothing like it ever to be" (27). A deep devastation rings in her poetic language, but her love for Mara is not only "sharp" but also "sweet". In this way, *Winter Love* aligns itself with the other novels discussed in this study in its earnest attempt of infiltrating diversity into the discourse of wartime that was assumed to be clearly organised to represent a homogenous picture following patriotism, nationalism and propaganda. It also shows that recollecting the Second World War is governed by incongruities: Red's past is simultaneously filled with nostalgia and painful memories, which challenges a categorical assessment of the time as well as of its literature.

Neither *The Naked Civil Servant* nor *Winter Love* fit the category of traditional war literature because they defy the readers' and critics' desire to be shown the "war as it really was, or rather, as they expected it to be"[10]. No-one expected the war to be about an unemployed and effeminate homosexual who struggled for money or about a lesbian couple and their endeavours to stay together despite all odds. Instead of such personal accounts infused with homosex-

9 Gill Plain, *Literature of the 1940s: War, Postwar and 'Peace'* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2013), p. 8.

10 Ann-Marie Einhaus, "Modernism, Truth, and the Canon of First World War Literature" in *Modernist Cultures* Vol. 6, No. 2 (2011), p. 299.

uality, wartime fiction was meant to represent the violence and "the dislocating impact of war on self and society"[11]. Despite, or rather because of this clear conception of what war literature ought to be, contrasting what literature of and about the time really engages with, critics like Gill Plain assumed that "there was a great deal of [literary] activity in the decade, but no lasting legacy"[12]. She and other scholars reiterate that "the events of the 1940s were simply too diffuse and too varied for a homogenous literary response to the war or to its shocking and complicated aftermath"[13]. It follows that until the 1990s, the Second World War was considered to be a largely non-literary period, because texts of and about the war were assumed to be non-existent.

Recent studies have done away with this immediate post-war claim that the Second World War was fought on too great a scale to find a literary voice. Kristine A. Miller found that rather than being a non-literary period, the Second World War was predominantly non-novelistic: diary entries, letters, articles, short stories and propaganda flourished, but longer works of drama and fiction as well as frontline narratives were produced less often. In order to remediate the traditional image of the soldier giving his life for the benefit of the nation, researchers set out to reclaim a female position fighting at the home front. Studies such as Karen Schneider's *Loving Arms* or Plain's *Women's Fiction of the Second World War* reveal the extraordinary circumstances for women during a contradictory time full of liberties and setback, where they were needed at the home front in often traditionally male occupations and contributed to the war effort in their battle against the air raids. However, "while women in 'men's jobs' were for the most part ultimately accepted as necessary, they were subject to derision and ridicule and were paid less than men for the same work"[14]. Schneider and Plain agree that "[t]he patriarchal system [...] stands firm despite the chaos of war"[15], because women were "asked to assume temporarily the *semblance* of masculinity – to act like men, but to remain constantly aware of their femininity"[16].

Crisp's *The Naked Civil Servant* mentions the forceful inscription of female gender conformity when describing an incident where a policeman challenges Crisp's blunt observation that women have taken to masculine clothing. The po-

11 Plain, (2013), p. 25.

12 Ibid., p. 2.

13 Ibid., p. 4.

14 Karen Schneider, *Loving Arms: British Women Writing the Second World War*, [1997], (Lexington, Kentucky: The University Press of Kenntucky, 2015), p. 22.

15 Plain, (1996), p. 26.

16 Ibid., p. 28.

liceman's reaction reveals that a woman who embraced a masculine appearance, was considered a disgrace. Suyin's *Winter Love* demonstrates this attitude towards women more forcefully. At one point Mara and Red are in a café when a bomb explodes nearby and destroys the building. Subsequently a number of people emerge and pressure the two women if they need help: "someone came up to me and asked if I wanted a shock injection, I said crossly: 'For God's sake, I'm all right I tell you.' (37) Moments later another "man coming up again to say: 'Sure you don't need a shock injection?" (38) He then turns to Mara to sooth the visibly upset woman whilst saying to Red:

'You'd better take her home, she's had quite a shock.'
And Mara whispered: 'Let's go home, let's go home,' not a bit brave or anything.
I felt conspicuous because of Mara not being brave and not offering to help, so I said, 'O.K., pull yourself together, we're going.
But the A.R.P. man said sharply: 'Now, don't fuss her, miss. Your friend's upset, can't you see?' (38)

Whereas in *The Night Watch* the ambulance team is mostly female to substantiate women's role in protecting Britain's cities during the war, Suyin's Air Raid Precautions worker is male and obtains a superior role over Red in telling her how to treat Mara. Unlike Kay who gains autonomy during the war, Mara, in particular, is treated like a child who needs guidance because she can apparently not decide for herself what to do. Red shows her discontent and immediately gets criticised when the A.R.P. man openly disapproves of her manner. It is striking that Mara is "not a bit brave" in this scene considering that she is courageous enough to leave her husband to move in with Red. These contradictions, albeit puzzling at first, fit perfectly well with Plain's examination of femininity during war: whereas temporary trespasses in form of clothing and occupation where accepted, women had to continue following the scripts of femininity. For an upper-middle class woman such as Mara, helping after a bombing would defile not only her social status but also her femininity. In *The Night Watch* Kay similarly states: "This filthy war's knocked all the glamour out of life for women like [Helen]. It's all right for us, we can just kick about the muck and pretty well like it –" (254-255). Obviously, only a certain kind of woman was permitted to "kick about the muck and pretty well like it", and neither Helen nor Mara belong to that category. Yet both share a flat with their lesbian lovers without causing undesirable consequences to their feminine appearance. In fact, Mara is regularly perceived as a heterosexual and highly attractive woman because she looks neat and fashionable, "so utterly different from all the drab, untidy females the war

