"People's Pasts [are] so Much More Interesting than Their Futures" –

Re-Negotiating the Homosexual Problem Novel

ENGAGING WITH THE LITERARY PAST

In her doctoral thesis *Wolfskins and Togas: Lesbian and Gay Historical Fictions, 1870 to the Present*, Sarah Waters stresses the "value of gay and lesbian historical romances in their affirmation of the transhistorical tenacity of outlawed desires"[1]. Self-reflectively mirroring this statement, Waters' character Kay claims that "people's pasts [are] so much more interesting than their futures" (106), which shows *The Night Watch*'s (2006) conscious investment in and interpretation of past times in order to retroactively inscribe lesbian desires into a consciousness of heterosexual *his*tory. In "Lesbian postmemory: haunted 'history' in *The Night Watch*", Natasha Alden similarly argues that

> there is a potentially unlimited scope for postmemorial identification between the affective community of lesbians now and at any point in history, albeit with the significant proviso that this [theory] is aware of its own limitations of current preconceptions and conceptions of identity categories.[2]

Both Waters' and Alden's statements insinuate that contemporary queer narratives (in contrast to future orientated post-Stonewall gay and lesbian activism) try to establish and create a genealogy between historical subjects and modern consciousness, in order to strengthen the claim for a legitimate place within soci-

1 Sarah Waters, *Wolfskins and Togas: Lesbian and Gay Historical Fictions, 1870 to the Present* (London: University of London, 1995), p. 12.

2 Natasha Alden, *Reading Behind the Lines: Postmemory in Contemporary British War Fiction*, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2014), p. 179.

ety and against homophobic assaults. Setting out to re-work and reclaim the ghostly history of lesbian narratives and to broaden lesbian history beyond Sappho of Lesbos[3], Alden positions Sarah Waters in line with earlier lesbian novelists and asks whether *The Night Watch* is "pastiche? Homage? [Or] [m]etafictional intervention into the historical record?"[4] She assumes that Waters "playfully subvert[s] some of the more conservative mores" of the Second World War period to offer a less depressing view of the homosexual past.[5] While I agree that *The Night Watch*'s representation of lesbianism in the 1940s is largely upbeat, I take issue with Alden's broad dismissal of earlier novels as depicting "crippling self-hatred and fear" that "seems to be a universal condition"[6]. Her evaluation of Mary Renault's *The Charioteer* (1953) needs particular revision as it is too rigidly informed by what Michael Bronski critically calls the "Is it good for the gays?" question deriving from immediate post-Stonewall activism.[7]

Scholars who were influenced by the gay liberation movement of the late 1960s and early 1970s approached novels written and published before Stonewall with a certain kind of expectation that systematically eliminated representations of self-loathing, homophobia and victimisation. This phenomenon can be observed in the conflicting perception of Renault's novels: whereas her earlier works set in the 1940s and 1950s such as *The Charioteer* did not find extensive recognition, the turn to historical fiction set in ancient Greece where sexuality was less victimised, has significantly increased her reputation as a serious writer. These historical novels have become part of the expanding canon of gay and lesbian fiction because they represent homosexuality not as a burden, but as a fluid identity that is embedded in Greek culture.[8] The resulting discrepancy in recognition and celebration signals a variation of Bronski's criticism: novels like *The Charioteer* depicting homosexuality in less cunning ways, have been misread and misunderstood by critics brought up in the post-Stonewall consciousness of affirmation. Lisa Lynne Moore calls this the "ethos of celebration" – the tenden-

3 Sappho of Lesbos was an ancient Greek poetess, who wrote about love between women. Her texts are symbolic for a lingering lesbian consciousness.

4 Alden, (2014), pp. 185-186.

5 Ibid., p. 181.

6 Ibid., p. 185.

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

8 Recall that Greek culture did not categorise homosexuals but differentiated between masculinised (top) and feminised (bottom) sex acts.

cy to hype some texts for a certain purpose whilst forgetting or misreading others even by the same author.[9]

Drawing closer to other equal rights movements such as Second Wave Feminism, queer studies and queer activism from the late 1990s onwards "has focused on negative aspects of the past in order to use them for positive political purpose"[10] in the present. In contrast to gay and lesbian scholarship educated in and operating according to the spirit of gay liberation, queer theorists constantly work against homogeneity of research, against the establishment of a coherent historiography and against a consistent theorisation of sexual desire or gender embodiment (amongst many other fields of interest). In order to re-work certain aspects deriving from early gay and lesbian research, Heather Love explicitly turns to the oppressive elements in literary texts and seeks to uncover the "gap between aspiration and the actual"[11]. Allowing for political criticism, she challenges the affirmative turn of the 1970s as "wishful thinking" that misjudged a homosexual literary tradition.[12] This chapter investigates the other end of Love's research by critically evaluating, how pre-Stonewall texts such as Renault's *The Charioteer* have been (falsely) perceived as negative representations of homosexuality. Contemporary scholars such as Alden share this critical perception of pre-Stonewall fiction, which homogenises these novels' complicated and heterogeneous fictionalisation of same-sex love in the 1940s. Novels like Waters' *The Night Watch* that have been perceived as queer, in contrast, are celebrated for "making affective connections [...] across time", as Carolyn Dinshaw terms the ability of fashioning a relationship with the past.[13] In the following, I will trace the deceptiveness of reading pre-Stonewall novels as damaging, whilst celebrating contemporary texts as upbeat. For a more comprehensive understanding, the hypocrisy of censorship needs to be taken into account when analysing novels of the 1950s in order to understand how publication processes influenced authors and their texts.

Renault's *The Charioteer* (1953) and Baxter's *Look Down in Mercy* (1951) show that social critique is not absent from their novels: it is subversively inscribed in minor characters rather than explicitly portrayed in protagonists. Texts

9 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.

10 Heather Love, *Feeling Backward: Loss and the Politics of Queer History* (Cambridge and Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2007), pp. 18-19.

11 Love, (2007), p. 4.

12 Ibid., p. 4.

13 Carolyn Dinshaw, *Getting Medieval: Sexualities and Communities, Pre- and Postmodern* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1999), pp. 11-12.

written before Stonewall are thus not unilateral representations of a homophobic discourse but multiplicitous in their depiction of homosexual lives. Re-assessing these novels in more detail and in contrast to contemporary fictions like *The Night Watch* (2006) and *Make Do and Mend* (2012) will illustrate a shared rejection of a collective identity in favour of a multi-dimensional and often conflicting approach to homosexuality. This is not to say that there is an uncomplicated genealogy between novels of the 1950s and contemporary fiction. I am not advocating what David Halperin calls "homosexual essentialism" – an idealism that is "thoroughly disqualified by its implication in the various strategies of elitism and exclusion that identity politics often carries with it"[14]. Instead, there seems to be a lineage of novelistic resistance to collectivism and shared identity in favour of individuality. Consequently, in this chapter I attempt to read the novels against the grain of self-loathing and misery, to show their surprising continuity of privileging the personal over the (sub-)communal that overcomes social burdens.

Natasha Alden distinguishes various sources that have seemingly impacted Waters in her writing in order to fashion a literary tradition between *The Night Watch* and earlier lesbian texts. According to her findings, the most influential sources are: Barbara Bell's auto-biography *Just Take your Frock Off: A Lesbian Life* (1999), Nevil Shute's *Requiem For a Wren* (1955), Radclyffe Hall's short story "Miss Ogilvy Finds Herself" (1934), and Mary Renault's *The Charioteer*.[15] In an interview with Lucie Armitt, Waters herself highlights the importance of this background material:

> [...] I'm imagining a reader who will 'get' the lesbian stuff [...], I probably situate my lesbian stories in something bigger, like an echo chamber. There are hints at other lesbian texts or traditions of representation – but that's something that most of my readers won't necessarily pick up on.[16]

14 David M. Halperin, *How to do the History of Homosexuality* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2002), p. 16.

15 Barbara Bell, *Just Take your Frock Off: A Lesbian Life* (Brighton: Ourstory Books, 1999), Nevil Shute, *Requiem For a Wren*, [1955], (München: Random House, 2010), Radclyffe Hall, "Miss Ogilvy Finds Herself", [1934], (New York: Random House, 2013).

16 Lucie Armitt, "Interview with Sarah Waters" in *Feminist Review* No. 85, Political Hystories (2007), p. 117.

In order to clarify this context of lesbian history apparently lost on "most" readers, I will briefly summaries Alden's reading of the most influential texts and their adaptation in *The Night Watch*.

Bell's *Just Take your Frock Off* provides a general account of how lesbian women lived during the Second World War. Her recollections influenced Waters' representation of opportunities for women such as driving, liberty in clothing and hairstyle. Bell's depiction of lesbian affairs during the Black-Out are echoed in Waters' illustration of Julia and Helen's first sexual encounter in London during the Blitz – in a public street concealed by darkness. Additionally, Bell emphasises the reluctance of looking into the future when saying "[i]t was the swarm and swirl of wartime. The immediate future was unknown. You didn't plan for the future." (79) Waters dramatises this reluctance to make plans through her backward narration, which shatters progressivity and a sense of futurity. Alden's reflections on *Just Take Your Frock Off* terminate here, and she ignores that Bell's auto-biography does not solely focus on lesbian opportunities during the war, but also stresses the atrocities of the home front:

> Seeing a dead body or a few bodies with pieces off them lying about, you don't store it up. [...] You had a good cry and then, next day, it all happened again and you stopped having a good cry, you took it. [...] You just thought – well, this is war, get on with it. (79)

Waters' novel similarly recounts the struggle to continue fighting and the characters', especially Kay's, traumatic confrontation with death on a daily basis. *The Night Watch* cannot simply be read as a lesbian novel, it is as much a passionate representation of battling and surviving the war. Bell's auto-biography is equally more than an account of her life as a lesbian, because she was also a policewoman during the Blitz, a teacher, a volunteer worker for disabled children and she supported many men and women infected with HIV/AIDS. Reducing her life story or Waters' novel to a sexual identity falls short of the myriad of the other features and issues they address. All novels discussed in this study repeatedly show that their characters are as much influenced by the Second World War as by their sexual preferences. They reveal diverse ways of coping with stigmatisation at a time that offered simultaneously more freedoms for and greater supervision of homosexual desires. Alden overlooks these issues when exclusively concentrating on Waters' adaptation of Bell's experiences of "how life changed for gay people [in positive ways]"[17]. In doing so Alden ignores scenes of contemplation and dismay in *The Night Watch* and Bell's moving description of how the war overshadowed newly found opportunities.

17 Alden, (2014), p. 193.

Nevil Shute's novel *Requiem For a Wren* is an example of this pessimism arising from wartime tragedies. The protagonist Alan Duncan returns home to Australia several years after the war has ended and learns that the family's housekeeper has committed suicide. Investigating the case, Alan discovers that the woman was his late brother's (Bill) girlfriend, whom he had tried to contact after Bill's death. From this point onwards, the housekeeper's life is retrieved making the reverse style of *Requiem For a Wren* reminiscent of Waters' backward narrative. Alden concludes that Waters' modification of this reverse narrative form "unsurprisingly" manages "to do much that [fiction of the time] can't in its depiction of gay life and gay sexuality"[18]. Leaving open what Waters' retroactive narration exactly does that earlier novels did not, Alden hastens to argue for the liberal approach of *The Night Watch* in the depiction of gender and sexuality expressed in the mannish lesbian Kay. Comparing Kay to Radclyffe Hall's protagonist in the short story "Miss Ogilvy Finds Herself", Alden sees a parallel between Miss Ogilvy and Kay who both feel passed over after the war. Watching their lives go by when looking out of a window and observing the outside world from a distance, neither Miss Ogilvy nor Kay manage to handle the return to 'normality' emerging with the establishment of peace. Unlike Miss Ogilvy who "is found dead at the end of the story", Kay "is simply left over", which leads Alden to conclude that Waters' novel "steers clear of fantasy and whimsy"[19]. Although Waters' tone is indeed sober for the most part of the text, particularly Kay falls into dramatic displays of her misery after the war. During a conversation with her friend Mickey, for example, Kay insinuates that she would not mind if the house she is living in collapsed over her head: "How much longer are you going to stay there, Kay? Till the day it collapses, I hope!" (106). Kay's apodosis "I hope" emphasised with an exclamation mark, indicates that she has no plans of moving out of the house although it is not safe to stay there. This image of the unsafe house is recalled when Mickey tries to persuade her to accept that the war is over and that Helen, Kay's former girlfriend, has left her for another woman. Kay replies to Mickey:

'*Get over it*. What a funny phrase that is! As if one's grief is a fallen house, and one has to pick one's way over the rubble to the ground on the other side ... I've got lost in my rubble, Mickey. I can't seem to find my way across. I don't think I *want* to cross it, that's the thing.' (108)

18 Alden, (2014), p. 190.

19 Ibid., pp. 190-191.

Speaking of her heartache in metaphors of rubble not only references the war when Kay was an ambulance driver, and the collapse of her flat where she used to live with Helen, it also highlights her investment in the past. To Kay, the war and her lost relationship intermingle as rubble that keeps her from moving on. The tragedy that resonates in her poetic language emphasises Kay's grief and stands in contradiction to Alden's analysis of Waters' style of writing as "steer[ing] clear of fantasy and whimsy". In fact, Kay is highly dramatic in communicating what little her life is worth to herself, which seems only a few steps away from suicide as depicted in Hall's "Miss Ogilvy Finds Herself". Moreover, the sudden termination of the narrative on Kay's story precludes a resolution of her case. The last mention of Kay shows her in a little room in the unsafe house listening to the landlord and looking at her former 'engagement ring' symbolic of her lost relationship with Helen. This scene fixes her to the past when "[s]he put [the ring] on her slender finger; and closed her fist, to keep it from slipping" (171). Alden omits this significant re-taking of the ring as well as Kay's unstable emotional state three years after her splitting up with Helen, in order to justify her claim that *The Night Watch* is less invested in "[l]oss and regret" [20] than lesbian texts of earlier periods. The depiction of Kay clearly shows that heartache and misery are not absent from *The Night Watch* and that Kay regards her past as an oasis to which she wants to return. The last section of this chapter will further elaborate on Waters' approach to the past as an incongruous re-writing that infiltrates sorrows and joy alike, which makes *The Night Watch* not simply a compelling read but allows for more diverse analyses of historical novels and their recreation of homosexual experiences before Stonewall.

Alden's analysis concludes that "to a reader who *does* recognise [the intertextual allusions to Bell, Shute and Hall], the effect is, indeed to situate [*The Night Watch*] in a bigger context of lesbian history, and to give it added weight as a re-imagining of what might have been"[21]. However, by arguing that *The Night Watch* "playfully subvert[s] some of the more conservative mores of the time, to offer a (qualifiedly) more utopian view" of homosexual life, Alden obscures the merit and legacy of these incorporated texts.[22] Her evaluation of novels written before Stonewall seems influenced by the assumption that it was a thoroughly oppressive time for homosexuals fostered by Cold War paranoia, which apparently finds unchallenged representation in literature. Her undiscussed list of "universal condition[s]"[23] and frequently inscribed vindications

20 Alden, (2014), p. 191.

21 Ibid., p. 183 [my emphasis].

22 Ibid., p. 181.

23 Ibid., p. 185.

of homosexuality in pre-Stonewall fictions include: "abjection", "secrecy", "shame", "self-loathing" and the "recourse to sexology or Freudian analysis of how [characters] had been 'warped' into perversity"[24]. Judging pre-Stonewall texts in such negative ways imposes a contemporary mindset onto them that disdains the accomplishment of publishing texts with a homosexual content during the Cold War in the first place.

This premature judgement is specifically distinct when Alden compares *The Night Watch* to Mary Renault's *The Charioteer* and concludes that "Waters does not need to construct the kind of elaborate defence of her gay characters that Renault does."[25] Renault's defence of her characters occurs, according to Alden, in a medical discourse following a tradition of psychoanalytic rhetoric fashionable during the 1950s.[26] Caroline Zilboorg criticises such readings where *The Charioteer* "has often been wilfully misread by critics eager to see it as a case study in abnormal psychology"[27]. It thus seems vital to closely analyse Renault's use of psychoanalytic references, which undeniably exist throughout the novel, in order

24 Alden, (2014), p. 193.

25 Ibid., p. 197.

26 It is vital to remember that the psychoanalytic rhetoric of the 1950s differs greatly from Freud's founding studies at the turn of the century. Whereas Freud was interested in the many layers of psychic development, radical psychoanalysis that followed his approach became decidedly more orthodox and psychoanalytic research was later dismissed as heteronormative with the family at its centre. Connell summarises that "[t]he course towards adult heterosexuality, which Freud had seen as a complex and fragile construction, was increasingly presented as an unproblematic, natural path of development. Anything else was viewed as a sign of pathology – especially homosexuality. [...] Psychoanalysis as a practice increasingly became a technique of normalization, attempting to adjust its patients to the gender order." Connell, *Masculinities*, [1995], (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2016), p. 11. This growing conservative attitude within psychoanalysis is the reason for why it is often (and often rightfully) dismissed as essentialising, heteronormalising and stigmatising.

27 Caroline Zillborg, *The Masks of Mary Renault: a Literary Biography* (Columbia, Missouri: Univesity of Missouri Press, 2001), p. 107. In the "Afterword" to her novel *The Friendly Young Ladies* (1944), Renault herself pledges that "defensive stridency is not, on the whole, much more attractive than self-pity." Regardless of her critical words, *The Charioteer* is saturated with moments of "defensive stridency", which demonstrates the author's reluctance to admit to her own investment in mechanism of literary self-regulation. Renault, "Afterword" from 1984 in Mary Renault, "Afterword" *The Friendly Young Ladies*, [1944], (London: Virago Press, 2014), p. 322.

to evaluate if and to what degree *The Charioteer* is what Claude J. Summers terms a "homosexual problem novel[...]"[28].

MEDICALIZATION OF HOMOSEXUALITY: LITERARY SELF-REGULATION

Psychoanalysis was developed in the 19th century as a method of treating mental illness and comprehending the complex workings of the unconscious. Sigmund Freud coined the term psychoanalysis to describe the therapeutic techniques exercised in various case studies. One major field of research concerned itself with sexuality and the question of how humans develop certain sex drives. In *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality* Freud asserts that the 'polymorphously perverse child' "displays a mixture of the character-traits belonging to his own and to the opposite sex" [29], thus compelling the child to negotiate between heterosexual and homosexual desires. Freud's interpretation relies on his assumption that humans are prone to bisexuality which necessitates a transformation of diverging desires into heterosexuality. More specifically, in a psychoanalytic model to describe the complex and abstract workings of the psyche, every infant is thought to go through various stages in its early life with the phallic stage (3-6 years) being the most important for the development of 'gender appropriate' sexuality. For boys, the key moment within this stage is said to be 'castration anxiety' where he gets caught playing with his genitals and learns his parents' (in most cases mother's) disapproval and threat of cutting off his penis. In combination with the boy's visual image of a naked female body or his witnessing of sexual intercourse between adults, he realises the abstract possibility of castration. Comparing and contrasting the castrated female body with the power and penis-possessing male body, the young boy allegedly abandons his former rivalry with the father for his mother's love, and comes to identify with the male role model, which leads to a resolution of the Oedipus complex into 'gender appropriate' masculinity and cross-gendered sexual desire. Freud claims that if this process is not or not fully performed, for example due to the absence of the father, the child may later find his sexuality to deviate from the 'norm'.

In *The Charioteer*, the young protagonist Laurie Odell is plunged into oedipal crisis when witnessing his father leaving the family. The exact mentioning of

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

29 Sigmund Freud, *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality. Complete Psychological Works*, Standard Edition, [1905], (Vol. VII, 1955), pp. 219-220.

Laurie's age, five years and ten month, functions to indicate that he is on the brink of outgrowing Freud's neurotic phallic stage when tragedy strikes. Lying in bed, Laurie tries to conceptualise the noises outside his bedroom door and his own awakening – meaning the double entendre of him being unable to sleep and his rising homosexual consciousness indicated by the chapter's closing words: "what he remembered best was having known for the first time the burden, prison and mystery of his own uniqueness" (13). Instead of stereotyping Laurie's homosexuality as an illness, he perceives it as unique, which introduces the character's positive self-perception and unwillingness to be ashamed of himself. Laurie observes another dimension – a man whistling in the streets. "The noise had an absolute foreignness, like the note of a jungle bird. It had no link with humanity." (7) Except for his male sex, the figure outside is unknown and the noise he is making is as foreign to Laurie as his nightly restlessness. Described as not "linked with humanity", the noise is abjected and relegated to the borders of society. First heard at his parents' separation and symbolic of his sexual deviation, the sound metaphorically accompanies Laurie for the rest of the text. It will become clear that this negative depiction of homosexuality is not sustained throughout the novel and that the core aim of *The Charioteer* is to establish a link between homosexuality and humanity.