had made of us, it took one's breath away" (58). Similar to Kay, Red distinguishes her own "drab" and "untidy" appearance from Mara's "wonderful coat" (57) "deep brown, soft, and a red pixie cap, and of course lipstick" (58). Among themselves the women differentiate between those who accept and even indulge the slackened norms of beauty (Kay and Red), and those who continue to perform a pre-war version of femininity despite experiencing a non-heteronormative love (Helen and Mara). Consequently, Mara compensates for her trespass towards lesbianism by showing exaggerated signs of the weak female who needs protection, and who is not brave at times of crisis. Red, in contrast, resembles Waters' depiction of the mannish lesbian Kay. The dynamics within lesbian relationships suggest a lingering gender binary where femininity is dominated by masculinity regardless of the non-heteronormative nature of the performance. Troublingly, homosexual narratives seem to struggle to abandon this conservative dynamic between genders, which illustrates how entrenched that kind of binary thinking remains to be in our society.

In order to broaden feminist research focusing on the contradictory role of women during the war, scholars increasingly investigated its memory, and the merit of historical fiction to retroactively and retrospectively reclaim the war. Ackerman's recent study on fictional and medial commemoration, investigates this lingering fascination with the Second World War.[17] He concludes that novels serve as a mediation between subject and collective, public and private, art and commerce, tradition and transformation, communicative and cultural memory, script and symbol, literature and modern (mass)media.[18] As a poetic cultural memory, texts can communicate and connect distant parameters across time. They may also inscribe a modern consciousness into the past that often conflates history with the present to create a hybrid version of events that simultaneously reflects on contemporary as well as past issues. Waters' *The Night Watch* (2006) and Fitzroy's *Make Do and Mend* (2012) fall into this genre of historical fiction that retrospectively narrates the war whilst adding a particular modern consciousness to the past. In depicting the rivalry between England and Wales, Fitzroy's *Make Do and Mend*, for instance, rehearses a long-standing conflict among the countries of Great Britain that continues to influence current

17 Zeno Ackermann, Gedächtnis-Fiktionen: Mediale Erinnerungsfiguren und literarischer Eigensinn in britischen Romanen zum Zweiten Weltkrieg (Heidelberg: Universitätsverlag Winter, 2015), p. 25.

18 Original: "Der Roman steht demnach in der Mitte und vermittelt: Zwischen Subjekt und Kollektiv, Eigensinn und Gemeinsinn, Kunst und Kommerz, Tradition und Transformation, kommunikativem und kulturellem Gedächtnis, Schrift und Bild, Literatur und modernen (Massen-)Medien." Ackermann, (2015), p. 383.

political and economic decisions. Whereas People's War propaganda during the Second World War promulgated unity between England, Wales, North Ireland and Scotland, narrative accounts like *Make Do and Mend* repeatedly show that social and localised differences continued to prevail. Fitzroy's novel emphasises that the ideology of the People's War becomes undone when the protagonist Harry Lyon and his partner Jim Brynawel resurrect the myth of a Welsh national legend. Rather than reifying a collective national unity to fight the enemy, the text challenges the authority of Government propaganda.

However, whilst some Welsh nationalists did find the People's War oppressive towards their country, the great majority of people did not, and on Victory Day "[t]hey flew the Welsh dragon alongside the Union Jack"[19]. This discrepancy between the novel and historical accounts, in addition to Fitzroy's use of frank language in describing sexual acts, identifies the novel as a retrospective fiction that seeks ways of amending a past by infiltrating it with contemporary political themes. Less obvious than *Make Do and Mend*, *The Night Watch*, too, speaks from a distinctly modern position where sexuality is liberated and women find their possibilities to be larger than during the 1940s. Drawing on these new opportunities, Waters' women live surprisingly independent lives during the war, able to have an abortion, engage in lesbian sex in the open street or perform the active life usually reserved for male bodies. Detecting markers of a contemporary consciousness is not meant to marginalise these novels: they are vital rewritings of the past, because they infiltrate a non-heteronormative subject matter into historical accounts that broadens our knowledge of the war. They also encourage a feeling of continuity and genealogy for homosexual subjects, who often feel unhinged from history because their desires have seldom been taken into account in historical research.

In order to mediate the function of novelistic representation of the past, Stewart's *The Second World War in Contemporary British Fiction: Secret History* points to the lingering gaps and blindfolds detectable in mainstream narratives recovering the war. She incorporates Waters' *The Night Watch* into her research to show that "certain narratives [...] may have been actively concealed by individuals for fear of familial or social disapproval, and alternative versions have, for ideological reasons, taken prominence"[20]. This assumption of a lingering heteronormative war culture formed the foundation of my research and was com-

19 Dr Martin Johnes, "Welsh Identity in Wartime" (2014) *BBC Online* [last accessed: 01/08/2017] <www.bbc.co.uk/wales/history/sites/themes/periods/ww2_welsh_identity.shtml>.