Operating in the sexological rhetoric of the time[30] – "burden", "prison", "mystery" "uniqueness" "foreignness" – it seems plausible why critics such as Alden or Summers conceive *The Charioteer* as a "homosexual problem novel[...]"[31], particularly considering that Freud's analysis of castration anxiety is dramatised in Laurie's feelings upon realising that his father will actually leave him: "The *absolute impotence* of childhood crushed him like a weight of the pyramids." (11) [my emphasis] Laurie's weak identification with his father is devastated through this strange sense of castration: he "loved and admired, *without respecting his father*" (9) [my emphasis]. This lack of respect for the father figure derives from his softness towards Laurie and stands in contradiction to his stereotypical male role as the head of the household: "he took things easily, and whether he decided to answer a question or not, never rebuked one for having asked it" (10). Although this sensitivity, conventionally attributed to the mother, is welcomed by Laurie, it seems not encourage his heterosexual development and identification with the male gender, which allegedly relies on displays of masculinity and distance from femininity.

30 For further information on terminology and scholarly research on homosexuality in the 1950s see Heike Bauer and Matt Cook (eds.), *Queer 1950s: Rethinking Sexuality in the Postwar Years* (Palgrave McMillan, 2012).

31 Summers, (1990), p. 26.

Laurie's mother also challenges stereotypical displays of femininity: "Laurie knew that his father had to obey his mother just as he had, under the penalty of exile from love." (9) Mrs Odell's power to subordinate and infantilise the father refutes gender clichés within the family and leads towards a psychoanalytic explanation for homosexuality according to which the disruption of family norms is the cause for 'sexual inversion'. However, Laurie's feeling of impotence or castration has not been initiated when seeing his parents in intimate display, but during their breakup. Zilboorg rightly calls this the "witnessing of the *reverse* of the primal scene"[32], which indicates Renault's ironic appropriation of what she identifies as Freud's "dogmatic and inadequate"[33] explanation for sexual deviation.

Beyond its psychoanalytic tone, the first chapter is rich with a perpetual amazement and the young boy's childish incomprehension: having learned and accepted that only illness can keep one awake after bedtime, Laurie logically concludes that he "would probably die" (8) because of his sleeplessness. Consequently, when Laurie "perceive[s] that his father didn't think he would die" (11) the worst conceivable threat is averted. Combined with his naive and hyperbolic approach to being awake after ten o'clock – "the mountains of the moon, the burial-place of the elephants: white on the map" (7) – the introductory chapter is imbued with a constant sense of unfamiliarity and perplexity. However clear the psychoanalytic context might be, Laurie is preoccupied with himself first and foremost as a human being (regardless of sexuality) with 'normal' needs, desires and anxieties and he continues to be so throughout the novel. Instead of representing homosexuality as a case study, *The Charioteer* is much more invested in depicting variance and complexity, and the struggle of living a 'moral' life that involves none of the promiscuity Laurie will later come to identify with the homosexual subculture. I would therefore argue that Renault deploys a socially variable psychoanalytic account of homosexuality – the sexually deviating subject not as mentally ill and neurotic, but as an, albeit burdened, individual finding his place in the world of the 1940s. This reading is reinforced by Renault's own words in her "Afterword" to *The Friendly Young Ladies* (1944) when she criticises Radclyffe Hall's *The Well of Loneliness* (1928) for its "self-pity, and its

32 Zilboorg, (2001), p. 108.

33 Renault to Peter Wolfe, February 27, 1970, and December 7, 1971: "Responding to Peter Wolfe's psychoanalytic treatment of her work, the author [Renault] herself emphasized that she found Freud "often absurdly dogmatic and inadequate to the totality of human experience" and indicated that Laurie is "naturally homosexual" rather than sexually compromised as a consequence of a broken home." Cited in Zilboorg, (2001), p. 108.

earnest humourlessness [which] invites irreverence"[34]. Renault keeps wondering how Hall "could bring herself to sound so woebegone a note"[35]. In view of these provocative words, it would be misleading to read *The Charioteer* as a similarly depressing representation of male homosexuality.

The text challenges its readers to look beyond the obvious scenes of homophobia and oppression in order to grasp a more complex situation of how to live as a homosexual during the Second World War. Consequently, Renault's references to the Oedipus complex are fashioned in order to appropriate and modify the medical approach to homosexuality by using its very own language. This is most explicit in Laurie's inability to spell "psychology" (14) when writing a paper in college. Vaguely familiar with the term, Laurie is unsure "where the *h*" (14) belongs, indicating a growing distance to the concept. This linguistic uncertainty demonstrates Butler's argument that "speech exceeds the censor by which it is constrained"[36]. Although the language of psychoanalysis constrains Renault's text and relegates it into a certain medical discourse that regards homosexuality as an illness, Laurie's inability (or reluctance) to correctly spell the concept that is supposed to limit him, demonstrates the power of language to subtly move beyond the realm of censorship. "If censoring a text is always in some sense incomplete, that may be partly because the text in question takes on new life as part of the very discourse produced by the mechanism of censorship."[37] The repeated self-regulation of Renault's writing by implicating a psychoanalytic defence for homosexuality discloses this very paradox observed by Butler: implicated in a system that prosecuted sexual indecency, *The Charioteer* simultaneously reifies this discourse in its self-regulation, and challenges it by finding space for escaping the grasp of the Obscene Publications Act of 1857.

Accordingly, Summer's analyses in *Gay Fictions: Wilde to Stonewall* is too sweeping to grasp the complexity of Renault's text: "Laurie's family situation in the stock psychiatric clichés of the 1950s is so obvious as to render trite and predictable what might have been an insightful study on the dynamics of mother-son bonding."[38] More promising is Zilboorg's argument that "Renault does not focus on 'mother-son bonding' because she is interested instead in locating Laurie within a specific social context and in exploring how he [...] will live with his

34 Renault, (2014), p. 322.

35 Ibid., p. 323.

36 Judith Butler, *Excitable Speech: A Politics of the Performative of Identity* (London and New York: Routledge, 1997), p. 129.

37 Butler, (1997), p. 130.

38 Summers, (1990), p. 162.

difference in a heterosexist society."[39] The term "focus" in Zilboorg's phrasing is significant: while it has been shown that Renault clearly offers a psychoanalytic reading of her characters, her *emphasis* lies on how to be a homosexual soldier during the Second World War. *The Charioteer* thus negotiates between the medical model that treats homosexuality as a psychic disease, and the characters' demand to be recognised as human beings.

Far from being written "in the stock psychiatric clichés of the 1950s", as Summers claims, Renault deconstructs familial stereotypes by depicting Mrs. Odell as calculatingly cool towards her son: "She loved him; but she was apt to offer or withhold her love in a system of rewards and punishments, as she had during his childhood." (64) Consequently, while their "mother-son bonding" may find its roots in a psychoanalytic framework, it is repeatedly modified throughout the narrative making it rich with references to identity formation and struggles of belonging, rather than representing Laurie as stagnating in his homosexuality. These variances are often superimposed by a focus on more obvious medical references such as the enduring bond between the male child and his mother: "When I'm grown-up, I'm going to marry you" (13). This is refined several years later by the teenage Laurie contending that his mother is "not going to die or get married" (272). Finally, when Mrs. Odell does marry the clergyman Mr. Straiker, Laurie is left "marked for life, as a growing tree is marked, by the chain that had bound him to her; but the chain was rusting away, leaving only the scar" (108). This highly symbolic and metaphorical description of Laurie as a tree that cannot grow properly because of a chain digging into its bark, reveals the protagonist's childlike dependency on his mother. Such depictions are read by Summers as signs of the "unnaturalness of the relationship of mother and son", allegedly culminating in Laurie declaring "his own intentions toward her"[40]. However, Mrs. Odell's marriage to Mr. Straike cuts the chain loose and releases Laurie from his role as the only man in her life.

Laurie's reaction upon receiving the news that Mrs. Odell is going to remarry shows that Summers' analysis is too simplistic because he fails to account for Laurie's wish to build a relationship of *confidence* with his mother that allows him to confess his homosexuality. At no point does the text seriously emphasise Laurie's "own intentions toward" her – his childish announcement to marry his mother was uttered at the age of five and is grounded in the traumatic experience of his father's leave-taking. Moreover, Laurie realises that "[b]efore she had abandoned him [due to her wedding], he had begun already to abandon her" (108) and he understands that

39 Zilboorg, (2001), p. 107.

40 Summers, (1990), p. 161.

the gulf of incommunicable things opened between them. Already it was unbridgeable. She would never now, as once he had dreamed, say to him in the silent language of day-to-day, 'Tell me nothing; it is enough that no other woman will ever take you from me' (108).

At this point in the novel, Laurie is already in hospital with a badly wounded knee as a consequence of the battle of Dunkirk. He clearly wants to confess his homosexuality to his mother but his naively imagined confidentiality remains unreachable. Laurie emphasises the finality of their separation metaphorically as a "gulf of incommunicable things [that] opened between them", which insinuates the profound depth of his distance to Mrs. Odell. When Laurie tries to bridge the gap that precludes their mutual honesty, he realises that his efforts are in vain. This comprehension is devastatingly reinforced upon meeting his soon-to-be stepfather Mr. Straike, which leads Laurie to sense the steadily growing estrangement to his mother for the first time. He is consequentially shocked by his mother's clumsy justification for why she did not bring his Tchaikovsky records when coming to visit Laurie in hospital:

His mother said, with a defensiveness which made her sound faintly reproachful, 'We didn't bring any of your *classical* records, dear, they'd be *sure* to get scratched in a place like this; and besides, Mr. Straike said he felt certain they wouldn't be popular with the men' (67) [emphasis original].

It is striking that Mrs. Odell speaks of "we" to include Mr. Straike. However, because Laurie is as yet unaware of his mother's new relationship, he does not catch the implication of the "we". Nor does he quite realise the importance of his mother listening to Mr. Straike's opinion that classical records would not "be popular with the men". Genuinely confused, Laurie struggles to comprehend the situation. Mrs. Odell's accentuation of "classical" and the overall defensive sounding argument betray her suspicion that records by an allegedly homosexual artist might expose Laurie as queer. This scene illustrates the complicated relationship between a closeted homosexual and his mother, which challenges Summers' argument that Renault "render[s] trite and predictable what might have been an insightful study on the dynamics of mother-son bonding"[41]. Contrary to this claim, *The Charioteer* precludes any straightforward reading of the relationship between mother and son by dramatising their co-closetedness.

41 Summers, (1990), p. 162.

In *Epistemology of the Closet*, Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick analyses the 'closet' – a metaphor for concealing one's sexuality – as a performative silence.[42] This means that an unexpressed and implied homosexuality regulates a person's conduct. Silence is not only performed by the homosexual but also by the people closest to him/her/them – in Laurie's case by his mother. Sedgwick claims that "no one person can take control over all the multiple, and often contradictory codes by which information about sexual identity and activity can seem to be conveyed"[43]. Keeping up his closetedness is thus much more complicated for Laurie in hospital than it used to be before the war. In school Laurie would play with the suggestiveness of homosexuality by joking: "I can't get him out of my head. Those long eyelashes. Would he look at me, do you think?" (18) This carefree attitude changes when trapped in the enclosed space of the hospital ward where every conversation can be overheard and every absence is noticed, which progressively shatters Laurie's confidence. While the rest of the hospital ward remains ignorant of Laurie's sexuality, he becomes increasingly aware of it, which is illustrated in a conversation between Laurie and his friend Reg concerning Laurie's unusual friendship with the hospital orderly and Quaker Andrew:

> Laurie went deep into his locker after a cigarette. […] 'That kid that does the ward at night, the young one, properly took to you, hasn't he?' 'Me?' said Laurie. He went back quickly into the locker again. 'Can't say I've noticed it specially.' 'What I'm getting at, Spud, you want to watch it. No offense.' 'Come again?' said Laurie into the locker. (87)

Laurie interprets Reg's statement that Andrew has "took to you" as a reference for his homosexual feelings towards "that kid", whereas Reg fears that talking to Andrew might seduce Laurie to become a pacifist himself. In order to conceal his embarrassment and insecurity during their ambiguous conversation, Laurie "went back quickly into the locker". The abstract concept of the closet is symbolised in Laurie's hiding to maintain the silence that protects him from harm. His fear of betraying signs of homosexuality is most obvious when he pretends to have missed Reg's advice to "watch it". Because Laurie cannot be sure what Reg refers to, he circumvents an answer. However, the mobility in the scene – moving in and out of the locker – bespeaks Laurie's restlessness and unease: he wants to escape the situation and the stinging suggestiveness of Reg's questioning. Believing that an open confrontation will restore his confidence that his secret is safe, Laurie boldly claims: "Don't worry, I guarantee that if any seduction

42 Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Epistemology of the Closet*, [1990], (Berkeley and London: University of California Press, 2008), p. 3.

43 Sedgwick, (2008), p. 79.

goes on it'll be done by me. [...] He held his breath." (88) Laurie's agitation yields to stillness where even breathing is arrested. The tension that the statement provokes in Laurie is relieved when Reg (deliberately?) misunderstands: "That's all a lad like that wants, someone to make a man of him." (88) The abrupt termination of their conversation forecloses Laurie's response to Reg's telling statement. It remains unclear whether or not he is entirely unaware of Laurie's homosexuality, which only increases the ambiguity of their dialogue.

In such scenes Renault fashions solidarity between Laurie and the reader who shares the secret of Laurie's sexuality, whereas Reg and every other character of the hospital ward is excluded. Waters argues that "Renault's originality in *The Charioteer* was to ally her readers with, rather than against, the homosexual dissembler"[44]. Because the queer world which Laurie represents has infiltrated 'normal' society, every conversation or conduct is deprived of its implied heteronormativity. Consequently, those without queer knowledge become "the butt of the humour"[45] like Nurse Adrian, who fails to fully grasp Laurie's incomprehensible babbling whilst awakening from narcotics:

'I don't deserve it, you know. If you knew all about me, you wouldn't be good to me like you are.'
'Hush, you've had an operation, you must keep quiet.' […]
'You don't think I'm like that, do you?'
'Of course not, it's just the anaesthetic.'
'Going through a phase is different, I mean people do. It isn't anything.' (39)

Only under the influence of narcotics does Laurie display the stereotypical discourse of self-loathing and pity. Even then, the double entendre of Laurie talking about his homosexuality and Nurse Adrian's blatant ignorance rings a humoristic tone. The scene seems to push the limits of plausibility – how much more clear does Laurie need to be before Reg and Nurse Adrian take off their heteronormative goggles and perceive Laurie for who he is? How far can the dramatisation of ignorance be pushed before the text loses credibility?

Even the most glaring allusions to homosexual desire are being overlooked by heteronormative characters to illustrate society's ignorance and to unsettle the authority of dominant knowledge. It follows that the novel can convincingly employ a plotline where Nurse Adrian develops romantic feelings towards Laurie because to her the wounded soldier is an attractive, masculine and heterosexual bachelor. When Laurie tells Nurse Adrian that he will soon be relocated to an-

44 Waters, (1995), p. 218.

45 Ibid., p. 218.

other hospital, she begins to cry because she does not want to see him go. Unsure how to react, Laurie embraces her, which plunges him into unfamiliar terrain:

He could no more have kept from kissing her than he could have kicked a lost puppy back into the street. [...]
What's the matter with me? He thought. At first, he wouldn't admit to himself that it was happening: it was disruptive, undermining all the established decencies and securities of his life. Then suddenly he felt delighted with himself. After this nothing would ever be exactly the same, one's limitations would never seem quite so irrevocably fixed. [...]
She knew nothing, she had scarcely even preconceptions; he had only to find himself the right kind of emotional pose, which as she trusted him wouldn't be difficult, and he could make use of her to almost any extent. She would be very useful, invaluable indeed, and after all, it was what she wanted. [...]
She doesn't think me different, except as the person one loves is always different. No one need ever think that again. I could tell her the truth sometime, perhaps. If I put it nicely she wouldn't know what it really meant. She'd probably think it very romantic. Or perhaps she need never know at all.
One would have to be tactful, not let her think she'd rushed one into it. Perhaps one could say ... (249-251)

Whilst shocked at first, Laurie soon begins to realise that a relationship with Nurse Adrian would significantly change his life and he momentarily betrays all of the "established decencies and securities of his life" by kissing her. Laurie perceives the possibility of a heteronormative life as generally attractive: "One's limitations would never seem quite so irrevocably fixed" and "[n]o one need ever think that [he is different] again". However, "[o]ne would have to be tactful" if one was to eventually come clean about the truth. Laurie's repeated self-identification as "one" indicates his actual distance to the whole idea of heterosexuality. Although potentially imagining married life, he cannot betray his personal convictions. In addition to his own reasons for dismissing the thought, Laurie is sympathetic with the nurse, who would ultimately be the one "paying for all this" (250). This scene demonstrates Laurie's deep-rooted desire to live a 'moral' life, which precludes deceiving himself as well as others. By suddenly terminating his ponderings, registered in the interruption ("..."), Laurie consciously decides to continue fighting for a life as a homosexual. The novel does thus not represent the common discourse of marriage for the sake of becoming recognised as a heterosexual and 'normal' individual. *The Charioteer* manages to remain authentic in its depiction of homosexuality as a desire that lived in the

shadows of heteronormativity and the respective scenes successfully illustrate that dominant standards are inherently fragile.

Due to these diverse discourses surrounding Laurie's homosexuality, his mother's reluctance to bring his classical records is likely to carry a deeper meaning. The deliberateness of her action suggests not only that Laurie is a closeted homosexual, but that his mother partakes in the symbolic performance of silence, which signals a co-closetedness between the characters. I characterise co-closetedness as a shared moment between mother and son where both may or may not know about the latter's sexual deviance, which leaves them in a position of co-dependency. Sedgwick similarly argues that "[t]he pathogenic secret itself, even, can circulate contagiously *as* a secret: a mother says that her adult child's coming out of the closet with her has plunged her, in turn into the closet in her conservative community"[46]. While Sedgwick sees a causal connection between a child's coming out process and a mother's consequent closeting, *The Charioteer* emphasises its synchronicity: from the moment that Laurie recognises his sexuality, Mrs. Odell becomes part of the silence that constitutes the closet. This interdependence between mother and son leaves Mrs. Odell with the potential of tampering with Laurie's chance of coming out to her: if silence was broken due to the public playing of Tchaikovsky records, her own closetedness, and therefore her good reputation and upcoming marriage with a conservative clergyman, would be endangered. She thus has a keen interest in moderating, navigating and restricting Laurie's desire to reveal himself to her. Mrs Odell's initiative challenges Sedgwick's claim of parental closeting as a *cause* of the child's outing. Whereas Sedgwick's asserts that the "adult's child coming out of the closet [is the reason for] plung[ing] [the mother], in turn into the closet in her conservative community", Mrs Odell cannot be plunged into the closet when she already lives in it. Consequently, while benefiting from the silence surrounding co-closetedness, Mrs. Odell would be forced to take a stand if her son was to leave this space of silence. If she allows Laurie to confess his homosexuality to her, she would need to respond – either by keeping silent out of embarrassment and shame, which would betray the loyalty to her child, or in accepting his otherness and any possible consequences. In order not to be put into this impossible situation, Mrs. Odell ensures that no sincere intimacy occurs between her and her child. It follows that rather than entrapping Laurie and Mrs Odell in the narrative of mother-son-bonding, Renault has Laurie realise his growing distance to his mother.

By positioning Laurie's first experiences with the homosexual subculture directly after realising that his bond with his mother is broken, the text resolves the

46 Sedgwick, (2008), p. 80.

Oedipus complex: no longer striving for his mother as the ultimate love-object, Laurie – the tree formerly marked by a chain – is free to develop and grow. His subsequent immersion into the queer world seems to be a counter-performance to the conservative lifestyle aspired to by his mother when marrying the clergyman Mr. Straike. Like a teenager, Laurie has to rebel and experience his freedom before he can conceptualise what he really wants in life.