20 Victoria Stewart, *The Second World War in Contemporary British Fiction* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2011), p. 2.

plemented by an investigation into gay and lesbian literature and its navigation of homosexuality during the Second World War. I asked how homosexuality is represented in retrospective narratives that are interested in a different kind of war story in order to disclose at what point the dominant discourse of war disintegrates. These questions led to a whole new set of issues regarding the historiography of homosexual desire concerning both its literary as well as academic negotiation.

The gay liberation movement since 1969 prompted a temporary amnesia of its troubled past that lastingly influenced the perception of pre-Stonewall literature as "not good for the gays"[21]. Instead of investigating a period in history where large numbers of men and women shared confined spaces with their own sex, which, according to Allan Bérubé facilitated same-sex desires[22], gay and lesbian scholarship had little interest in retrieving a past they saw as oppressive and hampering claims of emancipation. Looking into the future, literature was not recognised as a mediator between homophobic society and individual experiences navigating desires. The first chapter of this study set out to re-negotiate this perception and to challenge recurring readings of pre-Stonewall writings as "homosexual problem novels"[23] in order to demonstrate that an often positive consciousness resides in earlier novels that can help to promote and complement current genealogical efforts within the gay and lesbian community.

Despite latest queer theoretical endeavours to establish a literary tradition of queer fiction, there seems to reside an "ethos of celebration"[24] that praises some texts as important narratives of same-sex desire whilst neglecting others. It follows that novels such as Renault's *The Charioteer* and Fitzroy's *Make Do and Mend* have either not received broad scholarly attention or became criticised for their inscription of homophobia and self-loathing. However, it needs to be remembered that these early novels about the Second World War featuring homosexual protagonists cannot be reduced to their sexual discourse, since the war constitutes the characters' framework of action. Through merging the issues of war and homosexuality in my analysis, I demonstrate that deviating desires are part of society, even when heteronormative discourses such as the military deny

21 Michael Bronski, *Pulp Friction: Uncovering the Golden Age of Gay Male Pulps* (New York: St. Martin's Griffin, 2013), p. 10.

22 Allan Bérubé, *My Desire for History: Essays in Gay, Community, and Labor History* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2011), p. 112.

23 Claude J. Summer, *Gay Fictions: Wilde to Stonewall: Studies in a Male Homosexual Literary Tradition* (New York: Continuum, 1990), p. 26.

24 Lisa Lynne Moore, "Lesbian Migrations: Mary Renault's South Africa" in *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* Vol. 10, No. 1 (2003), p. 23.

their existence. Instead of treating homosexuality and war as distinct matters, my analysis brings them into conversation in order to reveal at what points the characters' struggles are grounded in a broader homophobic discourse that hampers their initiative, or when they have indeed internalised their burden as self-hatred.

Although it seems coherent to judge Laurie's anxious monitoring of his desires as a sign for *The Charioteer*'s emphasis on stigmatisations, it is the confined space of the military hospital, which simultaneously threatens Laurie's secret and facilitates his romantic feelings for Andrew. His constant negotiation between representing the nation at war as a soldier, albeit an injured one, and almost recklessly embracing his new love when spending prolonged time with Andrew in the hospital kitchen, challenges a categorical reading of *The Charioteer*. In fact, the repeated display of double discourses between Laurie and Andrew questions our comfort of heteronormative knowledge: by using distinctly homosexual parlance when referring to Tchaikovsky as "queer" (56), Laurie unsettles the heterosexual discourse of the military hospital and infiltrates it with "queer" knowledge. It follows that Claude J. Summers' analysis focusing on "homosexuality as a personal failing"[25] and Natasha Alden's claim that "[t]here is no free and easy acceptance of sexual orientation"[26] in *The Charioteer*, reduce the text to the rare moments in which Laurie becomes conscious of his inability to make his sexuality public because of a homophobic society. Contrasting Summers and Alden, I have argued that Laurie accepts his homosexuality, even as a teenager, but he struggles to find an elevating love that remains respectable according to his personal standards of morality fashioned after Plato's *Phaedrus*. Laurie is thus not burdened by a deviating sexuality, but by an ideology that determines his desire for decency and positions non-conformity in tension with this desire. Consequently, *The Charioteer* represents the struggle of finding a place within society for a homosexual subject at a time where homogeneity and conformity were assumed to be 'normal' and 'natural'. Laurie has to make a choice that never questions his homosexuality – after all, his choice is between Ralph and Andrew and not between a man and a woman. This is the footing on which *The Charioteer* rests and passages of self-doubt and despondency work to disguise a daring narrative in conventional language to guarantee publication.

The necessity of cloaking the homosexual context becomes most apparent in the analysis of Baxter's two versions of *Look Down in Mercy*. Whereas the American audience was confronted with tender kisses and actual intercourse between the protagonist Toni Kent and his batman Anson, the more conservative

25 Summers, (1990), p. 26.

26 Natasha Alden, *Reading Behind the Lines: Postmemory in Contemporary British War Fiction* (Manchester und New York: Manchester University Press, 2014), p. 193.