If, as Alden argues, Laurie's "longing to be accepted by society prevents him from accepting his sexuality for nearly the entire duration of the book"[47], Laurie would neither plunge into the homosexual subculture, nor blithely admit to his love for Andrew in an imaginary letter to his mother. At this point, Laurie can still conceptualise a confidential understanding with his mother, and although the letter is a product entirely of his fantasy, it lays bare Laurie's true feelings for the young Quaker and signals his acceptance of his homosexuality. It is a glimpse into his psyche, which heteronormative discourse denies him to make public.

> Darling Mother,
> I have fallen in love. I now know something about myself which I have been suspecting for years, if I had had the honesty to admit it. I ought to be frightened and ashamed, but I am not. Since I can see no earthly hope for this attachment, I ought to be wretched, but I am not. I know now why I was born, why everything has happened to me ever; I know why I am lame, because it has brought me to the right place at the right time. I would go through it all again, if I had to, now that I know it was for this.
> Oddly enough, what I feel most is relief, because I know now that what kept me fighting it so long was the fear that what I was looking for didn't exist. (57)

Despite never identifying Andrew as the love-object in this letter, the reader easily infers whom Laurie is talking about, because this scene is positioned immediately after his first encounter with Andrew in the hospital. Their conversation had ended with Laurie saying "Oh, by the way ___" (56). The unfinished sentence marks a desire to continue their conversation, which is denied to Laurie by the confined space of the military hospital where a prolonged talk between a soldier and a Quaker conscientious objector raises suspicions. The letter functions to complete Laurie's sentence and to disclose his stirring emotions. Addressing the letter to his "Darling Mother" sets a tone of softness and trust, which emphasises my reading of Laurie's wish to confide in Mrs. Odell. Instead of attempting to declare his own love for her, as Summers argues, Laurie imagines telling her the truth about his sexual leanings. This hopeful atmosphere of sharing his thoughts is continued until Laurie fears that his fantasy might invol-

47 Alden, (2014), p. 196.

untarily be projected onto the paper as written words. For the first time, Laurie realises that he cannot easily overcome the silence that governs his relationship to his mother because society would not allow him to disclose his outlawed love. His anxiety to reveal himself is symbolic of the social pressure to conform and not reminiscent of Laurie's alleged self-loathing. He is very conscious of what he "ought" to feel – "frightened and ashamed", "wretched" – but instead he is relieved to have discovered his true sexuality. His first sentence "I have fallen in love" shows not only a youthful lack of concern over admitting to his feelings, but also joy over having found out "something about myself which I have been suspecting for years". Encountering Andrew and falling so quickly and hopelessly in love with him is part of Laurie's self-discovery, which he registers as a positive turn towards self-fulfilment. Having known of his "own uniqueness" (13) since he was a little boy and having had homosexual friendships, Laurie now realises that what he has so far experienced was adolescent and immature compared to his feelings for Andrew. He even believes that he was destined to be injured during the war only to meet someone to connect with. The last sentence reveals that Laurie, if he ever truly fought his sexuality, was worried about finding true love instead of being ashamed for what he is.

This complex relationship between Laurie, his mother, his stepfather, Andrew and later Ralph in combination with Renault's appropriation of a psychoanalytic context shows that *The Charioteer* cannot be easily judged as non-affirmative or dramatising repentance as Alden argues. Her reading of the novel is too homogeneously influenced by a contemporary consciousness that lacks diversity in the judgement of the text and omits the publication conditions during the Cold War era. It is important to recognise that by alluding to homosexuality as a psychic condition deriving from failed identification with a male role model, *The Charioteer* was partially vindicated and protected from being censored in Britain. Butler calls this self-regulation a form of "implicit censorship"[48] which means that "the power of the censor is not exhausted by explicit state policy or regulation"[49]. At the same time as being self-censoring, Renault's novel circumvents obscenity laws by utilising the gaps that "[e]xplicit forms of censorship"[50] unconsciously produce. Stating "*what it does not want stated*", official boards of regulation "are exposed to a certain vulnerability precisely through being more readily legible."[51] Because the Obscene Publications Act of 1857 controlled how sexuality was presented in texts – "passion fine, 'sex' or titillation [especially in

48 Butler, (1997), p. 130.

49 Ibid., p. 130.

50 Ibid., p. 130.

51 Ibid., p. 130, [emphasis original].

homosexual acts] far from fine"[52] – authors like Renault were able to adjust their writings accordingly.

Despite its psychoanalytic self-regulation, *The Charioteer* was still daring and explicit enough to be refused by Renault's publishers Morrow in New York, who were influenced by McCarthyism and its homophobia. David Sweetman argues that "[t]he idea of a homosexual love story involving soldiers and pacifists must have seemed to the editors at Morrow like a scenario for their worst Cold War nightmare."[53] This reluctance to print *The Charioteer* illustrates that Renault was not as free to write about homosexuality set during the Second World War as novelists are today. Infiltrating certain stereotypes into her writing was therefore necessary for Renault's novel to get published – and as her American editors demonstrate, even that was not always sufficient.[54]

THE HYPOCRISY OF CENSORSHIP

The Charioteer was not the only novel that encountered resistance during publication. Walter Baxter's *Look Down in Mercy* (1951) was changed for an American readership to end on a note of confidence rather than in suicide. The discrepancies between the two versions give insight into the complicated world of writing against the grain of heteronormativity in the context of the Cold War. Whereas Renault teases her readership to find gay-affirmation in the allusive language of the text to circumvent censorship in Britain, Baxter's novel is generally more direct in is display of homosexuality and does not shy away from representing an officer in highly compromising terms. The following analysis will highlight the hypocrisy of censorship when certain acts of homosexuality as well

52 David Kynaston, *Family Britain, 1951-57*, [2009], (London: Bloomsbury, 2010), p. 552.

53 David Sweetman, *Mary Renault: A Biography* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1993), pp. 145-146.

54 In passing, David Sweetman acknowledges a significant detail in Renault's life that is often neglected in analysing her texts: Renault and her partner Julie needed money because the significant sum of $150,000 that Renault had earned when *Return to Night* had won the MGM Award, was spent. Sweetman concludes that "[n]ow that the money had run out Mary must write, Julie must work." Sweetman, (1993), p. 135. It is thus plausible that in order to guarantee publication and to come out of debt, Renault took precautions and deliberately infused her text with homophobic stereotypes so that it became published and a broader audience would be inclined to buy the novel.

as tender touches between male bodies are excluded from the British version, whereas non-consensual sex between the protagonist Kent and his mistress Helen remained un-censored in both editions. A comparison between the British and American edition of *Look Down in Mercy* will on the one hand clarify the pressure brought against authors of homosexual fiction in the 1950s, and on the other hand highlight the lingering patriarchal attitude that pardoned raping women. To begin with, I will examine the two vastly different endings that are both printed in the 2014 edition of *Look Down in Mercy*. Without further knowledge of other changes, the American version seems implausible as it parts with Baxter's otherwise largely realistic and burdensome style of writing.

After drinking heavily in an attempt to conceal his attempted suicide as an accident, Baxter's protagonist Anthony Kent sits on the window-sill in both endings. The British version unfolds as follows:

> His face was running with sweat and his arms shook; as he straightened his body to get back into the room the ledge of wood broke and he fell forward across the window-sill. His hands clawed at the woodwork behind him, but he could only touch it with the tips of his slippery fingers, and then he knew that he would fall. As his body began to plunge towards the drive he held his arms in a grotesque attitude as though to break his fall and he cried out; but not in mercy. (*MD* [1951], 273-274)

This ending is consistent with the rest of the narrative, featuring a weak man out of touch with his feelings and indecisive in his actions. The fated killing of the protagonist is a mixture not only of personal failure as an officer and heterosexual man, but also of continuous misfortune recognisable in his failed attempt to crawl back into the room and save himself. The use of words such as "clawed" and "grotesque" indicates homosexuality as 'unnatural' and creature-like, which dehumanises Kent making his death not only inevitable but also just. The British version has no sense of a happy ending and shows Kent moments before his death as a 'reasonable' homosexual who cannot/ should not cry for mercy. In contrast, the alternate version for the American market paints a different scene:

> His face was running with sweat and his arms shook; as he straightened his body to get back into the room the ledge of wood broke. He pushed violently with his arms and toppled backward, striking his head on the stone floor. He lay quite still on his back, his arms outstretched.
> (19)
> [...]

But in spite of the wretchedness of his physical condition Kent was filled with happiness; the unbelieving happiness when the near miracle occurs at the last moment. […] He knew he had solved nothing and he persuaded himself there was nothing to solve, all he had to do was to go on living and be with Anson. He resolved to try and be brave and to try and be good; to do more, he told himself, was not in his power. (*MD* [1952], 275-276)

Unlike the British ending, which depicts Kent as a grotesque creature, the American version emphasises his humanness in outstretched arms indicating openness rather than insecurity. His homosexuality seems to no longer be the cause of his troubles and his attempted suicide, but the reason to continue living. This ending is only consistent with the rest of the novel when reading the American version, which has been altered at other points as well to emphasise Kent and Anson's affair as simultaneously sexual and affectionate. Without knowledge of other passages from the American edition, the thoroughly transformed Kent, who refrains from worrying when repeatedly emphasising that he had tried to the best of his abilities to be the man society wants him to be, sounds implausible and inconsistent. Baxter additionally parts with his otherwise realistic narrative when deploying the concept of almost divine luck that saves Kent: "He had no idea that the failure of his attempt was inevitable" (276). When the British ending prohibits Kent from crying for mercy to substantiate his fate as self-imposed, the "inevitable" rescue of him in the American version paints homosexuality in a more positive light. Gregory Wood's introduction to the 2014 re-print edition cleverly circumvents to account for this change of mind by only stating that both endings are "ambivalent" (ix) – an observation to which I subscribe, given that we neither find Kent actually dead nor know of his plans concerning Anson, his batman and lover. Wood's further observation that "One [ending] is unhappy and the other happy" (ix) is equally plausible. However, his reluctance to "go into detail about this" (ix) and to instead emphasise the author's alleged unwillingness to depict a definite ending does not resolve any questions regarding their vast opposition. More enlightening is reading both versions through the lens of Michael Bronski's claim that 1950s novels were much less morbid in the United States than stereotypes suggest.[55] A less burdened and more optimistic portrayal of Kent in the American version suggests that Bronski's observation holds true. However, the delayed publication of *The Charioteer* in the United States seems to refute this assumption of more liberal American censorship. Obviously, there is no categorical truth to the convention of publishing and censorship in the 1950s but regardless of this discrepancy, it is revealing to look at further scenes

55 Michael Bronski, "The Shock of the Old: Christopher Bram Chats with the Author of *Pulp Friction*" in *The Gay & Lesbian Review Worldwide* Vol. 10, No. 2 (2003), p. 32.

from *Look Down in Mercy* that have been altered in the American edition of 1952 in order to gain insight into the time's arbitrary set of prejudices.

Comparing key scenes to the British version published a year earlier reveals a deep-rooted homophobia that required euphemistic language for the chaste British readership. Generally speaking, the American version is more voyeuristic about Kent's and Anson's sexuality and lingers to express tender kisses and touches. The British version suffices, like Renault's novel, to hint at physical contact between the characters and never makes their relationship sexually explicit. The more expressive language in the American edition significantly alters the reader's understanding of Kent's increasing sorrows throughout the novel. For instance, one scene in the British edition shows Kent and his batman in embrace to keep warm during the night – a conduct that does not appear as particularly controversial considering that the platoon is resting outside in the cold night, exhausted after a long and arduous march:

> [Kent] put his arms round Anson and pulled him closer. They lay still for a moment and then Kent lifted his shoulder from the ground and Anson put his arms round him. Kent was dimly aware that although his body might demand more, he himself did not: it was sufficient that they should rest in each other's arms, no longer hearing the firing or the man who had begun to scream again. (*MD* [1951], 152)

Expressing nothing more than mutual comfort, the text's most daring trespass contains Kent's faint realisation that "his body might demand more". True to his conditioning as a white, middle-class, heterosexual and married man, Kent withstands his somatic impulses and escapes further disgrace. This scene is the sole explanation for Kent's increasing self-doubt and his life-threatening actions to demonstrate his masculinity in heroic conduct that follow this passage: "he wanted to prove something to himself and to Anson, but what it was he did not know" (*MD* [1951], 152). Kent seems to feel the need to compensate for his body's stirring desire, even though his and Anson's behaviour displays hardly more than camaraderie in extreme circumstances. Consequently, Kent's reaction is vastly exaggerated and lacks credibility.

The considerably more explicit American version reveals a different situation where Kent and Anson share a kiss:

> [Kent] put his arms round Anson and pulled him closer. They lay still for a moment and *then their mouths met*. Kent lifted his shoulder from the ground and Anson put his arms round him. *They lay pressed closely together and* Kent was dimly aware that although his body might demand more, he himself did not: it was sufficient that they should rest in

each other's arms, no longer hearing the firing or the man who had begun to scream again. *They lay together for a long time and then Kent carefully moved his hand from beneath the blanket and brushed Anson's hair back from his forehead.*
'Let's try and get some sleep,' he whispered again, and felt Anson nod his head slightly. Very carefully, as though he was afraid someone might hear, he moved his body until he could lay his head on the soft pad of muscles below Kent's shoulder. Kent put his arm back beneath the blanket, their hands met and their fingers interlocked. (*MD* [1952], 169-170) [my emphasis]

The parts in italics signal the additions of the American version. The first two – "then their mouths met" and "they lay pressed closely together" – illustrate a different dynamic between the men. Their innocent embrace has turned into a kiss and they are described as clinging to each other like lovers. Whereas the British edition can still justify Kent's behaviour in terms of extreme military circumstances, the American version leaves no doubt that their relationship is sexual, and its depiction of intercourse becomes increasingly explicit. The latter addition of Kent touching Anson's hair expresses an initiative in Kent that seems startling to the readership of the British version, where the protagonist is characterised as restrained and passive until drunkenness loosens his inhibitions. The altered text illustrates a much more determined Kent who still feels that homosexuality is "utterly disgraceful and criminal" (1951:152; 1952:169), but whose emerging feelings for Anson overpower any feared consequences. Knowing this, it seems far more consequential that Kent feels the need to prove his manliness in heroic actions to himself as well as to Anson, in order to countervail the threat of emasculation that stereotypically accompanies homosexual conduct.

In contrast to the American edition, the British version does not obviously trespass conventional military camaraderie that legitimatises a certain degree of intimacy between men. However, a closer look reveals that the display of male conduct deconstructs the military as an institution of what Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick calls lingering "homosocial desire"[56]. Both editions show Kent at a military ball spending "most of the evening in the bar set aside for officers and sergeants, watching the men dancing with their women and with each other, gossiping on and on about the company with the persistence and inanity of a man in love" (15). This scene uses stereotypical markers of femininity to describe Kent. He persistently engages in gossip and disobeys conventions of male rationality when being inane. Culminating in a description of him as "a man in love", Kent displays exaggerated female emotions and the lack of control therein. As Brian

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

Pronger argues the "essence of manhood lies in its *difference* from womanhood"[57] – a difference that is violently devastated because of Kent's conduct. Moreover, placing this scene in a masculine space like the bar for officers and sergeants, challenges Connell's assumption that "the military and government provide a fairly convincing *corporate* display of masculinity"[58]. By depicting Kent's gender performance as bordering on femininity, the narrative shows that masculinity is prone to becoming undone even within institutions like the military. When additionally emasculating the *bar* – an allegedly highly masculine space – *Look Down in Mercy* substantiates a critical stance regarding the fixity of gender norms. Implicitly the novel also suggests that *because* the military was a 'male only' institution during the Second World War, men such as Kent were able to disguise their sexual desires. Sedgwick calls this social interaction between men "homosocial desire" which "describe[s] social bonds between persons of the same sex" that may often "be characterized by intense homophobia, fear and hatred of homosexuality"[59]. In addition to this, "homosocial desire" "hypothesize[s] the potential unbrokenness of a continuum between homosocial and homosexual – a continuum whose visibility, for men, in our society, is radically disrupted"[60]. Sedgwick emphasises that men are often unaware of the lingering "continuum between homosocial and homosexual" – meaning the potential transformation of male bonding into homosexual desire. *Look Down in Mercy* dramatises this paradoxical position by depicting the military as a space that facilitates male bonding and the possibility for it to turn into homosexual desire. Paul Hammond intriguingly argues that the expression of feelings among men "blurs the very distinction [between a homosexual and a homosocial context] which the British army still patrols"[61]. This means that despite its all-male environment, the British military had an interest in keeping its reputation unfettered by homosexual suspicions. Consequently, the British editors of *Look Down in Mercy* took good care to delete any scenes that exceed conventional male wartime bonding such as the drunken talkativeness of Kent at the military dance. Nonetheless, it remains obvious, even to the readership of the British version, that Kent is very attracted to the opportunity of engaging with men in a setting that raises no suspicions over his heterosexuality.

57 Brian Pronger, The Arena of Masculinity: Sports, Homosexuality, and the Meaning of Sex (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1990), p. 71.

58 Connell, (2016), p. 77.

59 Sedgwick, (1985), p. 1.

60 Sedgwick, (1985), pp.1-2.

61 Paul Hammond, *Love Between Men in English Literature* (New York: St Martin's Press, 1996), p. 225.

Although Kent and Anson's first sexual encounter is printed in both editions, the fictionalisation of their shared intimacy differs drastically, and the toned-down display in the 1951 version accords with the rest of the narrative and leaves a lot of blanks for the reader to fill in:

> In the darkness of the bedroom they stripped off their clothes swiftly, laying them on the floor at their feet, noiselessly taking off their boots [...]. Lying down side by side on the bed they encircled each other with their arms [...]. (*MD* [1951], 207)

The American version goes into more detail:

> [...] *and their mouths met*. In the darkness of the bedroom they stripped off their clothes swiftly, laying them on the floor at their feet, noiselessly taking off their boots [...]. Lying down side by side on the bed they encircled each other with their arms [...]. *A gentle, almost unintentional movement began, and their muscles crushed their bodies together.* (*MD* [1952], 233)

As before, the most explicit references to intercourse are deleted from the English edition. In the American version Anson and Kent's sexuality is depicted as simultaneously tender and rough, intentional and accidental, beyond both their rational understanding. The emphasis on "their bodies" shows that Kent's former superiority over his desire did not last and now his "muscles" control his movements. Their parting, too, is depicted in different terms. Small and tender gestures such as "[*h*]*e gently rubbed his unshaven face against Kent's*" (*MD* [1952], 235) and "[*h*]*e smiled and touched Kent's fingers through the* [*mosquito*] *net*" (*MD* [1952], 235) are missing from the English novel. By editing out these non-verbal signs of affection, the English version loses a sense of intimacy that trespasses mere physicality. Evidently, English editors did not simply object to expressive displays of love making between men, but also to signs of emotional attachment that would challenge a reading of Kent as a lonely man in the military craving human contact. Considering these conservative views on homosexuality, it seems deeply troubling that the English edition had no difficulty depicting Kent raping an innocent woman named Helen Dean.

Kent and Helen meet during the military ball, mentioned previously. Kent's conversation with Tarrant and other officers is interrupted by Doctor Rowland, who shows up to "talk about the sexual behaviour of women in general and Eastern women in particular" (21), indicating the novel's repeated and pronounced racism against Indians, which Kent himself shares and advocates. Generally uninterested in the topic of female sexual behaviour, Kent chooses the less dreary convention of dancing with Helen, one of Doctor Rowland's nurses. Dur-

ing their dance Kent remains silent and inattentive whereas Helen leads the conversation until addressing the officer directly, who responds: "I'm sorry, Miss – er … what did you say?" (16) When in the scene quoted earlier, talk connected to pleasure and positive social interaction between men drinking at a bar, it is now associated with female triviality in conversation and Kent's reluctance to follow it. Instead of talking to his partner, Kent feels the "surreptitious attention" (16) his dance with Helen is causing. Not disclosing what this attention exactly constitutes, the text instead highlights Kent's indifference towards Helen whom "[h]e had almost forgotten" (16). That Kent's silence is caused by his lack of interest is misunderstood by Helen, who fills it with wild fantasising: "she wondered if he had been watching her for some time, and had had rather too much to drink in order to pluck up courage to be introduced to her" (16). Helen's interpretation of Kent's behaviour is so innocent and naive that she comes across as weak and unconfident.