British readership were not exposed to such trespasses. Following homophobic scripts of the 1950s that made homosexuals "scapegoats"[27] that were harassed and degraded, Baxter's British ending where Kent commits suicide, fits Summers' wary evaluation of pre-Stonewall texts much better than Renault's novel. The Kent of the British version conceptualises and negotiates between the seemingly distant worlds of soldering and homosexual pleasure in a more troubled and less bold way than Renault's Laurie. Any form of intimacy between the characters is censored according to the Obscene Publications Act of 1857. Similar to Renault's use of allusive language to circumvent censorship of "obscene writing" that "deprave[ed] and corrupt[ed] the minds and morals of those who are open to such immoral influences"[28], Baxter's British version only hints at the physicality in Kent and Anson's relationship. However, both editions show that Kent tries to fashion and maintain a relationship with Anson, who is not only a man but his batman and therefore neither of Kent's class, nor of his rank.

Even the British version cannot escape the lingering "homosocial desire"[29] that becomes apparent through the depiction of Kent, despite intense attempts of presenting the military as an institution untainted by homosexuality and effeminacy. Because Kent enjoys the company of his men during dances and of Anson in particular, and repeatedly trespasses into feminine displays of joyful gossip, he unwittingly challenges what Connell identifies as a "*corporate* display of masculinity"[30] within the military. Connell argues that although hegemonic masculinity is a concept most men will not achieve to perform; the military constitutes a convincing and broad ground for masculine performances. Kent's behaviour contradicts Connell's evaluation and *The Naked Civil Servant* demonstrates the military's struggles to keep the institution free from gender trespasses. Quentin Crisp is discharged from service on account of his effeminate looks, which reveals that more often than sexuality, it was gender that became policed by conservative forces guided by the Government. The patriarchal system of monitoring gender conformity was therefore a lingering factor during the Second World War. Paradoxically, because the military fashions such a masculine self-image, Kent in *Look Down in Mercy* is allowed to enjoy male company without

27 Summers, (1990), p. 26.

28 Definition of 'obscenity' by Benjamin Hickling in 1868, known as the 'Hicklin ruling'. Cited in Rachel Potter, "Introduction" in David Bradshaw and Rachel Potter (eds.), *Prudes on the Prowl: Fiction and Obscenity in England, 1850 to the present* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), p. 2.

29 Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985).

30 Connell, *Masculinities*, [1995], (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2016), p. 77.

raising suspicions, until he comes to realise that his feelings for Anson are more than friendship.

Kent's confidence is increasingly shattered because his performance lacks masculine markers of toughness. He becomes emasculated and suffers the loss of respectability when showing an emotional response at the sight of death. Whilst this depiction initially seems to reiterate stereotypes of the weak homosexual incapable of command, the narrative reverses the situation by depicting a vicious enemy to create a counter-narrative to the alleged moral integrity of the British military. Not only is the enemy to be fought on the battlefield, its methods of beheading, burning and torturing need to be contrasted to the respectable British officer who is increasingly failing to withstand such atrocities. Representing a brutal enemy and contrasting them to a British officer illustrates the nation's self-understanding as "a benevolent imperial power"[31] that is, even during combat, humane and distinct from an aggressor such as Japan. The trauma of masculinity is then the perpetual fanning of insecurities over the adequacy of men's performance, because they are neither allowed to delight in violence as the dominant order rests on a system of *silent* monitoring, nor permitted to be affected by signs of brutality which would thwart their appearance of toughness. Kent's emasculation is thus partially vindicated when resisting the desire to act in similarly savage ways.

In *Winter Love*, Red gives a new perspective on masculinity when she reflects on her unhappy marriage with Andy after the war and captures not only her emotional brutality towards her unwanted husband, but also how easily men's masculinity can be threatened: "In the ways of wives, I keep him in doubt of himself as a man by making him feel small, by nagging him about his being late for meals, and by rationing him where bed is concerned." (79) This display becomes even crueller:

> And I can think up ways of nagging him so that his manhood will be shorn from him, little by little, so that all that's left of him is a preening body, still pretending to maleness, but getting it over quickly now, getting flabby and coming quickly, and the quicker the better for me. He's really getting impotent; I know, and he knows but we never talk about it, and I keep an eye on him he won't stray, and he's scared of me I know. (83)

Through her nagging, Red enhances Andy's pre-existing doubts over his masculinity which can be recognised in his earlier attempts of seducing Red during the war. The seeking of sex as a validation of men's manhood by subordinating the female body makes women an instrument to satisfy men's physical and emotion-

31 Rose, (2003), p. 286.

al needs for power and dominance. Red turns this stereotypical narrative on its head when she humiliates Andy by pronouncing his increasing impotence. Kent, too, fears this fate and dreams about being "in bed with Celia, and impotent. He caressed her body with his lips, but it was no use, she was twining her soft legs round his, fumbling at him with her fingers. For God's sake! She was saying, for God's sake!" (57). Similar to Mara as the nagging wife, Kent fears Celia's reaction when dreaming that he is sexually insufficient. Prone to social shaming, Kent is constantly in doubt over his masculinity and seeks ways to prove himself worthy. In consequence of this desire to countervail doubts and to stabilise his shaken ego, Kent seduces the Eurasian nurse Helen who thinks herself in love with the white officer. The hypocrisy of censorship is most blaringly evident when comparing the toned-down passages of homosexual love with Kent's explicit raping of Helen. In an act of alleged passion, Kent reduces Helen to her body, kisses her forcefully and finally assaults her. In contrast to previous scenes depicting Kent and Anson, this moment of rape is explicitly described in both the American and British version, which shows the double-standard of censorship: female objectification that elevates a man's masculinity seems to be too common place to raise objections, whereas consensual homosexual acts needed to be deleted from the British version.