These destructive dynamics between the characters are even more obvious when Helen *stops* talking: "She knew that the dance would be over in a few minutes and she stopped talking in order to see if he would ask her to reserve another dance for him later on." (17) Helen's silence is a counter-performance to her talkativeness designed for Kent to express his interest in her, but Kent "found her unattractive, her voice, her thin body and her colouring" (17). He shallowly reduces Helen to her racialised and female body because he has failed to get to know her personality when not listening to her during their dance. Their conversation is a display of expectations and the immediate devastation thereof. Until encountering actual war action in Part Two, the novel reads like a parody that brings to the fore the destructive social conventions that govern heterosexual courting – the innocent and dull female who tries to win the heart of the indifferent yet desirable man. This is most obvious when Helen envisions a future date with Kent: "there aren't any English girls in Sialpur, he might easily want to see me again" (17). Conscious of her Eurasian heritage, Helen feels insecure, which does not, however, prevent her from re-immersing into pointless hoping. Again, the depiction of Kent stands in contradiction to Helen's expectations: "But Kent was bored and only wanted to return to the bar." (17) In no way does Kent share Helen's dream of a future meeting and instead seems to plan his escape.

After their first dance, Kent and Helen meet again onboard of a ship that brings them to Burma. By now, the other officers have perceived that Helen is "rather sweet on" (33) Kent and wants to accompany him to another dance: "And Kent tried to protest his innocence, but at the same time he was pleased that she was thought attractive, and that he should be suspected, however jokingly, of having an affair." (34) Kent enjoys the attention his relationship with Hel-

en is causing, because it distinguishes him as heterosexual and masculine. During the dance he consequentially demonstrates an exaggerated interest in her by "calling her 'darling' in a voice just loud enough to be heard by Maguire, who sat next to him" (38). Helen, in turn, never stops to think that "the word 'darling' might be meaningless" (38). This scene displays the same characteristics as before when Kent performs a social role that is misinterpreted by Helen as true intentions: "She genuinely believed that Kent was falling in love with her; she knew that she was in love with him. By the end of the evening Kent was almost drunk and had forgotten that he was only playing a part." (38) When alcohol disables rational thinking and dissolves inhibitions, Kent loses control over his act and becomes intimate with Helen in her cabin.

At first, their desire is mutual and Helen "clung to him, kissing fiercely with closed lips" (38). Kent perceives the kiss as "uncomfortable and stupid" (38) because it "doesn't fool anyone, and he pushed his tongue until her lips suddenly parted" (38). Kent's realisation that their kissing "doesn't fool anyone" indicates that he is still performing the act of heterosexuality but does it badly because he feels no true desire for Helen. Nor does the memory of his wife Celia, "her photograph or her handwriting" "stir[...] him physically" (30). Fantasising about "the first night they [he and Celia] had slept together" "no longer move[s] him", and "for several months he had been completely sexless, except now and then for some fantastically improbable dream that he preferred to forget as soon as possible" (30). The "improbable dream" that must be forgotten immediately illustrates Kent's stirring homosexual desires for Anson who becomes increasingly important for the officer. When the intimate bond with Anson grows, Kent's desire for women in general and for Helen in particular diminishes. In order to compensate for this trespass, he becomes more demanding and takes a forced initiative towards Helen who initially responds with pleasure and "her breath quickened" (38):

> Half drunk and thinking herself in love she was defenceless. Had Robert done such a thing she would have been beside herself with outrage modesty, even if they had been formally engaged. But it was impossible for her to judge Kent's action, she was afraid that if she tried to disapprove it would only underline her difference from other women that he knew. (39)

The shadow of patriarchy, where the white male subject claims universal power over the female, is already visible in this prelude to the rape scene when the emotional and weak woman "thinking herself in love" yields to the male demanding intercourse. The added element of race complicates this scene because

it subordinates the Eurasian Helen to the Caucasian Kent. Interestingly, Helen's reluctance if Robert (a fellow Eurasian in love with Helen) had tried to sleep with her would have placed her in a more traditional Caucasian female role than her behaviour towards Kent does. Renault's *The Charioteer* emphasises female, especially English, "modesty" with reference to Nurse Adrian: "She was sexually backward as is scarcely any female creature except the English girl of a certain upbringing: nothing she wanted was clear to her but love" (249). Both texts highlight female preoccupation with finding love as their major goal in life. Whereas the "English girl of a certain upbringing" is naïve and sexually inexperienced, the racially visible and marked Helen misinterprets Kent's forwardness as a sign for his experience with permissive white women. Scared to "underlin[e] her difference from other women that he knew", Helen surrenders her resistance and gives in to "his touch" (39). Her rising pleasure, however, challenges her status as a racialised woman "who [is her] own violation, who [is] logically inviolable because marked *as* sexual available without sexual agency"[62]. In Wendy Brown's analyses, racialised female bodies are not supposed to enjoy the touch of the white man and claim sexual agency in such enjoyment. This argument substantiates Sara Ahmed's reading of racialised bodies as investing "skin colour with meaning, such that 'black' and 'white' come to function, not as descriptions of skin colour, but as racial identities"[63]. When racialisation involves the body in the process of investing meaning onto it, Helen's body defies its status through sexual pleasure. Kent's reaction is consequential: "So you like it, Kent though, and suddenly he was disgusted with himself and then angry and vicious against Helen." (39) Kent re-directs his disgust over his forced heterosexual initiative towards Helen, which unloads itself in him violating her, thus re-establishing the boundaries between white male power and racially marked femininity devoid of agency.

> He kissed her again with his open mouth, wet with gin, and when he thought that she was responding sufficiently well without warning slid his hand down the front of her dress and cupped her naked breast in his hand. [...]
> She was frightened now and protested, trying to hold his hands away from her body and whispering: 'No, Tony, my dearest, please no.' But he went on, kissing her with a semblance of passion until her struggles ceased. He thought her gasps of pain were pleasure, too drunk and too indifferent to wonder whether she was a virgin. (38-39)

62 Wendy Brown, *States of Injury: Power and Freedom in late Modernity* (New York: Princeton University Press, 1995), p. 170.

63 Sara Ahmed, "Racialized Bodies" in Mary Evans and Ellie Lee (eds.), *Real Bodies: A Sociological Introduction* (New York: Palgrave, 2002), p. 46.

The double moral standard in the practice of censoring during the 1950s could not be any more evident in this scene: whilst homosexual intercourse was considered 'indecent behaviour' from which the innocent English readership needed to be sheltered, non-consensual heterosexuality was apparently so commonplace that it did not even require concealment in allusive language. The detailed description of the naked female body – "naked breast" – reducing Helen to her sexual parts, in combination with the depiction of Kent forcefully "kissing" Helen, evidences that heterosexual intercourse, however brutal, is protected from censorship. The conventional objectification and victimisation of women is so entrenched in patriarchal society that sexual assault becomes too ordinary to provoke objections.

Helen is no longer able to claim sexual agency when she is desperately "trying to hold his hands away from her body" (39) and becomes overpowered by his "indifference" (39) towards her. She turns into a body which serves to pleasure the white man's needs, and to silence his ever-growing fear of not sufficiently performing in a heterosexual and masculine manner. Helen's representation as weak and hardly able to pronounce protest – only in a whisper and only disguised in endearing language – substantiates the text's unconcern for her. The image of the exploited and colonised female body is abundantly clear especially when considering the light-dark dynamics that frame the scene.

Before the rape, Kent switches off the lights and plunges the room into darkness. With their vision impaired, no threatening gazes can be exchanged and the focus lies on touch and scent. This is further highlighted in Helen's wish to *stay* in the darkness when Kent is leaving, for fear of revealing that the illness is "reflected in her face, [that] her hair [is] disarranged and [her] lipstick smeared round her mouth" (39). Unwittingly, Helen relieves Kent from visually encountering the consequences of his action, thus not only protecting herself from shame, but foremost leaving his masculinity and patriarchal rights towards female bodies unchallenged. The next chapter will clarify that while violence is part of performing hegemonic masculinity, chivalry prohibits men to physically abuse women. Consequently, by raping Helen, Kent has forfeited rather than substantiated his right to perform masculinity. Through staying in the dark, Helen shelters Kent from recognising this mistake. Moreover, the characters' perpetual use of endearments such as "[d]arling, I must go" (39), "Tony, darling" (39) and "Tony, my dear" (40) works in similar ways: Helen gives the impression that she still relishes Kent who gladly accepts her offer to remain oblivious to his action. Unwilling to let the despicable act surface their consciousness, both characters continue in their enactment of fondness for each other.

Throughout the novel, Kent repeatedly seeks Helen's company in order to counteract his increasing feelings for Anson. The following scene succeeds Kent's raping of Helen and mirrors two things: Kent's desire to comprehend his sexual assault against Helen as a mutual exchange of affection, and his need to return to this memory in order to countervail his emerging homosexual feelings.

All the time he had been in hospital he had tried to feel desire for Helen; whenever she came into the ward to spend her few moments of freedom with him he would hold her hand and watch her face, trying to relive the drunken moments on the bed, trying to graft the desire he had then felt on to the present moment. His cold behaviour toward Anson had all been part of the pattern he was trying to weave, but nothing seemed to go right, he could not understand what was happening, he only knew that he was deeply frustrated and unhappy. (193)

Unsuccessfully, Kent tries to actively transform his feelings for Anson into desire for Helen by showing indifference towards the former and recollecting a past intimacy with the latter. Daringly for its time of writing, this scene implies that homosexuality cannot be 'treated' and re-converted into heterosexual desire, even when built on memories of intercourse. Consequently, Kent takes a more radical step when planning to share another night with Helen. To increase the symbolic meaning of inviting her to his quarters, he asks Anson to personally deliver his message, and to accompany the nurse to Kent's bungalow. Unanticipated by Kent, Anson and Helen bond over their shared interest in the officer: "it had been a relief for both of them to talk about him, and although there was only time to touch on the merest superficialities it had served as a link between them" (195). Whatever detail these "merest superficialities" have revealed to them is unclear, but when Kent sees them at ease with each other, he is bewildered and excluded from their intimacy. His discomfort is elevated when Helen says goodnight to Anson: "Kent saw them smile at each other as though they shared a secret. It made him feel uneasy" (196). Kent is no longer able to control the situation and becomes increasingly insecure in Helen's company. The nurse, however, misinterprets the situation once more and believes that Kent is longing for his wife and feels guilty over betraying her. Helen tries to comfort Kent but "to her horror his eyes filled with tears that spilled over before he could hide his face" (198). "And [then] Kent gave up the unequal struggle and cried, because he had had too much to drink, because she had said that she understood, and he knew that was impossible, mourning [...] for his dead love and the unknown terrors of the new" (198). In this key passage, Kent is represented as desperate, yet finally able to admit to himself (but not to Helen) that he is in "love" with a man and

that his former "love" for his wife or for Helen is a "dead" one. He is terrified of what this implies, but no longer capable of fighting his feelings. Helen, too, is terrified but for a different reason: a man overcome by emotions is too overwhelming for her to comprehend. Raised in a society that excludes emotions from the realm of masculinity and replaces them with an allegedly undying desire for sex, Helen takes action:

> Helen had made her decision but found it was too difficult to put into words. She stood up and held out her hand and he took it in his with a questioning look. She smiled at him, reassuringly, nodding her head slightly and he stood up. Still holding his hand she led him through the lounge and into the bedroom. (199)

This scene unfolds almost in 'slow-motion' where every bit of movement is emphasised as a huge change in Kent and Helen's relationship of dependency. Moral censorship on female sexuality prevents Helen from articulating her thoughts and to dissolve what the "it" is that cannot be "put into words". Even when the "it" is linked to the bedroom there is still no clear explanation for the meaning of the "it" since Kent misinterprets Helen's movements as a preamble for goodbyes "on to the veranda" (199). Only when "she had shut the door" does he realise "what she intended" (199). The "it" is here dissolved by Kent's emerging understanding and the connotation of a shut bedroom door as determining the most intimate of spaces. Lee Edelman and Lauren Berlant pointedly unmask this space as shielding the heterosexual sex act[64] that is conventionally initiated by the male, transforming the private bedroom as "a place where men have assumed their right to sexual intercourse"[65], and where women have been fixed in their reproductive roles. Such an assumption fails to prevail in this instance as it is Helen – a female – who takes initiative. By acting contrary to heteronormative conventions, Helen re-genders the bedroom space and transfers autonomous femininity into it. She is the active part who *leads* Kent towards the bedroom, which troubles notions of female passivity in general and her former depiction as the victim of rape in particular. It is her reassuring smile and her slight movements that seduce Kent to trust and follow her. In holding his hand as a way of comfort, yet also to guide him almost like a mother would with her children, Kent is not only emasculated by her but also infantilised.

64 Lauren Berlant and Michael Warner, "Sex in Public" in *Critical Inquiry* Vol. 24, No. 2 (1998), p. 555.

65 Nancy Duncan, "Renegotiating Gender and Sexuality in Public and Private Spaces" in Nancy Duncan (ed.), *BodySpace: Destabilizing geographies of gender and sexuality* (London and New York: Routledge, 1996), p. 131.

Standing out and contrasting with previous scenes, is the utter silence that surrounds them. When before, Helen was represented as the communicative part – to conceal nervousness during the dance or verbalise resistance in the cabin – she is now speechless upon her imminent plan to sleep with Kent. For the first time he cannot interpret sounds in his favour as he had done when he raped Helen thinking that "her gasps of pain were pleasure" (39). Through being silent, Helen claims a new form of power that overpowers the officer.

A sudden shift in Helen's confidence occurs when the narrative reveals that neither she nor Kent truly desire the unspeakable "it": "In silence and *against both their wishes* they took off their clothes and crept under the mosquito net, then they clung to each other in the darkness like children" (199) [my emphasis]. When before Helen was striving to be Kent's mistress, she now realises that her desires have never been real, that she wanted to be with Kent in order to elevate her own status beyond markers of race. Both Helen's and Kent's fate is manifesting, which is expressed in a tragic gesture of the characters clinging to each other's bodies and realising that their efforts are in vain because intercourse will do nothing but graven their pain. It appears as if Helen and Kent begin to acknowledge their destinies as racially and sexually marked subjects respectively. In sharing the plight of abjection, Kent and Helen find a moment of false consolidation that betrays their integrity.

Several weeks later, after having survived the worst of his journey out of Burma, Kent meets Helen one last time to find her taking care of Robert:

'Robert?' Kent asked, puzzled. 'Robert who?'
'Johns. You know who I mean, he's been a hospital orderly with me for a long time. At least, he's a warrant officer now,' she added proudly. 'You used to tease me about him.'
'No, I can't seem to place him, Helen. Did I meet him with you?' [...]
'No, you wouldn't know him, he's a Eurasian.' There was no trace of bitterness in her voice, and when she said 'Eurasian' she lifted her chin slightly. (247)

In this final encounter between Kent and Helen, she realises that as an English officer, Kent would not have bothered to recognise Robert's existence let alone remember him. Preoccupied with his "white man's burden" (8)[66] – a demonstra-

66 In the poem "The White Man's Burden: The United States & The Philippine Islands" from 1899 Rudyard Kiplan praises imperialist missions where the 'white man' sets out to colonise foreign lands inhabiting people "Half devil and half child" (l. 8). As a euphemism for imperialism, "The White Man's Burden" captures the racist discourse of colonialism. Kent's usage of the phrase in *Look Down in Mercy* underlines his own racism towards the Indians and Eurasian whilst aiming to substantiate his current situ-

tion of Kent's deep-rooted racism – Kent has never cared about anyone but himself, least of all about a Eurasian orderly. When Helen realises Kent's utter indifference towards Robert and her heritage more broadly, she "lifted her chin": a sign of pride and solidarity to help the man who has been worshipping her despite Helen's disrespectful behaviour towards him. Simultaneously, she comes to understand that Kent will not linger to help her and Robert retreat – that he is once again more worried about his own survival than anyone else's. Her altruism in helping Robert whilst knowing that she will be left alone to face the enemy positions Helen as the novel's most courageous character, putting Kent and the soldiers of war to shame. Helen proves that gender, race and class do not determine a person's decision and that fabricated norms are only cages for those who are prepared to linger behind bars. On this positive note the novel ends its story of Helen, who is positioned as a strong, brave and independent woman, free to choose for whom to die.

RESISTING BLACKMAIL – RESISTING STIGMATISATION

The unrevised representation of Helen's fate as a victim of rape in contrast to the censoring of homosexual conduct shows the double-standard of publishing practices during the Cold War. Helen's new-found pride as a Eurasian woman does not compensate for the fact that the scene of rape explicitly references, and thus condones violence against women, whereas tender kisses between men are censored in the English edition of *Look Down in Mercy*. Moreover, Kent's constant self-doubts and his disrespectful treatment of Helen in order to prove his heterosexuality seem to substantiate Alden's and Summers' negative evaluation of novels written in the 1950s as representations of burdened individuals perpetuating stigmatisation and homosexual trauma. However, Baxter's novel is not as straightforward as it seems. In his introduction to the 2014 edition Woods identifies Kent's inconsistent personality: "Kent is both a hero and a coward, a saver

ation as a 'burden' because he is not yet in direct combat and deprived of the chance to "search your manhood" (l. 29). Rudyard Kipling, "The White Man's Burden: The United States & The Philippine Islands", in Rudyard Kipling (ed.), *Rudyard Kipling's Verse: Definitive Edition* (Garden City, New York: Doubleday, 1940).

66 Kristine A. Miller, *British Literature of the Blitz: Fighting the People's War* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), p. 3.

of lives and a killer, a homophobe and the lover of a man."[67] Considering this accurate description, it seems deceptive to judge Kent as thoroughly compromised due to his questionable deeds, and assessing the novel as "not good for the gays" would overlook its complexity as well as its inscriptions of paradoxical bravado against homophobic culture, illustrated when Kent commits a murder that saves him from being outed.

A mischievous character named Goodwin turns into Kent's personal rival when Anson becomes the officer's batman, whereas Goodwin, who was first friends with Anson, is left a lonely outcast. Without a friend to keep him company, Goodwin falls into a habit of roaming the deserted villages by himself whenever he has a day off. At one point he encounters a bombed-out house with a safe lying outside. He manages to open the safe and finds "twenty-five medium-sized rubies" (221). This treasure would make him a rich man, but in order to keep the rubies, Goodwin needs to leave the army immediately. He consequently approaches Kent and demands to be given a note that allows him to be transported out of Burma by train. Because Goodwin begins to suspect an unnatural bond between Kent and his batman when he catches Anson coming to the barracks very late one night, he feels superior to his officer. His suspicions are fostered by his knowledge over Anson's sexual preferences: "Anson and me were muckers for a long time, I know all about Anson, thank you very much." (227) Although the term 'mucker' only denotes comradeship in the conventional sense[68], the characters seem to interpret the term to imply more than friendship. When Kent ponders its meaning, he explicitly states that it "means *more* than mere friends; he sometimes wondered exactly what it did cover" (20) [my emphasis]. Consequently, Goodwin and Kent share a specific understanding of the term 'mucker' that clarifies Anson's sexual preferences as queer and his association with Kent reinforces Goodwin's suspicion that the commanding officer is equally queer.

Goodwin's titillating knowledge provides ground for blackmail: "if you don't [give me a note] I'll tell everyone I can about you and Anson. [...] I'll tell them what you are, nothing but a bloody nancy boy!" (227) "[M]aybe I can't prove anything but you know it's the truth" (228). Goodwin strengthens his allegedly superior knowledge by calling Kent a "nancy boy" with an exclamation mark for emphasis. The derogatory phrase "nancy boy" means "an effeminate

67 Gregory Woods, "Introduction" in *Look Down in Mercy*, [1951], (Richmond: Valancourt Books, 2014), p. ix.

68 The *OED* defines 'mucker' as a military terms used in British English to describe a "close companion or friend; a person with whom one regularly socializes or teams up" "mucker, n.1." *OED Online*. Oxford University Press, June 2017. Web. 9 September 2017.

man or boy; a homosexual man"[69], which emphasises Goodwin's deployment of an explicitly homophobic insult. In *Excitable Speech*, Judith Butler claims that the person who performs a speech act, such as Goodwin's "nancy boy", is imagined to wield sovereign power. This is done "to the extent that the speaker of hate speech is understood to effect the subordinating message that he or she relays"[70]. Consequently, when Goodwin evokes a speech act that has its roots in homophobic language, he not only makes use of its current meaning but also "recalls prior [speech] acts" in order to position his accusation – "nancy boy" – into a wider narrative of homophobic insults.[71] Because hate speech is citational, and homophobic hate speech is informed by particular previous discourses around such speech, the subjects resorting to these preceding acts, put themselves in relation to them. As Butler argues, "this means that the subject has its own 'existence' implicated in a language that precedes and exceeds the subject, a language whose historicity includes a past and future that exceeds that of the subject who speaks"[72]. Due to his own deviating sexuality expressed in his former relationship with Anson, Goodwin's blackmail towards Kent is ultimately ineffective. He is trying to make use of a power settled in homophobia, which he is not capable to evoke convincingly.

Kent's reaction to Goodwin's blackmail additionally demonstrates Butler's assertion that being called a "nancy boy" is an "address [that] constitutes a being within the possible circuit of recognition and, [as in this example] outside of it, in abjection"[73]. Language is not only injurious in multiple ways but can also be enabling for the subject who has been made the object of hate speech. It is therefore not exclusively the initiator of language, who actively performs, but also, unforeseen by the speaker, the receiver, who is brought into being through the address. Butler argues that:

> one is not simply fixed by the name that one is called. In being called an injurious name, one is derogated and demeaned. But the name holds out another possibility as well: by being called a name, one is also, paradoxically, given a certain possibility for social existence, initiated into a temporal life of language that exceeds the prior purposes that animate that call.[74]

69 "Nancy boy, n." *OED Online*. Oxford University Press, June 2017. Web. 21 August 2017.

70 Butler, (1997), pp. 80-81.

71 Ibid., p. 20.

72 Ibid., p. 28.

73 Ibid., p. 5.

74 Ibid., p. 2.

It is this double effect of language that, on the one hand, degrades Kent as homosexual, but, on the other hand, catapults him out of the closet into the realm of the abjected, which gives him agency to react, whereas the closet keeps him unintelligible and passive.

Julia Kristeva's *Powers of Horror* is essential for theorising the abject as a social position that oscillates between object and subject but cannot quite assimilate into either: "what is abject is not my correlative, which providing me with someone or something else as support, would allow me to be more or less detached and autonomous"[75]. The abject is "the jettisoned object" [76] which *confuses* and *shatters* meaning by lying outside a certain set of rules. This "place of banishment"[77] enables the abject to unsettle dominant discourses merely by its existence as abject. Shunning the abject is a consequence of its power to collapse learned and absorbed behaviours – its ability to turn meaning into meaninglessness. This is not to assess abjection as more positive than the closet – ultimately, an outed homosexual is increasingly exposed to various kinds of harassment. However, despite its difficult social position, an outed subject opens grounds for reaction and defence, which is evident in Kent's response to the blackmail. His only way of not falling into "a bottomless gulf of disgrace yawning at his feet" (227), is to keep "his head and [find] out exactly how much Goodwin [knows]" (227).

Kent's temporary need for action challenges Sedgwick's claim that

> in many, if not most, relationships, coming out is a matter of crystallizing intuitions or convictions that had been in the air for a while already and had already established their own power-circuits of silent contempt, silent blackmail, silent glamorization, silent complicity.[78]

Sedgwick argues for the interdependence between blackmail and coming out, where the force of harassment compels the subject to move from the 'private' environment of the closet to the insecure but less restricting realm of the public. Kent however, only momentarily harnesses the relative autonomy of an outed homosexual, to extinguish the source of the threat by shooting Goodwin in the face, thus not simply killing him, but symbolically muting all future hate speech: "He raised the revolver slowly until the muzzle was level with Goodwin's mouth

75 Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982), p. 1.

76 Ibid., p. 2.

77 Ibid., p. 2.

78 Sedgwick, (2008), pp. 79-80.

and pointed slightly upwards. […] Goodwin started to speak: 'Put that thing down, you gutless nancy.' Still smiling Kent fired." (228-229). "[H]e would rather be suspected of murder than homosexuality" (228). While the last statement substantiates the officer's own homophobia and disgust over his deviating sexuality, Kent's action rings a tone of bravado to not allow himself being blackmailed. His struggle to admit to his homosexual feelings and learning to live with them is dramatised in such a compassionate way that the reader is paradoxically persuaded to identify with this highly compromised protagonist although he is committing a murder.

In *The Charioteer*, Ralph, too, becomes involved in a form of blackmail when he is expelled from school for indecent behaviour whilst holding the position of Head of School. Although it can be argued that this is a less stereotypical case of blackmail than in *Look Down in Mercy*, it nevertheless clarifies the predicaments homosexuals may be exposed to in a homophobic society. Little is known about the real reasons for Ralph's expulsion at the beginning of the novel, but Laurie instantly declares Ralph's innocence despite all rumours. While his own motivation for defending Ralph is outwardly camouflaged in an advocacy of justice deriving from his conviction that Ralph is not to blame, it becomes clear that by helping Ralph, Laurie is unconsciously arguing his own case: "He felt suddenly, the enormous release of energy which comes when repressed instincts are sanctioned by a cause." (20) While Laurie is incapable of openly arguing against the discrimination of homosexuals, he instead channels his frustration in the defence of Ralph, whom he deeply admires. This reaction is contrasted by Ralph's when he unresistingly accepts the expulsion.

Much later in the novel it is explained that Ralph and Hazell (the boy who was responsible for Ralph's expulsion) had an affair. Their fallout was over a physical punishment of Hazell executed by Ralph in his function as the Head of the School. When Hazell ejaculates as a consequence of the pain inflicted by Ralph, he reveals himself not only as a homosexual but also, in Ralph's terms, as being "sick" (180). However, instead of shaming and blaming Hazell for his dismissal, Ralph critically recalls his own reaction to the situation:

> I'd have liked to see him dead, so long as I hadn't got to touch him. I suppose he saw it. It may be he went to Jeepers out of revenge, but I don't think so. I think he was scared, and it made him a bit hysterical. He told it reversing the point of the final episode, if you see what I mean. I didn't see very much future in arguing about it. (180)

Ralph's allusive style of speaking circumvents clarity, which indicates that he still feels uncomfortable about the incident. His ambiguous sentence "[h]e told it

reversing the point of the final episode" means that Hazell, hurt over Ralph's dismissive reaction towards his sadomasochistic leanings, told the headmaster a story that depicts Ralph as "sick" rather than himself. Despite the fact that he would be in the right, Ralph sees himself as unworthy of defence because he perceives his own reaction towards Hazell's proclivities as inconsiderate. He reflects that "a perfectly normal person wouldn't have been so angry. [Hazell] was sick, after all." (180) Unfamiliar with these details of Ralph's bond with Hazell and their subsequent dispute, the schoolboy Laurie can only see his hero being treated unfairly and plans to come to his rescue. He suggests a 'counter-blackmail':

> What we want is more of a sort of psychological war. Now the whole thing about Jeepers is that he's terrified of scandal. It's himself he has cold feet about, really, and his job. [...] We'll just all go along to him in a body and say the whole House is immoral, one and all, and we've come to confess like Hazell did. Then he won't sack anyone, he'll fall over himself to hush it up. (22)

Laurie's response exposes the weakness of the hegemonic system: instead of being incontestable and indisputably prevailing, the dominant order is itself vulnerable to blackmail. However, Butler rightly asserts that for a "threat to work, it requires certain kinds of circumstances, and it requires a venue of power by which its performative effects might be materialized."[79] This "venue of power" does not lie within the reach of Laurie but is associated with the school and its administration. Consequently, his threat is rendered ineffective even before it is actively performed because Laurie's fellow students are not prepared to risk their reputation over Ralph. Similar to Goodwin's failed attempt of blackmailing Kent, Laurie cannot harness the potential he sees in a collective upheaval against the school.

These two cases show that, whilst being a compelling option to gain certain privileges, the concept of blackmail is highly unstable as it entails a set of potentials that cannot be controlled by a single party. Another character from *The Charioteer* named Alec pinpoints this deceptive power of blackmail and highlights that homophobia is the root of struggle that needs countermanding. He refutes any conclusion that assumes his homosexuality as damaging, and instead blames society for its unfair stigmas. In a passionate monologue Alec claims:

> It's a matter of what your self-respect's worth to you, that's all. [...] In the first place, I didn't choose to be what I am, it was determined when I wasn't in a position to exercise

79 Butler, (1997), p. 12.

any choice and without me knowing what was happening. I've submitted to psychoanalysis; it cured my stutter for me, which was very useful as far as it went. [...] But I don't admit that I'm a social menace. [...] I'm not prepared to accept a standard which puts the whole of my emotional life on the plane of immorality. I've never involved a normal person or a minor or anyone who wasn't in a position to exercise a free choice. I'm not prepared to let myself be classified with dope-peddlers and prostitutes. Criminals are blackmailed. I'm not a criminal. I'm ready to go to some degree of trouble, if necessary, to make that point. (199)

This scene clarifies why *The Charioteer* was a daring text to be published at a time where homosexuality was more forcefully criminalised and medicalised than before. The recurring issue of psychoanalysis, which played a major part in the medical discourse 'treating' homosexuality, is qualified as ineffective in Alec's argument when he states that "it cured my stutter for me, which was very useful as far as it went". The usefulness of psychoanalysis is reduced to treating a speech disorder, because it fails at 'curing' its actual target. As mentioned before, psychoanalysis functions as a broad framework in the novel that is constantly challenged and appropriated through sarcastic references such as Alec's.

Passionately, Alec prompts fellow homosexuals to reflect on "what your self-respect's worth to you" (199). He does not want to be judged as a homosexual, and rejects any kind of identity that fixes him into the category of "menace", "immoral" or "criminal". Homosexuality is something that 'just happened' to Alec; it is intrinsic of what constitutes his personality, which he does not want to deny but neither allows himself to be reduced to. Zilboorg rightly claims that Alec is "arguing for more than being left in peace that requires remaining hidden, closeted"[80]. He pledges "for the affirmation of the emotional wholeness of huge numbers of people"[81]. Arguing against the blackmailing of homosexuals, Alec concludes that "[c]riminals are blackmailed. I'm not a criminal." (199) By establishing a difference between homosexuality and criminal conduct Alec shows strong self-affirmative streaks. Except for Ralph, who judges his reaction towards Hazell as a justification for his punishment, each character resists being blackmailed for their tendencies.

To Alec homosexuality is not a sickness but a variation of an arbitrary norm that disguises itself as a standard. Ralph experiences this standardaised version of sexuality in similarly critical ways when he describes his short period of 'going straight':

80 Zilboorg, (2001), p. 115.

81 Ibid., p. 115.

'I did two years of women, when I first went to sea.' [...]
'Did you?' said Laurie. 'Why?' [...]
'I didn't want to give [fellow sailors] anything on me. Besides, when I found I could if I gave my mind to it, I thought I might become *naturalized*, so to speak.' (182-183) [my emphasis]

He continues:

Funny thing, you know, it didn't feel at all like going straight. More like trying to cultivate some fashionable vice that never quite becomes a habit. [...] I happened to meet someone [...]. All I can remember thinking is 'Thank the Lord, back to *normal* at last.' (183) [my emphasis]

This scene is predominantly interesting in its usage of the terms "naturalized" and "normal". Brian Pronger states that "to say something is natural is to make a judgment; what we are really saying when we say that a phenomenon is natural is that it fits our view of the world – a view that is the product of tradition"[82]. This means that there is no 'natural' sexuality but only a standard that continues to be perpetuated by certain conducts following a tradition. What is assumed to be 'biologically natural' – that is heterosexuality – transforms into a standard that appears to be 'normal': an assimilated social behaviour according to cross-gender erotic desire. Michal Warner concedes that "[n]early everyone, it seems, wants to be normal. And who can blame them, if the alternative is being abnormal, or deviant, or not being one of the rest of us?"[83] By seeking female companionship, Ralph reveals his wish to fit into the standard narrative of normalised society. When he says "I thought I might become *naturalized*", Ralph hopes to "blend, to have no visible difference and no conflict"[84]. For a period of two years, he adheres to this premise of normalization/naturalization when he withstands any homosexual tendencies. However, his failure to maintain relationships with women indicates that the standard of 'normal' and 'natural' is void for subjects who diverge from dominant conventions. When Ralph is becoming conscious of his true desires, social norms and their apparent universality are put into question. This illustrates what Warner titles *The Trouble with Normal*: the realisation that what is thought to be 'natural/normal' (heterosexuality) is 'abnormal' for homosexuals. Ralph's temporary attempt of living in a heterosexual re-

82 Pronger, (1990), pp. 50-51.

83 Michael Warner, *The Trouble with the Normal: Sex, Politics, and the Ethics of Queer Life* (Cambridge and Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1999), p. 53.

84 Ibid., p. 60.

lationship shows the pressure on homosexuals to conform to dominant standards and mirrors the homophobic discourse of past (and present) times. His reluctance to continue on this path, on the other hand, signals strength and the will to find self-fulfilling love. Moreover, Ralph's recollection of this period in his life, and the awareness with which he reflects on it, reinforces my claim that *The Charioteer* does not represent homosexuals as thoroughly burdened and suffering individuals. Instead, Ralph shows a remarkable ability to analyse himself and to conceptualise his desire, whilst making a conscious decision to take the more troublesome path when following his homosexual desire.

More daringly still, Alec renounces in his monologue quoted previously the stigmatisation of homosexual men seducing innocent young boys when saying: "I've never involved a normal person or a minor or anyone who wasn't in a position to exercise a free choice". Similar to Ralph, who talks of becoming 'normalised', Alec assumes dominant society to be 'normal'. His essentialist argument does not keep him from demonstrating the inherent arbitrariness of standards when he criticises the presumption that homosexuals assault children – a stereotypical accusation that Laurie, too, becomes aware of when he soothes a young boy in hospital, who is fretting over the sound of airplanes and bombs. Laurie realises that being in the boy's bed holding him in his arms might be understood in very different ways than intended, and that this would destroy the "perfect innocence between them" (308). Depressed, he continues thinking that "[i]t wouldn't take so very long for that kind of consciousness to settle under one's skin." (308) Both Laurie and Alec are acutely aware of the stigma that accompanies their sexuality, but refuse to identify with its negative stereotypes. The difficulties in living their lives as homosexual men thus derives from the prejudices brought against their desires and is not, as Alden previously argued, a reflection of their damaged psyche resulting from deep-rooted self-hatred. Because pre-Stonewall novels are evidently less activist than a modern gay consciousness would like them to be, they become oversimplified and reduced to obvious scenes of contemplation, blackmail and dismay.

Adam Fitzroy's *Make Do and Mend* (2012) demonstrates a contemporary, post-Stonewall desire to re-write the past in more uplifting terms. The novel displays the slowly developing relationship between the protagonist Harry Lyon and the farm labourer Jim Brynawel. Towards the end of the novel, Jim is suspected of murder and in police custody because he does not want to clarify his whereabouts during a time of absence from the Hendra estate. The village vicar and a close friend of the Lyon family named Philip, explains Jim's underlying concerns:

'Of course I understand his reasons; homosexual acts are just as illegal as murder, and in some people's eyes the penalty should be no different, but the fact remains that very nearly the only way for Jim to establish his innocence of one crime is to admit to having committed another – which he won't do because it would mean implicating you.' (237)

This scene and the resolving of the murder case in general, places no emphasis on either the victim or the suspect, but on the fact that by revealing that Jim has stayed with Harry in Liverpool, his and Harry's homosexual relationship would become exposed. Harry's reaction to Jim's silence betrays the novel's modern consciousness as well as the protagonist's apparently unconscious derogative use of language: "he's a dear, silly, loyal man, and it looks as if we're going to have to save him from himself" (237). Although meant as a term of endearment, calling Jim a "dear" but "silly, loyal man" emphasises Harry's higher class compared to a farm labourer who loyally fulfils his duties. Harry thus maintains a certain standard that depicts him as superior to his lover. At the same time as undermining a subversive discourse, Harry confronts the solicitor Mr Pugh with his homosexual relationship, whose reaction is surprisingly temperate:

'You mean that for a period of some thirty-six hours you were continuously in one another's company – even during the hours of night?'
'Yes.' Harry did not elaborate, but nor did he retreat from his position.
'Very well. Did anyone see you together during any part of this time?' (250)

As the vicar has rightly identified, homosexual acts where punishable at the time, and Harry's blithe admittance that he and Jim have spent several nights in each other's company situates him and the novel into modern discourse. Moreover, Harry and Mr Pugh's conversation presents the solicitor as open-minded, liberal and anti-homophobic, which seems to contradict the prejudices experienced by Ralph, Laurie and Alec in *The Charioteer* and by Kent in *Look Down in Mercy*. These anachronisms are equally present in the reaction of Harry's brother Jack upon receiving the news that Harry is a homosexual: "bloody hell, Harry, I've been treating the poor man [Jim] as if he was an ordinary labourer" (239). Not only is Jack completely unconcerned by Harry's sexual preference, he finds fault in his own treatment of Jim. Instead of being abjected, Jim becomes elevated above the status of labourer through his relationship with Harry. It seems doubtful that this retroactive and retrospective representation convincingly captures homosexual life in the 1940s, but what it shows is a contemporary gay and lesbian consciousness that feels oppressed by a stigmatised and stigmatising past that leaves little scope for critique on the social system. The active re-

writing of this period reveals the need to fashion a genealogy that is free from burdened individuals who can only chose between being outed or becoming murderers when their secret is threatened.

Unlike narratives from the 21st century, pre-Stonewall novels had to disguise critique in more elusive and allusive language. This is particularly evident in *Look Down in Mercy* when Anson reflects on Kent and his first intimate encounter: "it was wrong of course and disapproved of by the vast majority of people, but then so were many things; people, he thought, always disapproved most of what they didn't want to do themselves" (153). Anson evaluates that "the vast majority of people" are homophobic because they do not share homosexuals' desire for male bodies. In Anson's view, intolerance is based on ignorance, but that does not make him despise his feelings for Kent. Rather, Anson displays an indifferent attitude towards the judgment of other people, because they "*always* disapproved" and there is no point getting worked up about it. A further comparison to Harry in *Make Do and Mend* clarifies the astonishing lucidity and sobriety with which Anson perceives sexual deviance. Harry says: "I admit this sort of thing isn't really supposed to happen – it never is, between men – but believe me it does, all the bloody time, and you soon learn to treat it with respect." (186) Both novels refrain from actually naming outlawed sexual preferences and refer to them as a "sort of thing" (*MD*, 186) and "it" (*LD*, 153). *The Charioteer* often adopts military language when addressing homosexuals as "refugees" (*TC*, 305), and *The Night Watch* calls lesbianism "the whole grisly 'L' business" (*TNW*, 274). United in a reluctance of linguistic clarity, the contemporary novels pledge as much hesitance as novels of the time to do justice to their historical setting. *Make Do and Mend* and *Look Down in Mercy* both allude to the time's prejudices and stigmatisation of differences, but Anson more clearly qualifies homosexuality as "wrong" (*LD* 153) rather than simply not "supposed to happen" (*MD* 186) in Harry's display. Harry's challenge to "treat it with respect" (*MD* 186), too, diverts from Anson's attempted explanation that people "disapproved most of what they didn't want to do themselves" (*LD* 153). Clearly, Fitzroy's text speaks from a contemporary mindset that is impatient with discrimination and intolerance. This attitude is most obvious when the vicar, Philip, characterises Harry as a "sensible, well-rounded individual" (*MD* 291), whereas his homophobic and misogynic brother Thomas lacks any noble qualities. This reversal of who and what constitutes a 'sensible individual' – a homosexual is privileged over a conservative heterosexual – substantiates *Make Do and Mend* as a contemporary narrative. Yet, it needs to be recognised that strong self-affirmative roots can be found in the much earlier consciousness of *Look Down in Mercy*

when Anson ponders his and Kent's homosexuality in "quite uncomplicated" (*LD* 153) ways.

Moreover, scenes in which characters such as Kent or Laurie show resistance make *Look Down in Mercy* and *The Charioteer* such compelling reads and trouble any straightforward analysis that evaluates them as "homosexual problem novels"[85]. Baxter manages to keep the reader engaged *because* Kent is far from content with his life and his homosexual awakening. A very significant pedagogical value of endurance despite setbacks is inscribed in the text that probably spoke to many homosexual men of the time, especially ex-servicemen who themselves experienced the exceptional circumstances of wartime and faced similar obstacles in their lives. The protagonist's path shows that becoming aware of homosexual desires during the Second World War was possible and the characters Anson and Goodwin illustrate that the odds of homosexuality were higher than the military was prepared to admit. Kent's reaction towards the challenges that come with navigating and negotiating his desires for a man is, admittedly, minted with shortcomings and his murder of Goodwin as well as his sexual assault against Helen preclude a thoroughly positive reading of him. This might account for why the novel is not better known today and the corresponding paucity of critical attention – it is simply not convenient for a modern gay consciousness.