Kent's action resembles Red's experience with her husband: both men feel insufficiently masculine and subordinate a female in order to elevate their self-worth. Kent additionally challenges himself to rescue a soldier named Goodwin when he is injured and unable to seek cover. In an act of bravado, Kent risks his life to save his manhood but does so only after recognising his deep emotional bond with Anson whose offer to complete the task himself stirs Kent's passion for him. His act of masculine heroism is thus a parody of 'the real thing' when love for another man and not the nation compels Kent into action. In this way *Look Down in Mercy* challenges the relentless monitoring of men based on shame and abjection and illustrates that homosexual feelings can produce heroic action. Contrary to stereotypical assumptions, Kent's homosexuality does not hamper his initiative, but releases an unknown power, which the military's mechanisms of enforcing conformity fail to do. Although momentarily moving into the sphere of feminine emotions, Kent's deed is translated into patriarchal language of the roaring lion, which derogates the possibility of creating a lasting masculinity that is informed by feminine emotions rather than tough violence. Novels narrating homosexual desires at times of war thus find various ways of interrupting scripts of gender and sexuality, but may also resolve their own challenge back into dominant order.

The display of failure when trying to live up to the idealistic inscription accompanying his position, shows Kent as a character who is burdened by more than his emerging homosexuality. Similar to Laurie's situation in hospital, Kent's plight is aggravated through the war when the nation seduces men to perform heroically and to metaphorically serve their country as Unknown Soldiers to further national collectivity. The struggles endured by Kent and Laurie can therefore not be located in their sexuality – at least not exclusively. The extraordinary situation of war bears challenges for them that peacetime did not, because the sharing of confined spaces endangers their closetedness whilst also fostering attraction to their own sex.

The main body of this study focuses on this paradoxical role of the war simultaneously policing and enabling outlawed desires. I discussed the interlinking issues of gender, nation, patriotism, public and private spaces to show that all of these seemingly neutral parameters are deeply embedded in a dichotomous gender structure. Wartime literature illustrates a highly complex and intersecting matrix where each of these markers (and more) determines how characters perceive themselves and others during this period. Presenting itself as stable and enduring, the nation actually lacks these desirable qualities. It is, according to Anderson, an "imagined community"[32] that needs a "repertoire of images"[33] to disguise its fundamental insubstantiality. Narration is thus as much the basis of nation-states as the distinction between 'friend' and 'stranger', both in relation to other nations and within its own borders. At times of war a constant control is required over who belongs to the nation – who represents the propagated norms of patriotism and nationalism – and who fails to rehearse such ideologies: conscientious objectors, deserters and other non-conforming subjects. The 'us' versus 'them' dynamic is one strategy to induce conformity and national belonging. In order to fight so-called Nazi Germany, British nationalism nurtured the desire for belonging to one community by repeating the united strength of Britain and its people. However, "it is that very emotional power of the idea of being one with others that makes the definition of the national community so fraught" [34], Sonya O. Rose explains. Wartime nationalism designed on the back of national unity is marked by incongruities when some people fail to adopt the war as their war. Waters' character Julia expresses the inherent paradox of a fabricated

32 Benedict Anderson, Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism, [1983], (London and New York: Verso, 1991), p. 6.

33 Sara Ahmed, *Strange Encounters: Embodied Others in Post-Coloniality* (London and New York: Routledge, 2000), p. 98.

34 Sonya O. Rose, Which People's War?: National Identity and Citizenship in Britain 1939-1945 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), p. 286.

communality during the war: "I hate this passion for uniforms, too. Uniforms, armbands, badges. I thought the military impulse, as it's grown up in Germany, was what we were against!" (273) Demonstrating the double-standards of the People's War when simultaneously claiming to level classes, whilst differentiating people's social status through uniforms, Julia discloses the arbitrariness of an ideology according to which what one fights against and what one represents becomes indistinguishable. This instability is retroactively captured in Adam Fitzroy's *Make Do and Mend* (2012) where the protagonist Harry demonstrates how manipulative and ultimately failing the propagation of a People's War is.

When Harry is injured after a submarine accident, he begins to disidentify with his role as Navy officer to instead re-collect a Welsh identity represented in the legend of Owain Glyn Dŵr – a Welsh independent fighter who announced sovereignty of Wales against English rule in the Middle Ages. As a heroic figure of Welsh independence, whose life and deeds are recollected in many stories, Glyn Dŵr illustrates Geoffrey Bennington's argument that "we undoubtedly find narration at the centre of nation: stories of national origins, myths of founding fathers, genealogies of heroes"[35]. The legend of Glyn Dŵr is compelling because it can be neither proven right nor wrong as his grave has never been found, making the tomb of the metaphoric Unknown Soldier forever empty. At the same time as being a localised legend, Glyn Dŵr envisions and embodies Welsh independence from English rule.

Harry's path towards indulging his Welsh origin is accompanied by his increasing renunciation of the war and his role as officer to the point where he considers actively protesting against the war by "wearing a white poppy" (247-248) next Armistice Day. The legend of Glyn Dŵr subordinates the People's War and positions England and Wales not as a united nation battling conquest, but as independent countries each fighting on their own. Harry comes to the conclusion that "if ever England is invaded, we'll know that without a doubt Wales will still hold on" (297). Clearly, the narrative of a *United* Kingdom is challenged in *Make Do and Mend* when the characters prefer a local over a collective identity. Even Harry's trespass into actively writing propaganda for the BBC, limiting his experience to "accommodation, food, routine, the occasional funny story" (151), is marginalized as an interlude and superimposed by the novel's ending where Harry and Jim fantasise over an enduring Wales.

Another telling reference to the faultiness of People's War propaganda is the conflict between Harry's brother Thomas Griffith-Lyon and Harry's partner Jim

35 Geoffrey Bennington, "Postal Politics and the Institution of the Nation" in Homi K. Bhabha (ed.), *Nation and Narration* (London and New York: Routledge, 1990), p. 121.

Brynawel. My analysis has shown that the novel's use of Welsh surnames is decisive for determining which character is portrayed as belonging to 'us' (Thomas) and which is belonging to 'them' (the conscientious objector Jim). Whereas Thomas claims to be a representative of the nation when adopting his wife's surname Griffith meaning 'lord' to hyphenate it with his last name Lyon ('lion')[36], Jim Brynawel translates to 'windy hill'[37] and denotes his non-conforming position within the nation at war. Thomas implicitly declares himself the keeper of patriotism and he accuses Jim of murder. The novel cleverly subverts Thomas' efforts to degrade Jim when revealing that the latter is a historian whose real name is Montgomery, which loosely translates to 'top of man power'.[38] Jim's now upper class and high intellect puts him on similar footing with Thomas, who does not accept his defeat and continues to row against Jim even though everybody else has accepted the former stranger. *Make Do and Mend* shows that the People's War is not only unconvincing in terms of uniting Britain, but also with regard to the dichotomy of friend and stranger. Consequently, propaganda created to sustain the elusive and illusive nation faces the danger to unravel when subjects begin to emancipate themselves from the common and communal path.

The narrative of resistance to the Government's promulgating a People's War is equally evident in *The Night Watch*, when Duncan's friend Alec asserts that it is not the soldiers' war "but a load of government men's. It's not our war, either; we have to suffer in it though. We have to do the things they tell us." (481) Disillusioned and unconvinced by the promises of glory and reputation made by their country's leadership, Duncan and Alec want to commit suicide, but whereas Alec succeeds Duncan survives and becomes a prisoner. The prison silences and confines critical voices concerning the war in order to protect the national war effort. Duncan and the other inmates logically feel like outcasts since they are incapable of changing the events happening outside. As a tactical manoeuvre to increase this sense of debarment, the prisoners are symbolically emasculated when they cannot represent their nation at war. Although Alec's negative attitude towards the war has lastingly influenced Duncan, he finds no way to convincingly express his resistance. Despite his seemingly powerful hold on inmates, Duncan queers the prison space by transforming his bunk neighbour Fraser's heterosexual fantasy of a "plain, stout, stupid, grateful girl" (305) into

36 Basil Cottle, *The Penguin Dictionary of Surnames* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Publishers, 1967), p. 123 and p. 174.

37 Evans H. Meurig and William Owen Thomas and Christopher Daviers, *Y Geiriadur Mawr: The Complete Welsh-English English-Welsh dictionary* (Llandysul: Gwasg Gomer, 1980), p. 59 and p. 36.

38 Cottle, (1967), p. 196.

homosexual desire, when pleasuring himself to the sound and motion of Fraser's own masturbation. Although the prison functions as an extension of the nation to keep non-conforming subjects safely contained behind bars, it is powerless against Duncan's body devastating the semblance of order from within.

In *The Charioteer*, the protagonist Laurie also infiltrates homosexual desire into the heterosexual space of the hospital and performs a masculinity that is informed by his emotional attachment to the young Quaker, Andrew, rather than by exaggerated displays of toughness. In fact, Laurie's injured leg makes his movements appear stiff and laborious. Any form of heroism, no matter how minimal, is hampered, which is depicted in his failing attempt to save Nurse Adrian's handkerchief from flying away: "Instinctively he started to run after it, felt the stiff drag of his leg, and stopped." (249) Laurie's injury will leave him unable to perform the kind of masculinity the nation demands of its soldiers ever again, and he progressively learns to handle his situation until he identifies with his "cripple's boot" (90): "This, henceforward, was Laurie Odell." (90-91) Unlike Kent in *Look Down in Mercy*, whose injuries are never permanent enough to expel him from the discourse of war, Laurie's body bears its marks as a reminder of his service as well as the war's ruthlessness. Instead of the nation manoeuvring Laurie into war and manipulating him into further acts of masculine heroism, it is Mr. Straike, the devious new husband of Laurie's mother, who pesters his stepson and demands a masculine performance. Laurie manages to withstand Mr. Straike's desire to rechristen him as Laurence, the 'non-sissy version' of his nickname, and instead reveals the vicar's own unchristian attitude towards men whose Quaker religion condemns fighting. Betraying his Christian values when denouncing Quakers working as male orderlies, Mr. Straike discloses that in wartime, religion can become subsumed under nationalism. Instead of respecting Christian values, built on peace and altruism, he represents the nation's efforts of manipulating men into battle. Mr. Straike's hypocrisy is underlined by the fact that he is a non-fighter himself, which makes him unfit to judge others' who refuse to fight. In contrast to his stepfather, Laurie adopts a much more lenient approach to conscientious objectors when saying sarcastically: "Perhaps we ought to have tried burning them [Quakers] alive. Perhaps we just needed to be civilians and not soldiers. I wouldn't know." (269) Laurie criticises that those who are not forced to physically encounter the war on the battlefield have a more radical attitude towards conscientious objectors than soldiers. He therefore criticises the relentless monitoring of men by the nation or other institutions such as the church to push men into combat.