However, characters of both *Look Down in Mercy* and *The Charioteer* criticise society's intolerance, which shows that none of the pre-Stonewall novels discussed here have a categorically negative or positive opinion of homosexuality or represent the whole of their characters as burdened individuals. Instead, it is striking that in earlier novels minor characters such as Anson or Alec often operate as the 'voice of tolerance' or express passionate critique concerning a prejudice society. In this way, novels of the 1950s incorporate challenges in more concealed ways than contemporary representations, which makes them easily misjudged as "not good for the gays". Reader responses to Renault's *The Charioteer* strengthen this argument and show that the novel was perceived as a passionate representation of a largely privatised subject matter. It helped, for instance, a schoolmistress to cope with her friend's suicide: stating that *The Charioteer* "must have lifted the hearts of many who have come up against that problem and its effect", the schoolmistress praises the novel whilst disguising its controversial topic as "that problem and its effect"[86]. Her reluctance to be more explicit, even in a 'fan-letter' to a writer of homosexual fiction illustrates that different forms of sexuality where not named. Renault's relative explicit fictionali-

85 Summers, (1990), p. 26.

86 Sweetman, (1993), p. 149.

sation of this unutterable subject matter reveals the daringness of *The Charioteer* within the context of the early 1950s. Another letter by Gerald Heard, a friend of Christopher Isherwood's, states: "The dialogues are really amazing – as Isherwood said to me, how can an author who must in many respects be 'above the battle' and outside that particular circle of Purgatory understand it so well?"[87] Renault's readership obviously did not share the modern consciousness of gay-affirmation against which Alden judges *The Charioteer*. Heard speaks of the "battle" to simultaneously mean the Second World War, and the conflict between deviating sexuality and heteronormative society. Equally symbolic is the term "Purgatory" – it denotes the hostile environment of the 1950s whilst also suggesting a troubled attitude towards the homosexual subculture that determined many men's (and women's) lives.

Sarah Waters rightly argues that "Renault seeks a model of homosexual conduct, asking not, What is a homosexual?, but, How might one be a decent homosexual"[88]. This question is explicitly addressed by Ralph, who states that "[i]t's not what one is, it's what one does with it." (131) Distinctly, Ralph is *not* troubled by his deviating sexuality, but struggles to find his way to negotiate it within 'normal' society and in tension with its promiscuous subculture. Laurie is admittedly less self-confident when saying: "We sign the warrant for our own exile, he thought. Self-pity and alibis come after." (308) However, the certainty of his homosexuality is not denied – he has signed onto it – but how to perform it and remain 'morally superior' to the flamboyant subculture proves troublesome for both Laurie and Ralph. In order to give Laurie and Ralph something to hold onto, Renault appropriates Plato's *Phaedrus* as a strategy of finding an uplifting love and harmony of the soul, which will be the focus of the following section.

"TEMPER TANTRUM AND JEALOUS SPATS": FASHIONING HOMOSEXUAL RELATIONSHIPS

As Renault's title suggests, *The Charioteer* is saturated with references to Plato's dialogical text *Phaedrus*. Laurie is first introduced to the text by Ralph, who gives him his copy upon being expelled from school. Before presenting the book to Laurie, Ralph warns him that "[i]t doesn't exist anywhere in real life, so don't let it give you illusions. It's just a nice idea." (32) As if to prove his point, the chapter ends with a secretive kiss or an embrace between the characters, indicat-

87 Cited in Sweetman, (1993), p. 149.

88 Waters, (1995), p. 220.

ed, as is characteristic of Renault's allusive writing, by an ellipse: "Come here a moment. ... Now you see what I mean, Spud." (33) Clearly unconvinced by the ideal of Platonic love that is of the mind and not physical, Ralph leaves the plot for now to let Laurie find out his own convictions. The following will analyse Laurie's relationship to both Ralph and Andrew in order to more fully comprehend the external factors that influence homosexuals in their desire to build and maintain a lasting relationship. Not only is Laurie's outlawed desire scrutinised by society, his self-imposed moral standards fashioned after Plato's *Phaedrus* also preclude him from enlightening Andrew about his homosexuality. The *Phaedrus* thus promises a world Laurie is highly attracted to, but which remains out of reach for him.

In Plato's *Phaedrus* Lysias makes an inductive argument for why love is a disadvantage as it maddens the soul and defies reason. Several years after his last encounter with Ralph, Laurie recounts Lysias' speech to Andrew in hospital: "a lover who isn't in love is preferable to one who is. Being less jealous, easier to live with, and generally more civilized." (102) Lysias' model of non-love is illustrated in the depiction of the homosexual subculture that is informed by Renault's own experiences in South Africa, where she associated with many homosexual ex-service men. Sweetman writes that "Mary [Renault] rapidly realized that these young men longed for stable, enduring relationships, yet often found it impossible to create one. She became accustomed to temper tantrums and jealous spats, to broken hearts and threats of suicide."[89] Renault's long-time girlfriend Julie Mullard, who lived with her in South Africa, directly links their homosexual company to Renault's representation in *The Charioteer*, stating that if "Mary" had not "got to know [homosexual ex-servicemen] on very close terms, she would never have been able to write *The Charioteer*"[90].

Renault's dramatisation of these experiences is most evident at a party where her alter-ego Laurie (note that the names Renault and Laurie are almost anagrams) encounters "[*n*]*ous autres*" (305). Nikolai Endres sums up the party as providing a ground for "bitchiness and backbiting, cattiness and camp, pettiness and pretense, drama and desire" – it is a "gay world of immediate consummation and instant gratification, where love is endlessly deferred in the guise of sex"[91]. Laurie stands at a crossroad where he can either renounce this effeminate and flamboyant lifestyle, which would mean turning his back on his childhood idol

89 Sweetman, (1993), p. 129.

90 Zilboorg, (2001), p. 105.

91 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. 154 and p. 155.

Ralph, who latently associates with "[*n*]*ous autres*" or immerse into it. Laurie uses a style of speaking influenced by the military to describe the undesirable hold the homosexual subculture is beginning to have on him: "You get swept along the road with the refugees, till you find you've been carried through the gates without noticing, and you're behind the wire for the duration." (305) Juxtaposing war and homosexual subculture in his rhetoric of "refugees" and "wire", Laurie insinuates that both endanger the human soul. He stigmatises effeminate homosexuals and implicitly makes them responsible for a homophobic society:

> [t]hey [effeminate homosexuals] were specialists. They had not merely accepted their limitations, as Laurie was ready to accept his [...]. They had identified themselves with their limitations; they were making a career of them. (132)

It is not only obvious that "they" "have no life apart from being homosexuals" [92] as Peter Wolfe rightly perceives, but that Laurie is not willing to identify with them. Laurie's aversion is highlighted in the incessant use of the third person plural "they" and his distinct dis-identification notable in the emphasis on his name: "Laurie was ready to accept his". Not only is the protagonist a first person among the rest, he is a name within an anonymous mass and whilst accepting his homosexuality, Laurie is not willing to be associated with those "specialists". In *The Night Watch*, Waters depicts her character Duncan in strikingly similar ways. In prison, Duncan and his cell-mate Fraser encounter the 'prison queens' – a group of homosexuals who impersonate femininity like drag queens onstage. When Fraser implies that his sexual preference puts Duncan in close proximity to these effeminate homosexuals, he loses his temper:

> [Stella] makes me sick. They all do, all that crowd. They don't want to go to bed with girls, but they make themselves like girls. They make themselves worse than girls! They need doctors! I hate them. (432)

Duncan's anger, signalled in short, aggressive sentences, culminating in his cry for doctors, is reminiscent of Laurie's perception of the homosexual subculture. Both characters take the discourse of heteronormativity when they imply the need to medicalise homosexuals. In Duncan's outburst the anonymous group "they" is once more contrasted to Duncan's "me" and "I". Duncan and Laurie feel insulted by the flamboyant homosexuals and are angry over being lumped together with "them".

92 Peter Wolfe, *Mary Renault* (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1969), p. 114.

Their aversion towards effeminate men also illustrates the dichotomy between masculinity and femininity. Connell[93] argues that hegemonic masculinity is based on gender performances, which vary according to situation, time and relation to others whilst nevertheless perpetuating itself as an ideal version men ought to enact.[94] It is therefore highly undesirable for men to deviate from hegemonic masculinity whereas "[d]istancing oneself from stereotypical femininity" is, according to Carrie Paechter, "a claiming of power"[95]. Unlike masculinities, femininities "do not confer cultural power, nor are they able to guarantee patriarchy"[96]. This is due to the fact that there cannot be a hegemonic femininity, "because being in a hegemonic position is also about being in a position of power"[97]. This relates to the dilemma that hegemony and patriarchy mutually inform male dominance and female subordination. Accordingly, female gender performances that most severely distance themselves from hegemonic masculinity, are not considered hegemonic at all but hyperfeminine – "a form of dramaturgical, glamorized femininity"[98] often related to drag queens like Stella, whose "cheeks were rouged, and her lips as red as a girl's" (231). Traditionally the use of make-up and neat hair-style derives from a wish to please men, which amplifies Butler's argument that the dualistic relationship between masculinities and femininities originates from "compulsory heterosexuality"[99]. She argues that "[t]he heterosexualization of desire requires and institutes the production of discrete and asymmetrical oppositions between 'feminine' and 'masculine,' where these are understood as expressive attributes of 'male' and 'female'"[100]. It is not only men's fear of being considered feminine but also their assumed heterosexual desire for it which connects masculinity and femininity in a dualistic position. Homosexual desire is based on similar distinctions between masculinity and femininity where the person performing the former (independent of biological sex)

93 Connell is a transgender woman whose transition from male to female was completed after the first publication of *Masculinities* in 1995. Due to various changes of first names, I will refer to Connell by their last name whenever possible and use 'they' and 'them' to indicate gender fluidity.

94 Connell, (2016), p. 77.

95 Carrie Paechter, "Masculine Femininities/Feminine Masculinities: Power, Identities and Gender" in *Gender and Education* Vol. 18, No. 3 (2006), p. 257

96 Ibid., p. 256.

97 Ibid., p. 256.

98 Ibid., p. 255.

99 Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, [1990], (London and New York: Routledge Classics, 2006), p. 24.

100 Ibid., p. 24.

finds pleasure in the latter and vice versa. While Waters' prison queens clearly perform gender in unconventional ways, their hyperfemininity and desire for masculine men paradoxically fixes them according to a conventional system of dualistic genders without changing masculine or feminine qualities. This suggests that heterosexual desire might be the origin of dualistic gender erotisation and performance, but it is not exclusively responsible for its perpetuation.

Laurie's and Duncan's disidentification with the homosexual subculture demonstrates Mimi Schippers' argument that "gay men claim their status as 'real men' by defining their embodiment of a gay identity in relation to [an] inferior feminine form – as a 'straight gay' in relation to effeminate gay men"[101]. While probably not all gay men perform in the way suggested by Schippers, Duncan and Laurie clearly understand themselves as 'straight' rather than 'effeminate' homosexuals. The threat of emasculation is thus as operative on homosexual men as it is on heterosexuals, which highlights emasculation as a powerful mechanism in monitoring the great majority of male bodies regardless of sexual preference. Consequently, Laurie and Duncan use the dynamic between 'us' and 'them' not simply to differentiate their homosexuality from heteronormative society, but more distinctly, to signal themselves as 'morally superior' to the great mass of effeminate homosexuals, who deceive allegiance with masculine standards.

Quentin Crisp's auto-biography *The Naked Civil Servant* (1968), introduced at the outset of this study, alters this perspective when he admits that "homosexuals didn't like me" (87). Crisp's implied 'they' comprises those homosexual men who pass as heterosexuals such as Laurie and Duncan. This group "did not look forward with pleasure to living in a world where the facts about their abnormality would be common knowledge" (87). He explains further that being "outrageously effeminate" (87) constituted the ground for hostility brought against him by fellow queers. *The Charioteer* and *The Night Watch* change the parameters of Crisp's experience: whereas Crisp stresses his effeminacy as unique among homosexuals, these novels dramatise it as common. Whilst Laurie and Duncan stand alone as morally superior protagonists fighting association with the "specialists", Crisp experiences his flamboyancy as exceptional. Consequently, the novels use a highly stigmatised and fabricated group image in order to position their heroes in contradiction to the Other, and to substantiate them as morally superior. Rightly, Alden observes that Laurie's "difference from the effete, histrionic homosexual men, and [his] horror at them [...] is extremely

101 Mimi Schippers, "Recovering the Feminine Other: Masculinity, Femininity, and Gender Hegemony" in *Theory and Society* Vol. 36, No.1 (2007), p. 97.

strongly emphasised"[102]. While I agree that Laurie feels disconnected from the homosexual subculture, Duncan feels no less threatened by the 'prison queens', a detail Alden conveniently overlooks in order to strengthen her overarching argument that past representations of homosexuals are more depressing than contemporary re-writings. Contrary to Alden's claim, both Laurie *and* Duncan display an aversion against collective displays of a homogeneous identity that stigmatises homosexuals, which not only highlights their focus on individuality, but also a textual continuity of addressing it. When Alden sets out to establish Waters lineage with gay and lesbian authors of the past and her appropriation of material, a more fruitful endeavour might be to emphasise Waters' thematic revision of Renault's reluctance to fictionalise a protagonist who surrenders to a damaging image of his desire by uncritically participating in an eccentric subculture.

The homosexual world of sex and promiscuity, criticised by Laurie and Duncan, relates to Lysias' concept of non-love in the *Phaedrus*. Believing himself to be above this permissive subculture, Laurie refuses to identify with this world that "suffers from halves and unbalanced charioteers and roped off wings"[103]. He is searching for a more exhilarating love, and upon hearing that Ralph is expected to join a party, Laurie's hope for it subconsciously reawakens when he ponders: "It was *madness* to have come" (115) [my emphasis]. Informed by the first speech in the *Phaedrus* where love is a form of madness overthrowing the rational mind, Laurie's statement implies a lingering and persuasive love for Ralph. Dressed in the semantics of madness, the text disguises Laurie's true feelings, even from himself. As yet unaware of Socrates' model of the tripartite soul where love is never absolute but multiple and unsteady, Laurie's intellect can only grasp love in terms of Lysias' binary argument. It follows that whilst capable of explaining the first speech of the *Phaedrus* to Andrew, Laurie's recollection of Socrates' response is fractured and concentrates on rhetoric: "Only as the whole thing hangs on the definition of love, [Socrates is] able to turn it inside out in the refutation, which is the highlight of the piece. It —" (102). Emphasising Socrates' move towards a deductive argument to challenge Lysias' claim that love is madness and madness is bad, Laurie breaks into silence. He is incapable of recalling the abstract concept of Socrates' pure love where the soul is split in three pieces: one white horse (self-control), one black horse (desire) and a charioteer (reason). In Greek mythology, only the gods have perfect harmony of the tripartite soul and can live in heaven. The charioteer of the earthly human, however, struggles to keep the horses in lockstep as the black horse is easily distract-

102 Alden, (2014), p. 195.

103 Endres, (2012), p. 161.

ed and disobedient. It does not nourish the soul but feeds the body with pleasure. Fleeting of nature, this pleasure satisfies only the black horse, but leaves the white horse and the charioteer in disharmony. This is why Lysias' non-love, the satisfaction of the body in promiscuous intercourse, is not good for the soul. Platonic love pursuits of a harmony between all parts of the soul and claims that this can be achieved by finding your reflection in the beloved. Laurie reads from his version of the *Phaedrus*: "*... he sees himself in his lover as if in a mirror, not knowing whom he sees*." (100) [emphasis original] When the soul finds harmony, it becomes one with the beloved. Slightly modified, Renault's *The Charioteer* embodies the white horse in Andrew, the black horse in Ralph and Laurie becomes the charioteer, who tries to negotiate his love for them. Having experienced his first kiss with Ralph at school, Laurie's attraction to him is from the outset predominantly physical whereas his conversations with Andrew in the hospital kitchen are intellectual and devoid of bodily desire. Zilboorg rightly argues that Renault's novel illustrates a model of Platonic love where "physical homosexual union is to be refigured as intimate but 'pure' companionship"[104]. Far from renouncing bodily pleasures altogether, Plato's myth is illustrated as a moral choice for Laurie to "fulfil his erotic desires while behaving admirably with worthy companions"[105]. Consequently, the obstacles between the innocent Andrew and Laurie's striving for a harmonic soul that involves the mind *as well as* the body are too grave to ever be overcome. Rapidly Laurie becomes aware that "[t]he lovers of the innocent must protect them above all from the knowledge of their own cruelty" (101). Identifying himself as "the lover" and Andrew as "the innocent", Laurie pledges not to seduce his beloved. He reinforces his good intentions in a conversation with Ralph:

> I think [Andrew] quite likes me, and he mustn't ever know. It would spoil his life, and there's no need. [...] It's much more important he should be all right. [...] The thing about him is, he wouldn't know how to run away from it. (223)

Laurie shoulders the responsibility of concealing his love for Andrew whilst suspecting the young Quaker's own sexual deviance. Unwilling to force self-awareness onto his friend, whom he fears will not be able to handle such knowledge, Laurie suffers heartache in his stead. Consequently, Laurie and Andrew's conversations are for the largest part of the text minted with double discourses. Andrew's innocence and literal understanding of Laurie's careful hints and suggestive language give the text a humoristic, yet tragic, touch. During

104 Zilboorg, (2001), p. 111.

105 Ibid., p. 111.

their first meeting, for example, Laurie tries to evaluate the situation and Andrew's sexual preferences by reference to Tchaikovsky's alleged queerness. But Andrew keeps misunderstanding:

'I read somewhere once, Tchaikovsky was queer.' [...]
'Was he? I hadn't heard. He was never actually shut up surely?'
'No, it never came out. Though I believe' – [Laurie] saw his mistake, and with a painful jolt caught himself up just in time. 'Not mad, you know. Just queer.' [...]
'I find all Russians slightly mysterious'. (56)

Familiar with the implication of the term 'queer', Laurie does not stop to think that Andrew might perceive it in very different terms as a mental illness. Realising his mistake "just in time", Laurie tries to be more explicit. His short chopped off sentences – "not mad, you know. Just queer" – betray his own inexperience in flirting and he fails to clarify things for Andrew. In the end Laurie is convinced that Andrew has no understanding of sexuality on a great scale, let alone of homosexuality in particular. After this failed attempt to establish confidentiality, the characters' friendship develops in a perpetual sense of unease trumped by mutual yet innocent affection.

In a different situation, Laurie has to carefully explain why Anson's suggestion to roll up in a rug to keep warm whilst sitting outside is not a sensible idea.