Negotiating his place in a world full of extremes, Laurie finds a friend in Andrew, which strengthens the protagonist's rebellious campaign against Mr.

Straike. However, their innocent relationship is built on a fortress of silences and gaps because communicating his feelings would risk revealing to Andrew that their close relationship exposes Andrew's homosexual tendencies. Laurie stays clear from articulating his desires and instead introduces Andrew to Plato's *Phaedrus*. Seeking to find a love that is both of the mind and of the body, Laurie cannot identify with the available scripts of wartime that constantly demand him to deny part of his identity, and he eventually and tragically confides in Ralph who seems to resolve and combine these conflicting desires. However, Laurie cannot quite cope with having lost Andrew and the novel hints at the brevity of their love when stating that "they are reconciled for a night in sleep" (347). One is bound to ask what the morning might hold?[39] – a question that the novel never resolves.

The relationships between Kay, her girlfriend Helen and Julia, Helen's secret lover in *The Night Watch*, disintegrates in similar ways as Laurie and Ralph's, because Kay's female complicity in a patriarchal structure restraints Helen and drives her into the arms of Julia. In Kay's world men have no role to play because she is the man – the husband – who "wants a wife" (353). Not only does Kay heroically rescue Helen in 1942, she also awakens Helen's lesbianism represented in a metaphorical rebirth when she is freed from the rubble under which she is stuck. Kay gazes "at her in a sort of wonder; unable to believe that something so fresh and so unmarked could have emerged from so much chaos" (503). Ending the novel on this note, Waters lays emphasis on Kay's love for Helen. However, the section set in 1944 paints Kay in a less positive light when she shows her affection for Helen in a way that oppresses her girlfriend who consequentially flees into the arms of Julia where she can "confide in [her], almost as one wife to another" (275). Whereas Kay's performance of (female) masculinity during the war enhances her initiative, it is domineering towards Helen – evident in Kay's use of the phrase "Good girl" (284). Designed to express what Red in *Winter Love* calls "lower-middle-class talk [that] made one feel somehow more 'in' with everybody else, less class-feeling about, more chummy and sturdy" (6), Kay's "Good girl" has the opposite effect on Helen as it fixates her into the role of a dependant woman yearning for the approval of a man – in this case, a woman performing the role of man. Whereas Kay's habit of speaking in working-class style coincides with Red's observation that this "reflected the 'I-can-look-after-myself' feeling" (6), Helen, who is the receiving end of such talk, is denied the same autonomy. It follows that whilst a reading of Kay as an independent

39 Nikolai Endres, "Horses and Heroes: Plato's Phaedrus and Mary Renault's *The Charioteer*" in *International Journal of the Classical Tradition* Vol. 19, No. 3 (2012), p. 161.

and strong woman contributing to the war effort is highly desirable from a queer theoretical point of view, it oversimplifies her damaging attitude towards Helen, which turns Kay into a female complicit within the patriarchal power structure. Consequently, not all women assumed merely a "*semblance* of masculinity"[40] whilst retaining their femininity, they could also deeply identify with masculinity to the effect of privileging it over femininity.

Although unconscious of her masculinist performance, Kay becomes increasingly aware of Helen's growing emotional distance and she begins to fear that Helen desires a 'real' man and she angrily tells Helen to go and "pick up some boy, some soldier –'" (327). Red, too, struggles with her increasingly unstable relationship to Mara and wonders "why, [Mara is] weak, she's influenceable, she doesn't harden herself against things as I do. And for a fleeting panicky moment I thought how easy it would be to lose her. To someone else. A man, for instance." (114) In remarkably similar terms, underlining Waters' incorporation of earlier lesbian texts, Kay and Red question their lovers' lesbianism before suspecting their faithfulness. This implies the constant fanning of insecurities regarding a masculine gender performance and its exhaustion for the performer. Both Kay and Mara lose their lovers towards the end of the war. Whereas Kay's excessive performance of (female) masculinity has led to Helen's betrayal, Red's fate rehearses a more traditional resolution of lesbian love when she marries Andy and has children with him.

Winter Love's ending demonstrates Castle's criticism that lesbian women are always "in the shadows, in the margins, hidden from history" because their desire is often not even recognised by heteronormative society: in the moment of marriage, Red's lesbianism becomes forever invisible.[41] This gains more traction with view to another scene when Mara's husband Karl realises that his wife is no longer faithful and calls on her at Red's place. Instead of realising their friendship for what it really is, he ignores Red and when she inquires about how Mara and Karl's conversation went, her partner contributes to her sorrows: "It never crossed his mind. Another man yes, but not you. I think he was reassured, seeing it was only you." (92) Red reflects that "Karl hadn't even looked at me as a person. Suddenly I hated them both, Karl and Mara, together." (92) Invisible to Karl, Red and Mara's relationship loses substance and becomes more forcefully trapped inside their flat where it remains hidden from heteronormative discourse.