'You must think,' Laurie managed, 'that I've a horrible mind. The trouble is, I've got a pretty good idea what the Staff Sergeant's is like.'
'Yes,' said Andrew. He swallowed. 'Luckily you thought. Sorry.'
'That's the army for you.'
'I shouldn't really have been as dumb as that […].' (172)

Similar to playing his classical records in the hospital ward, the two men rolling up in a rug is suspicious beyond measure, and Laurie's acute awareness of the madness of Andrew's suggestion takes his breath away for some time before he can "manage" an explanation. Unable to fully pronounce the reason for his objection, Laurie flounders and saves himself by alluding to the strict conduct of the military hospital. He leaves distinctly open if "the Staff Sergeant" would suspect indecent behaviour between the men, or if his objection would concern Andrew's pacifism in combination with his association with a soldier. As a conscientious objector, Andrew's friendship to the soldier Laurie often breeds more resentment than the fact that they are of the same sex. This is evident when they encounter Mrs. Chivers – an old woman who allows the hospital patients to relax

in her garden. Laurie and Andrew call this garden their "private Eden" (73). In Christian belief, the Garden of Eden is a paradisiacal place of innocence and the use of it in this context underscores the characters' innocent relationship and sanctifies Laurie's homosexuality. Upon realising that Andrew is not a soldier but a conscientious objector, Mrs. Chivers transforms into a "serpent" (73) and breaks into a torrent of hatred: "Get away with you out of my garden, it's no place for the likes of you." (79) Her anger originates not from Laurie's homosexuality, of which she is ignorant, but from Andrew's pacifism, which clearly indicates the Second World War as a time where society was preoccupied with the war and often disinterested in people's sexualities as long as it remained hidden from public discourse. Behind this backdrop, it becomes clear why Laurie's comrades remain unaware of his homosexuality even when it appears to be obvious: the war directs their attention to more pressing matters than sexuality. The nurses even call Andrew and Laurie "David and Jonathan" (209) – a reference to homoeroticism – but no-one seems to suspect their bond to go deeper than mere friendship.[106]

After several more strained conversations between Andrew and Laurie, the charioteer realises that however great his love might be for Andrew, their friendship will continuously be "falsified by what had been left out" (305). True to his convictions that preclude sexual openness with Andrew, Laurie indulges in the experienced Ralph, who fosters Laurie's latent desire of finding a relationship that is not only of the mind, but also physical. Similar to their kiss at the beginning of the novel, Ralph and Laurie's first sexual encounter remains inexplicit and marked by a spare line in the text.[107] Afterwards, Laurie is troubled by his

106 One scene implies that Laurie's friend Reg might be less unaware of Laurie's homosexuality than he pretends to be. After a private conversation in the hospital bathroom, Laurie holds the door open for Reg to leave, but Reg hesitates: "Oh, no, but *no*, [Laurie] thought in helpless protest: it really was, at last, too much; suddenly it collapsed into an outrageous joke. He stood in the doorway and rocked with laughter. 'But it's —' he gasped, He gazed at Reg and imagined him creeping coyly out after a discreet delay, like a *femme galante* at a house-party. It was excruciating." (213) Reg's reluctant behaviour and Laurie's interpretation thereof suggests that Reg might know of his friend's sexuality and fears that the other patients might judge their friendship as suspect. Laurie is annoyed and disappointed in his friend, who is more worried about what people think of him than about his loyalty to Laurie. However, the novel never mentions any further scenes that might reveal the extent of Reg's actual knowledge beyond Laurie's own interpretation.

107 Renault comments in her "Afterword" to *The Friendly Young Ladies*: "I have always been as explicit as I wanted to be [...]. If characters have come to life, one should

actions whilst Ralph is sound asleep. Laurie compares his sexual desire, which had gradually stirred in him since meeting Ralph at the party, to "animals [that] move toward water over miles of bush" (291). Disturbed by the loss of control over his mind when giving into his desiring body, Laurie feels remorse over his animalistic action. Worse, now that he has experienced the pleasure of intercourse, "he knew, and must go on knowing" (291) for the rest of his life that he cannot fulfil all of his desires on a mental basis. In consequence, he now realises that his friendship with Andrew is foredoomed. Despite these regrets, there is a conciliatory tone to the passage when it ends with Laurie slightly touching Ralph's fair hair: "Ralph's eyes opened. They were smiling, and with fear Laurie saw in how deep a happiness, too silent and too deep, eating like rust the core of his defenses." (292) Ralph's smile conquers Laurie's wall of self-protection and he realises that the homosexual subculture with which he does not want to associate, and which constitutes the "it" (223) Andrew will not be able to run away from, is not determining each of his sexual romances – that a homosexual has more choices than sexual abstinence or promiscuity.

However, the gay subculture – the black horse, the desiring body – are not so easily tamed and struggle back when Bunny (impersonating his ex-lover Ralph) discloses Laurie's true feelings and sexuality to Andrew in an act of vengeance for losing Ralph to Laurie. Overwhelmed and confused, Andrew rushes to London where he takes up dangerous ambulance service – possibly to kill himself and his painful awareness that Laurie's homosexuality is a reflection of his own feelings. When Laurie travels to London to ease his friend's heart, Dave (Andrew's father figure) advises him to leave the boy in peace. Taking Dave's advice, Laurie only leaves his copy of the *Phaedrus* behind. Ultimately, Laurie's sacrifice is self-reflective – the incessant need to live as a 'moral' homosexual and to prove to himself, to the homosexual subculture and to heteronormative society that neither will determine his fate, has left Laurie bereft of the one person who could have shared his ideal of Platonic love. In the *Phaedrus*, Socrates concludes that harmony of the soul can be achieved when the lover and the beloved are one in their reflections: but Laurie never achieves to see himself in Andrew because he cannot sacrifice the boy's innocence. Instead, he betrays his convictions when he returns to Ralph and gives in to the black horse. In the last paragraph of *The Charioteer* it says:

Quietly, as night shuts down the uncertain prospect of the road ahead, the wheels sink to stillness in the dust of the halting place, and the reins drop from the driver's loosened

know how they will make love; if not it doesn't matter." Renault, "Afterword", (2014), p. 324.

hands. [...] They are far, both of them, from home, and lonely, and lengthened by their strife the way has been hard. Now their heads droop side by side till their long manes mingle; and when the voice of the charioteer falls silent they are reconciled for a night in sleep. (347)[108]

The Charioteer displays no happy ending considering that "both of them [were far] from home, and lonely" (347). Laurie has not managed to fulfil all of his desires and both Laurie and Ralph feel lonely in each other's company. The charioteer has lost control of the horses and "loosen[s]" his grip at which the horses embrace "for a night in sleep". Laurie and Ralph share *one* night together which indicates that their love is not eternal. Aptly Endres questions: "Ralph and Laurie are reconciled for a night in sleep, but what does the morning after hold?"[109] Considering this vague ending, I partly disagree with Summers, who contradicts his earlier reading of *The Charioteer* as a "homosexual problem novel[...]" when concluding that Renault's novel is ultimately "optimistic, and in its optimism it is subversive of the 1950s sexual ideology that would condemn homosexuals to unhappiness"[110]. Laurie's dissatisfaction in his relationship with Ralph challenges Summers' positive reading. Instead, *The Charioteer* movingly demonstrates the fate of homosexuals, who try to live 'moral' lives in a society that scrutinises their desires. Laurie is destined to become Ralph's lover for now because Andrew is not yet ready to face the truth. However, they "reconciled for *a* night in sleep": the novel leaves open what might happen in the morning. Possibility and chance are not devastated through closure, and the novel's sad ending is not finite, which is indeed "subversive of the 1950s sexual ideology".

Fitzroy's *Make Do and Mend* (2012) appears to be a contemporary revisiting of the *Phaedrus* myth and a remodelling of Renault's hesitant ending, where the modern version of Laurie (Harry) enlightens the contemporary Andrew (Jim) and they live 'happily ever after'. Moreover, *Make Do and Mend* exaggerates Renault's display of the homosexual subculture in the figure of Clive Campbell-Ainslie – an antagonist who represents the dark side of both homosexuality and the black market. "[Clive] would barter sexual favours for goods with [sailors], and later on would barter those self-same goods for different sexual favours with

108 Renault paraphrases Plato's *Phaedrus* in this scene. This is formally indicated by not italicising this paragraph which distinguishes it from other quotes directly taken from the *Phaedrus*. Endres analyses other scenes and compares them to Plato's text in order to reveal where Renault takes liberties to divert from the original. For more information see Endres, (2013), p. 161.

109 Endres, (2012), p. 161.

110 Summers, (1990), p. 170.

other people [...] the black market had never been quite so black." (182) Whereas in Renault's party chapter the seedy element of the "underground" (*TC* 199) gathers to exchange sexual favours for moments of company, Clive transfers sexual promiscuity into economic use. In both depictions Lysias' non-love is clearly privileged, but Clive more forcefully focuses on rationality to process transactions – to him, only a non-love can provide economic profit.

Harry is accustomed to these transactions and willing to perform them in order to buy Christmas presents for the women working at his farm. When Clive demands his 'pay', the text gives insight into how black the black market has become: "Don't undress, Clive instructed him, coldly. You won't be here long enough. I'll just have your mouth this time, I think." (178) The black market can be read as an allegory to the black horse in Plato's *Phaedrus* and when Harry gets involved in it, he plunges to the ground. In a commanding tone, Clive not only emasculates and objectifies Harry he also fractures his body when saying "I'll just have your mouth". When *The Charioteer* depicts homosexual promiscuity as morally condemnable, *Make Do and Mend* dramatises its threat to the soul as well as to the body – a modification that might be informed by the knowledge over the HIV/AIDS crisis, which so distinctly revealed the real physical threat homosexual men would come to encounter. No longer bodily whole, Harry becomes almost a machine: "Moving dispassionately, as if deploying some soulless piece of equipment, Clive positioned Harry on the bed, his head hanging back over the edge, and stood over him feeding him hot, stale flesh." (179) Harry's head seems separated from his body and becomes the sole emphasis of Clive's impassionate transaction. The text continues in great detail to describe Clive's expression of power over Harry, climaxing in the depersonalising of the characters by focusing on the institutions they represent: "the RAF, fucking the Navy" (179). Harry reflects that wearing different uniforms satisfies Clive even more because subordination is always most effective when more than one factor combines. Harry is emasculated, objectified and bodily fractured, all of which can be transferred onto the Navy and its oppression by the RAF. As the initiator of this subordination Clive feels vastly empowered.

While "[a]t first it was all usage and being used" (179), Harry cannot sustain self-control over his own desiring body. Gradually he begins to enjoy Clive's seduction and identifies with his own objectification and bodily destruction. The expressive language – "accepting the spasming ejaculation as if through a feeding tube directly into his stomach" (179) – borders on pornography and locates *Make Do and Mend* most definitely as a novel of the 21st century, where texts are no longer censored for indecency. Despite this apparent difference to *The Chari-*

oteer where Renault stays far away from making sexual contact explicit, Harry echoes Laurie's remorse after sleeping with Ralph when he realises that:

> a cerebral, academic man [like Jim] who lived a life of the mind would surely be unwilling to subject himself to the vagaries of carnal desire. Indeed, it would probably be better to forget about Jim altogether [...]. Harry's world, regrettably, contained more facsimiles of Clive than it ever would of Jim. (180)

The similarity between Laurie's and Harry's protective attitudes towards their innocent lovers is remarkable. Even their conclusion to renounce their attraction in order to save Andrew and Jim is identical at this point. However, *Make Do and Mend* opts for a different solution to the *Phaedrus* dilemma and has Harry and Jim reconcile in the end. Ultimately, self-knowledge is bliss to Harry and ought to be encouraged because he and Jim "could be closer if [Jim] was willing to allow it" (164) – a thought that would never cross Laurie's mind. Whereas *The Charioteer* portrays self-knowledge as an unnecessary burden on Andrew, *Make Do and Mend* considers it a positive path towards self-fulfilment. Consequently, Jim takes initiative and says to Harry: "I need to know, once and for all, who I really am; I need you to show me, if you can." (189) Jim's repetition of the first person "I" emphasises his personal desire for knowledge and protects Harry from being charged as a seducer. Whereas Laurie actively restrains Andrew's development and maturity, Fitzroy's character demands to become enlightened. At this point, the narratives diverge as Harry, unlike Laurie, becomes able to envision a relationship that satisfies bodily and mental pleasures with his beloved.

Harry and Jim's first sexual encounter betrays none of the dirty-mindedness explicit in Clive when the text stays clear from detail and suffices in describing a kiss: "And Harry turned his face up towards Jim's, pulling him closer, and the kiss happened somehow although he was never sure exactly how." (189) Clearly differentiating their love-making from Clive's promiscuity, Harry and Jim's relationship seems to envision the harmony of the tripartite soul. *Make Do and Mend* does not have the charioteer reconcile with the black horse as in Renault's novel, but risks the moment of self-awareness to allow for Harry to attain a more innocent yet equally physical love. Having momentarily turned his back on morality, Fitzroy's charioteer does not need to sacrifice himself, but highlights that Harry "had been immeasurably improved by knowing Jim" (294), which illustrates Socrates' argument that the lover sees himself in the beloved for the benefit of both. Concluding on a modern note of equality, Harry pledges that the "gender of the partner" (295) is irrelevant for finding true love.

Regardless of Harry and Jim's satisfaction with their situation, I claim that *Make Do and Mend* is compromising in a different way – not in terms of self-pity or by settling for the black horse, but in its depiction of homosexuality as heterosexuality's abjected Other relegated to the border of society. The novel ends in an epilogue where Jim and Harry celebrate their happiness and the marriage of Harry's brother Jack to Kitty, one of the women working at Hendra. After the ceremony, Harry and Jim go to the remote farm where Jim lives and find it cleaned with a fire waiting to be lit and a note saying:

Dear Jim and Harry [...]
There was enough mixture left over to make an extra little cake, which we thought you might appreciate – and you'll find a bottle of Thomas's [sic] champagne chilling in your sink (We've got the other one with us!) Promise to drink our health tonight, and we'll promise to drink yours …
All our love,
Your affectionate brother and sister
Jack and Kitty Lyon. (294) [emphasis original]

While the rest of the village is unaware of Jim and Harry's love, Jack and Kitty know and receive it in an uncharacteristically positive way given that the novel is set during the Second World War. Apart from that, it seems significant that this scene is displayed in the epilogue making it literally 'other' to the rest of the novel. The letter suggests that Harry and Jim's romantic intimacy is a distorted image of Jack and Kitty's public wedding, emphasised in the smaller cake and the leftover champagne. Jim and Harry stay on the remote farm, in the little cottage where their difference does not affect 'decent' citizens whereas the newly-wed couple "set[s] off for the railway station" with "[m]ost of the village [...] scatter[ing] flower petals as they went" (290). In contrast to Jack and Kitty's open display of their love, Harry and Jim remain hidden. While *Make Do and Mend* represents homosexuality in modern terms as a choice, the separation of Jim and Harry's romantic evening from Kitty and Jack's marriage in form and content perpetuates homosexuality as a deviance that needs to be assimilated into heteronormative discourse in order to control it. Wendy Brown argues:

The very invocation of tolerance [...] indicates that something contaminating or dangerous is at hand, or something foreign is at issue, and the limits of tolerance are determined by how much of this toxicity can be accommodated without destroying the object, value,

claim or body. Tolerance appears, then, as a mode of incorporation and regulating the presence of the threatening Other within.[111]

Instead of filling the text with double discourses to destabilise dominant language and knowledge as done in *The Charioteer*, Fitzroy's novel represents a neat space for homosexuality. By appearing as an uncloseted couple, Jim and Harry pose no threat to heteronormative society, as they become distinguishable into new categories and a different discourse that cannot threaten 'the norm'. No longer indefinable, people can finally lay to rest their issues with Harry being unmarried and Jim being a stranger within the village. Fizroy's ending has an unsatisfactory tone of re-establishing order and the dominance of 'civilised society'. Whereas characters such as Laurie try to live within homophobic society and constantly erode its alleged superiority simply by being a stranger within, Jim and Harry are relegated to the borders – to the rural farm hut where they get fed with leftovers. The characters' sexuality seems to determine their lives in the most fundamental way so that they become utterly reduced to it.

Unlike Harry and Jim, Laurie is primarily a human being before he is a homosexual, a soldier, a cripple, a son and a lover. This combination of identities makes *The Charioteer* a much more compelling, authentic and liberating read than *Make Do and Mend*. *Look Down in Mercy*, too, becomes enthralling because Kent cannot resist his desires at a time and in a position that could endanger his life. The emotional setbacks and his cruel attitude towards both Helen and Anson persuasively narrate the struggle of living a secret. There is never a truly positive or negative affect on the reader regarding the novels of the 1950s, but always a mixture of both and many more. In this way *The Charioteer* and *Look Down in Mercy* compare to Waters' *The Night Watch*, which also depicts characters who are aware of their homosexuality whilst trying to live with and beyond it. Consequently, Alden's conclusion that "*The Charioteer* is the story of Laurie's progress towards entering a relationship with a man; [whereas] *The Night Watch* is the story of individual women for whom sexual orientation is only one part of their identity" seems questionable.[112] Both novels as well as Baxter's narrative resist any form of essential identity shared by one group. Instead, the most contemporary novel, *Make Do and Mend*, seems to reduce its characters to their sexuality.

111 Wendy Brown, *Regulating Aversions: Tolerance in the Age of Identity and Empire* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006), p. 27

112 Alden, (2014), pp. 197-198.

THE INVISIBLE STRUGGLE: REFURBISHING A GHOSTLY PAST

I have thus far analysed why novels of the 1950s cannot be categorised as homophobic or self-damaging according to a contemporary mindset. This debate was evoked by Alden's critical evaluation of pre-Stonewall novels, especially Renault's *The Charioteer*, and her reading of Waters' *The Night Watch* as a more positive appropriation of the past. I shall now return to *The Night Watch* in order to evaluate the novel's investment in and refurbishment of the invisible homosexual past by means of examining the characters Duncan and Kay, who both struggle to find their place in post-war London and develop an attachment to bygone times. Waters resolves their plight in two ways: depicting Duncan's homosexual identity formation and consequential liberation from Mr Mundy (his former prison guard), whereas Kay stays firmly attached to the memory of the war years. Figuratively, *The Night Watch* seems to suggest that there is not one 'true' approach to historiography – that our perception of the past is always imbued with a contemporary consciousness. Transferred to the perspective of a queer historiography, this might imply that there is more than one queer story to be told that opens vast readings of a colourful and not singularly oppressing past. A refurbishment of gay and lesbian figures or a genealogy between pre- and post-Stonewall writers will therefore always be troubled by incongruities. These frictions, as dramatised in the varying character developments of Duncan and Kay, need to be recognised by the gay and lesbian community in order to reclaim a past that is heterogeneous and might not unproblematically suit a contemporary (political) self-understanding.

The Night Watch begins in 1947 when the war is over and people have disposed of their wartime identities and returned to 'regular' life. At this point in the novel, the reader is unaware of the characters' pasts because Waters' backward narrative, beginning in 1947 and ending in 1941, compels the reader to constantly revisit and re-evaluate the text and its characters. Through its form and narrative structure, *The Night Watch* challenges any perception of a stable identity and instead reveals that fluidity and transformation constitute life. In this way, the novel dramatises modern queer theory[113], where the concept of a stable

113 The term 'queer theory' was initially coined by Theresa De Lauretis in 1990 in the course of a conference held at the University of California. She also used the term in the accompanying issue *Differences: a Journal of Feminist Cultural Studies*. In her "Introduction" De Lauretis explains that "'Queer Theory' conveys a double emphasis – on the conceptual and speculative work involved in discourse production, and

identity is challenged in favour of identity formation. Thomas S. Weinberg defines identity formation as "a dynamic social process that involves a variety of possible sequences of stages through which a person passes while seeking to construct a credible and acceptable definition of his self"[114]. By thus moving away from static identity politics that seek to gather and categorise diverse sexualities under umbrella terms, queer theory has established fluidity and diversity in society. However, Leo Bersani rightly asserts that "by rejecting the whole concept of identity – we risk participating in the homophobic project that wants to annihilate us"[115]. Consequently, when arguing for a character's identity constructed on the basis of sexuality, we need to distinguish between heteronormatively *assigned* identities following the essentialist notion of a knowable and unchangeable self, and a non-heteronormativly *negotiated* self-understanding that seems to, albeit still controlled by discourse, refuse stability in the terms assumed by patriarchy. Duncan's identity formation illustrates that characters can come to reject a conscious perpetuation of a heteronormative identity by accepting their difference. When Duncan liberates himself from social standards, he also begins to conceptualise a life free from Mr Mundy, a former prison guard who took Duncan in and symbolises Duncan's imprisonment in the past.

Although no longer behind bars, Duncan persistently identifies as a social outcast. The official verdict for his imprisonment in 1941 was attempted suicide to escape military service, but his homosexuality, which was also punishable by law, remains a latent factor for his fate. After the war Duncan has moved from the prison into a candle factory "for invalids and charity cases" (18-19) where the sound of the "whistle" (82) determines his day. The reference to medical disorder in connection with the factory and Duncan's occupation at such a place is significant. The war and post-war years were a period of disorder not only dis-

on the necessary critical work of deconstructing our own discourses and their constructed silences." (iv) 'Queer' was intended to "mark a certain critical distance from" (iv) the distinct terms 'gay' and 'lesbian' or their juxtaposition in 'gay and lesbian', 'lesbian and gay' in order to "avoid all these fine distinctions in our discursive protocols, not to adhere to any one of the given terms, not to assume their ideological liabilities, but instead to both transgress and transcend them – or at the very least problematize them." (v) Theresa De Lauretis, "Queer Theory: Lesbian and Gay Sexualities An Introduction" in *Differences: a Journal of Feminist Cultural Studies* Vol. 3, No. 2 (1991), pp. iiix–viii.

114 Thomas S. Weinberg, *Gay Men, Gay Selves: The Social Construction of Homosexual Identity* (Virginia: Irvington Publishers, 1983), p. 1.

115 Leo Bersani, *Homos* (Cambridge and London: Harvard University Press, 1995), p. 42.

tinguishable in architectural damage, but also written on the male body. Whereas the bodies of returning soldiers were shattered by the war, Duncan, who never saw combat, is physically healthy but characterised by a childlike dependency on Mr Mundy. The constant narration of Duncan as "a boy like him" (127) projects infantile innocence and naivety onto him and hampers his ability to live an autonomous life. Having existed in a routine outside of his making since the beginning of the war, Duncan feels anxiety over any hint of freedom and is wary of the consequences "waiting for him at home" – referring to Mr Mundy. Consequently, even as a free man the prison continues to constitute Duncan's existence because he subordinates to a former prison guard and to the factory routine.

Duncan's obsession with the past is substantiated in his collection of old objects that the war takes from bombed out houses and scatters over London for Duncan to find and carefully place on the shelves in Mr. Mundy's house. Katharina Boehm reads these objects as symbolising a "desire to connect with the past in a creative and fanciful manner"[116] without appropriating it into the terms of the present. Boehm follows Bill Brown's "thing theory"[117] and claims that

> The object in its irreducible thingliness becomes a middle ground, or a third term, that enables the imaginative negotiation of relations between past and present while safeguarding the autonomy of the past against the cultural preoccupations of the present."[118]

While this reading is intriguing in its focus on the object as an autonomous thing, and Boehm's perception of the mutual touch between subject and object integrates with my reading, I believe the consequences for Duncan and his role as collector to go further than Boehm suggests. Instead of just connecting with the past, Duncan is trapped by it, which is equally highlighted by Fraser, Duncan's former prison cellmate, during a conversation with Duncan's sister Viv:

> I think he has got stuck. I think, he's made himself be stuck, as a way of – of punishing himself, for all that happened, years ago […]. I think Mr Mundy is taking very good care to keep him stuck; […] I don't think anyone else is doing anything to, as it were, unstick him. All that fascination of his with things from the past, for instance. (126-127)

116 Katharina Boehm, "Historiography and the Material Imagination in the Novels of Sarah Waters" in *Studies in the Novel* Vol. 43, No. 2 (2011), p. 247.

117 Bill Brown, "Thing Theory" in *Critical Inquiry* Vol. 28, No. 1 (2001).

118 Boehm, (2011), p. 247.

Fraser's constant repetition of the word "stuck" lays emphasis on Duncan's immobility which, in the end, he directly identifies with his obsession with abandoned or lost objects from the past. The additional reference to Mr Mundy who "keep[s] him stuck" and Viv who does not try to "unstick him" reveals Duncan's dependence on other people and substantiates his constant perception as a "boy" – all of which indicating that Duncan is not living in the present but continues to be stuck in the past of which his objects are symbolic.

Fraser not only points out Duncan's desperate situation, he also involuntarily triggers a sense of desire in Duncan to free himself from his past and his objects. After their random meeting at the factory, the former prison mates renew their friendship, but when Fraser fails to show up one evening, Duncan is left insecure and devastated. In consequence of his friend's absence, Duncan parts with his usual bedtime routine, which ordinarily involves "looking over the pots and jars and ornaments, the teaspoons and tear-bottles, picking them up and delighting in them all over again; thinking about where they'd come from and who'd owned them before" (162). This routine agrees with Boehm's reading and emphasises Duncan's attitude towards his objects as things telling their own story of the past vastly different from the present and knowable only through imagination and touch. "But he looked at it all, tonight, without much interest." (162)

> He briefly picked up the bit of clay pipe he'd found on the beach by the riverside pub, that was all. He put his pyjamas on slowly, buttoning the jacket, then tucking it tidily into the trousers. He cleaned his teeth, and combed his hair again – combed it differently this time, making it neat, putting a parting in it like a child's. He was very aware, as he did all this, of Mr Mundy waiting patiently in the room next door; he pictured him lying very still and straight, his head propped up on feather pillows, the blankets drawn up to his armpits, his hands neatly folded, but ready to pat the side of the bed, invitingly, when Duncan went in … It wasn't much. It was almost nothing. Duncan thought of other things. There was a picture, hanging over Mr Mundy's bed: a scene of an angel, safely leading children over a narrow, precipitous bridge. He'd look at that until it was over. He'd look at the complicated folds in the angle's gown; at the children's large, innocent-spiteful Victorian faces.
> He put down his comb and picked up the bit of clay pipe again; and this time touched it to his mouth. […] He opened his eyes – and at once met his own gaze in the mirror. His hair was combed in its neat white parting, his pyjama jacket buttoned up to the chin; but he wasn't a boy. (162-163)

The relationship between Duncan and Mr Mundy alludes to ancient Greek culture where men are said to spend some time of their lives involved with other

men of younger age.[119] Instead of identifying these men as homosexuals, "truth and sex were linked, in the form of pedagogy, by the transmission of a precious knowledge from one body to another; sex served as a medium for initiations into learning."[120] Homosexual sex acts did consequently not determine a sexual identity, but rather a person's gender identity: "In ancient Greece, males who engaged in same-sex acts changed, as they aged, from feminine to masculine roles."[121] Since Duncan is the boy, he is emasculated compared to the older and arguably more mature Mr Mundy. During intercourse, Duncan looks at the Victorian painting to distract himself from the old man's obscene touch "until it was over". The "it" that is "almost nothing" and in any case "wasn't much", reveals Duncan's inability to properly reflect on his relationship of dependence with Mr Mundy. The painting, which is the only thing Duncan can recall from their intimate moments, transforms the old man into a two-faced angel – at once kind and helpful when giving Duncan a place to stay (or "safely leading children over a narrow, precipitous bridge"), but also ridden with "complicated folds" unnoticed by the carefree observer. The Victorian children are equally troubling in their symbolic significance: they may stand for the relationship between Duncan and Mr Mundy, where the former is the innocent young boy and the latter the spiteful old man expecting sexual favours for his kindness and hospitality.

In the end it is the "clay pipe" and its touch on Duncan's mouth which liberates him from his attachment to Mr Mundy. The "it" that Duncan did not dare to name earlier is no longer anonymous but directly associated with the old man whom Duncan sends "to hell" (163). Whereas the objects on the shelf of Mr Mundy's old childhood bedroom entrap Duncan in the past, touching the clay pipe that reminds him of Fraser with whom he had found it, liberates him from his boyishness. This transformation is enhanced through his reflection in the mirror and the awareness that the boy, who Mr Mundy sees in him, is not the man Duncan wants to be. "He was twenty-four, and could do what he liked." (163) Suddenly, "[t]he world seemed full, to him, of extraordinary new things" (165). Duncan is no longer entrapped by the past through his collection of old objects, but open for "new things" and ready to move into the future. He manages to break free from these things through the indirect touch of Fraser – a touch which sustainably alters Duncan's self-perception and "[h]e messed up the parting in

119 Anne Fausto-Sterling, *Sexing the Body: Gender Politics and the Construction of Sexuality* (New York: Basic Books New York, 2000), p. 14.

120 Michel Foucault, *The Will to Knowledge: The History of Sexuality: 1*, [1976], (London: Penguin Books, 1998), p. 61.

121 Fausto-Sterling, (2000), p. 14. For further information revisit Fausto-Sterling's cartoon (Figure 1).

his hair." (163) Although Duncan is free to gaze into the future to fashion an independent life, Waters' approach to the past is not always resolved by turning towards the future. In fact, the backward narrative structure itself seems to foreclose a reading of progressivity in order to more decisively reclaim an invisible lesbian history.

Terry Castle criticises that the refurbishment of a homosexual past is not equal for men and women. In contrast to homosexual men like Duncan, lesbian woman often remain "in the shadows, in the margins, hidden from history" dominated by the male homosexual who, despite his marginal social position, contains in his male body the potential for masculine power.[122] In her work on *The Apparitional Lesbian*, Castle further states that "[t]o try to write the literary history of lesbianism is to confront, from the start, something ghostly: an impalpability, a misting over, an evaporation, or 'whiting out' of possibility"[123]. In this way, the male homosexual tradition has "both subverted historical master narratives and substantially overlapped with them"[124]. Positioned simultaneously in conflict and in marriage with patriarchal structures, "masculine privileges" [125] remain situated within the male homosexual realm of power or wedded to performances that idealise masculinity. It follows that while male homosexual historiography can "confidently and nostalgically [look] to the homophile communities of classical Greece, ancient Rome, Persia and Renaissance Europe", lesbian scholars in their "search for lesbian originals" are confined to the poetess Sappho of Lesbos.[126] Mary Renault's character Ralph Lanyon pointedly lists a number of historical figures who are, but for one exception, male: "Plato, Michelangelo, Sappho, Marlowe; Shakespeare, Leonard, and Socrates if you count the bisexuals" (178). It is evidently easy enough to search for and find prominent male homosexuals, but lesbian desire often remains invisible.

Waters' novel not only criticises the difficult contemporary perception of lesbianism as well as its historic invisibility, she also emphasises the psychological impact invisibility, or being differently visible, has on subjects. At the beginning of *The Night Watch*, Kay is described as "haunt[ing] the attic floor like a

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

123 Castle, (1993), p. 28.

124 Laura Doan and Sarah Waters, "Making Up Lost Time: Contemporary Lesbian Writing and the Invention of History" in David Alderson and Linda R. Anderson (eds.), *Territories of Desire in Queer Culture: Refiguring Contemporary Boundaries* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000), p. 12.

125 Ibid., p. 12.

126 Ibid., p. 13.

ghost or a lunatic" (4), which places her in line with Castle's analysis of lesbian invisibility. The flat in which Kay lives "was nothing to her but a place in which to sleep or to lie sleepless" (5). When everyone else is beginning to rebuild homes, Kay has become emotionally homeless and walks the streets of London aimlessly and lonesome, not noticing and unnoticed by other people crossing her path. Kay has become an invisible lesbian, struggling with the return of peacetime heteronormativity, because "the apparent freedoms of wartime are not sustained with the return of peace" [127]. Kay is no longer recognised as a strong woman since the ground on which she is standing now is different from that of the early 1940s. No longer claiming the public streets of London as her workplace, Kay has no purpose in life and no position that awards her with recognition.

In contrast to Kay, her ex girlfriend Julia Standing becomes the apparitional and assimilated lesbian after the war when she dresses up in feminine fashion for a photograph to promote her latest novel. Wearing make-up and lipstick, she turns out looking rather "*marriageable*" (146) [emphasis original]. Julia's heteronormative visibility illustrates the paradoxical position of lesbians in society: when being recognised as "marriageable", Julia's lesbianism becomes invisible. In contrast to both Kay and Julia, Helen looks "like pressed meat" (47), "*like a lovely onion*" (51) [emphasis original]. Helen, who used to date men before meeting Kay and Julia, portrays bisexuality as the most damaging social position that resides between lesbianism and heterosexuality. Her insecurities are reinforced when Julia, her current partner, begins spending more time with her publisher Ursula, whom Helen describes as looking "neat, moneyed, tailored" (56), not at all like a "lovely onion". Battling her jealousy of this woman who successfully combines the distinct spheres of heterosexuality and lesbianism in her appearance, Helen wishes she could transform her inner torments and ambiguous social position into intelligible marks on her body:

> For a burn or a cut might be shown, might be nursed, might scar or heal, would be a miserable kind of emblem; would anyway be *there*, on the surface of her body, rather than corroding it from within (153) [emphasis original].

Helen tries to use her body as a space for protest but fails to do so because "the slicing was too precise" (155) and "[t]he edges of flesh were already closing" (155). Unable to produce a cut that signifies the depth of her emotions, Helen is overpowered by her own body. This moment of attempted self-destruction re-

127 Victoria Stewart, The Second World War in Contemporary British Fiction: Secret Histories (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2011) p. 128.

calls a long and tragic history of self-inflicted injuries by people who cannot find their place in society.

Whereas the initial representation of Kay as a ghost substantiates the narrative of invisible lesbianism, *The Night Watch* develops a more diverse picture when Kay voluntarily stays attached to the war years. Waters thus re-writes the negative implication of the invisible lesbian and invests Kay with positive feelings towards the past in order to emphasise the relevance of lives like hers. When visiting her friend Mickey after the war, Kay is shown to repeatedly recall the war when she used to enjoy herself with a group of lesbian friends. Yet, it turns out that the gin slings she recalls drinking with them during happier times had instead been gin gimlets. "The fact that she'd misremembered before – misremembered to the extent that she'd been able to picture Mickey actually cutting up the lemons, squeezing out the juice – made her uneasy." (109) Kay's 'memory' of real lemons during war bespeaks the nostalgia with which she recalls that time when she was still happy with her girlfriend Helen. That Kay already begins to forget what had happened only two years ago additionally shows that looking back is always a form of narration and becoming aware of this has an uneasy effect on those who misremember. A sense of truth is turned into fiction, and the mind's capacities are put into question.

Kay's appeal to women is equally gone with the emergence of peace. During one of her laborious walks, Kay tries to flirt with a girl – "[t]he girl, however, wasn't much good" (34) because she does not understand Kay's small talk as flirtatious. The girls careful dress code and her high heels present a constant site for comment to Kay who wonders, how the girl "can go so fast, in heels so high" to which the girl replies "carelessly" (34): "One gets into the habit, I suppose" (34). The girl's "careless" response suggests that she does not question why she is wearing high heels but regards it as possibly the latest trend after years of grovel on the streets and austerity where flat shoes were a necessity. Kay's emphasis that the shoes were not ordinary high heels but "heels *so* high" further suggests that the girl is wearing especially high ones, hinting towards the impending Barbie image of femininity that would become increasingly established and popular within the next centuries.[128] This indicts femininity as a manufactured product in the competitive system of heteronormative reproduction during the post-war period where few men returned and many women had survived, which boosts the sexual economy of the post-war era. The selection process was in favour of men who had a large number of potential mates to choose from, making women a product to be judged as 'good' or 'bad'. Critically, Iris Marion Young summarises this habit on the "disciplines of the feminine" to "mask or

128 Manufacture of first Barbie in 1959.

subordinate the raw facts of embodiment, to make the body 'pretty' by constraining fluid flesh, masking its organic smells with perfumes, painting skin, lips, eyes, and hair that have lost their nubile luster"[129]. Furthermore, the girl's generalisation that "*one* gets into the habit" indicates that women in general followed fashion for exceptionally high-heels. With this careless generalisation, the image of women following trends for the sake of appealing to men, who will, like Kay, notice that the shoes are "good for the shape of the legs", has emerged. Kay's voyeurism in this scene reinforces her desired gender performance as modelled on male masculinity, rather than female masculinity that partakes in the subordination and objectification of women as will be discussed in the fourth chapter.

However, the girl was "not understanding, not understanding at all", (35) and fails to recognise Kay's advances as flirtatious. Regardlessly, Kay starts a conversation with her in which she persistently, almost pathetically, tries to get the girl's attention. The girl's naïve misunderstanding is a reflection of Kay's failing masculine power, which is underlined by the number of men returning home from the front making 'boyfriends' and 'husbands' terms and concepts to be reckoned with again. In 1944 the attitude towards men had been different, which proved to be a blessing for Viv as it allowed her to keep the shameful imprisonment of her brother Duncan to herself because "[t]hese days, […] no one asked after brothers, boyfriends, husbands – just in case." (247) Kay's explicit interrogation about the girl's boyfriend registers a shift in mood and manner, and renders Kay's advances ineffective when men, as the 'legitimate' mates of women, return from the front. Kay is no longer able to successfully claim the role of man and her lesbian desire remains unrecognised by the girl.

The parting scene between Kay and the girl substantiates how gender and sexuality are returning to heteronormativity after years of exceptional circumstances.

> She went on faster, to the edge of the kerb, looked quickly to left and to right, then ran across the road. Her high-heeled shoes were pale at the instep; they showed, Kay though, like the whitish flashes of fur you saw on the behinds of hopping rabbits.
> She hadn't said 'Goodbye', 'So long', or anything like that; and she didn't, now, look back. And they turned down a street and were lost. (34-35)

Kay's observation that the girl's "high-heeled shoes were pale at the instep" and looked "like the whitish flashes of fur" of rabbits are telling in several ways: firstly, the pale instep signals the girl's inner paleness when following fashion

129 Iris Marion Young, *On Female Body Experience: "Throwing Like A Girl" and Other Essays* (Oxford University Press, 2005) pp. 5-6.

trends to please men. She has lost personality and instead has become part of the machinery that endlessly produces dependent women. Secondly, she is moving away from Kay like a rabbit on the run which shows that Kay's appeal on women is fading because women have returned to conventional relationships with men. Thirdly, the image of the rabbit as an animal preyed on completes this renewed patriarchal system in which women are the 'prey of men' and lesbian desire returns into invisibility. In the end Kay is left standing on the street looking after the girl thinking that she was "lost". The scene ends in a double entendre, superficially indicating that the woman is no longer in sight for Kay, but more tellingly suggesting that she is a lost cause – that she is too far gone in the conventions of society and lost for Kay to show her alternatives.

Through such scenes where Kay's present contradicts her glorious past, *The Night Watch* turns the gaze into bygone times in order to emphasise lesbian autonomy during the war, which troubles arguments regarding their categorical invisibility. When Alden asserts that the gay and lesbian past is ridden with self-loathing, Waters' Kay questions this argument by expressing the very opposite. This is additionally evident in her attitude towards watching movies in the cinema:

> Sometimes I sit through the films twice over. Sometimes I go in half-way through, and watch the second half first. I almost prefer them that way – people's pasts, you know, being so much more interesting than their futures. Or perhaps that's just me ... (105-106)

Kaye Mitchell comments that this scene "encodes a subtle pessimism – if 'interest' is always a backwards movement, then what of hope, progress, development?"[130] This pessimism is, of course, part of Kay's character and challenges Alden's reading of *The Night Watch* as a thoroughly positive display of homosexuality. It is also, however, an incorporation of the narrative form as such. Disrupting time as a continuing force, Kay thinks in the parameters of Waters' writing where the present precedes the past. Kay's habit of watching the second half of a film first can be read as a meta-narrative to self-reflexively mirror Waters' narrative structure. Almost a *mise en abyme*, Kay's judgement of people's pasts being (in the present *continuous* form) most interesting also evaluates her own past as more interesting than her present and future. Constantly deconstructing time, the reader is left in an uncanny state of un/knowing – raised in the logics of progressive time and encountering its permanent undoing. In this way, the past

130 Kaye Mitchell, "'What does it feel like to be an anachronism?' Time in *The Night Watch*" in Kaye Mitchell (ed.), *Sarah Waters: Contemporary Critical Perspectives* (London, Bloomsbury, 2013), p. 94.

becomes less rigidly fixed and made available to be reinvented and retold to incorporate nostalgic and retrospective gazes, as well as progressive ones into the future. Waters' text reminds of the possibility of re-encountering that which seems fixed to imagine a different queerstory. When Kay can be represented against convention as nostalgically gazing into the past, the past might not be as oppressive as Alden conceives it to be, which makes the future a less compelling concept. It can thus be argued that Waters' reverse chronology is not simply a disruption of progressive time but a judgement of it – a critique of society's relentless forward movement. Rachel Wood nicely summarises that *The Night Watch* is "attending to a history of isolation, sadness, and exclusion that contemporary history makers might wish to evade"[131].

Literary representations of homosexual lives before gay liberation offer a discerning perspective into society and must be considered by contemporary critics in their own right. Equally important is the critical evaluation of modern novels such as *Make Do and Mend*, which has been shown to be more content with the abjected position of homosexuals than Renault's *The Charioteer*. Waters' *The Night Watch* enunciates a hybrid version where the past might be arresting, but where it is also facilitating modes of living that are not destined towards futurity. Whereas this chapter addressed the many ways of representing homosexuality, the following analysis will concentrate on the depiction of the Second World War in the context of such outlawed desires. I will challenge the assumption that war is a heteronormative endeavour that perpetuates nationalism, patriotism and hegemonic masculinity by disclosing that the novels share a collective reluctance of praising the war. In fact, despite their discrepancies in form and content, the novels largely agree upon the ruthlessness of combat and criticise the national leadership for manipulating men into battle.

131 Rachel Wood, "'Walking and Watching' in Queer London: Sarah Waters' *Tipping the Velvet* and *The Night Watch*" in *Journal of Lesbian Studies* Vol. 17, No. 3-4 (2013), p. 315.