The narrative of home as monitoring heterosexual and concealing homosexual desires is part of the experiences of all characters. The home becomes the

40 Plain, (1996), p, 28, [emphasis original].

41 Terry Castle, *The Apparitional Lesbian: Female Homosexuality and Modern Culture* (New York, Columbia University Press, 1993), p. 2.

limiting space that entraps subjects to guarantee a set of norms to prevail within public society. As the "the house [is] a metaphor for the closed 'bound' self, which the war opens and airs"[42], its limiting functions find undoing on the physical as well as the psychological level. Starting "with a few loose bricks" "the collapse of a wall" (*TC*, 240), as represented in the destruction of buildings, enables a re-negotiation of homely belonging. Whereas Helen flees into the street to escape the confinement of Kay's flat, Viv, another one of Waters' characters, aborts a child and turns the impeccable "show-flat" where she suffers from the operation into an "anti-home" stained with blood. In killing her child and by manipulating her domestic and reproductive role, Viv finds a kind of liberation denied to many other women of the time. In *Winter Love* Red and Mara meet such a woman whose husband "used to make her pregnant all the time, did it to tie her down, to destroy her" (106). Upon this revelation of the woman's fate, Red reflects that "women aren't happy just being married and having kinds and doing the housework, they want something else too" (111). What these women want is to be independent and not trapped inside the domestic home where they become caretaker of men and children. Through aborting the child, Viv liberates herself from the confining narrative of the home and by tarnishing the show flat, she defies "reproductive futurism"[43] further. As a truly queer character, Helen's body becomes the site of resistance, more so than the mannish lesbian Kay. Consequently, gender non-conformity cannot guarantee counter-discursiveness when conservative ideologies continue to reign on the body as well as in the home.

In retrieving and navigating war stories with a queer subject matter, this study has simultaneously challenged the perception of wartime as a heteronormative endeavour and the assumption of pre-Stonewall novels as bleak and burdensome. Negotiating the seemingly distant parameters of unlawful sexual desire and violent combat fought on the back of men and women alike, these novels disclose the war as a time of crisis for heteronormative society on more scales than one. Whereas enforced civil separation between men and women fostered military affectation of masculinity, it also enabled intense camaraderie and more deeply felt emotions. Women, too, found their circle of mates first diminished and then increased to compile experiences that peacetime society prohibited. Homosexual wartime fiction thus manoeuvres between protesting against the

42 Jenny Hartley, Millions like Us: British Women's Fiction of the Second World War (Virago, 1997) and Phyllis Lassner, British Women Writers of World War II: Battlegrounds of their Own (Palgrave Macmillan, 1998), p. 60.

43 Lee Edelman, *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2004), p. 2.

ruthlessness of the war that threatens to dismember society and celebrating the coming together of people sharing the same desires.

However, throughout this study I have repeatedly emphasised that retrospective war novels like *The Night Watch* and *Make Do and Mend* display anachronisms when projecting a distinctly modern consciousness into the past. This is overtly obvious in scenes of sexual contact, but also implicitly stated when characters display an exaggerated sense of pride in their sexuality and non-conforming gender performance. These implied slippages need to be exposed in order to reveal the novel's at times compromising attitude. In contrast to these modern re-writings that deliberately over-emphasise a liberal consciousness, *The Charioteer* and *Look Down in Mercy* show more restraint. However, I assert that pre-Stonewall novels offer discernible critique on heteronormative society in more allusive ways which, paradoxically, elevates their potential of undermining dominant knowledge. Because neither Kent nor Laurie are recognisable for their homosexuality, they present a constant threat to the social order and challenge the military's masculine self-image, whereas Kay and Harry perpetuate hegemonic standards by replicating heterosexual relationships and gender stereotypes, or by becoming assimilated as the controllable abject. Pre-Stonewall novels therefore seem to offer greater potential for disclosing the diverse layers of society, which makes it necessary to abandon the "is it good for the gays"[44] question that hampers wide-raging research.

Sexual variance is not a contemporary invention but a constantly present variance of dominant life. Gazes into the past are thus not necessarily restrictive but potentially elevating and educational, because they contribute to feminist efforts of negotiating a disguised and overlooked *Her*story. Future studies should build and expand on the potential queer stories in order to diversify not only current culture, but also its history. Whilst this study has focused on homosexuality during the war, other aspects such as race, class, ethnicity, age and generation could not find sufficient negotiation due to limited space and because of the explicit emphasis on representations regarding sexuality and gender. It therefore seems important to flag these missing themes in order to delineate ground for subsequent investigations.

We live in a world full of new challenges, some of which are built on patriarchal ideologies fashioned in earlier periods. By exposing the continuity of social diversity, we can deconstruct the roots of sexism, racism, classism, homophobia and the fear of anything that is 'different', in order to devastate arguments for a conservative future that is no different from its past. *History's Queer Stories* contributes to this form of research by revealing that not even a conserva-

44 Bronski, (2013), p. 10.

tive period such as the Second World War is undisputedly controlled by dominant forces that induce a collective conformity. Narrative negotiations of a non-heteronormative war offer a point of departure for subsequent research into a queer history in order to create a more colourful present and future.