Introduction: “Never in the History of Sex was so Much Offered to so Many by so Few”

Narrating War and Homosexuality

QUENTIN CRISP’S WAR

The women of London had gone butch. At all ages and on every social level, they had taken to uniforms – or near-uniforms. They wore jackets, trousers and sensible shoes. I could now buy easily the footwear that I had always favoured – black lace-up shoes with firm, medium heels. I became indistinguishable from a woman.
Once, as I stood at a bus stop, a policeman accused me of this. After looking me up and down for nearly a minute he asked me what I was doing.
Me: I’m waiting for a bus.
Policeman: You’re dressed as a woman.
Me (amazed): I’m wearing trousers.
Policeman: Women wear trousers.
Me: Are you blaming me because everybody else is so eccentric?

Quentin Crisp, *The Naked Civil Servant* (152 -153) [1]

As arguably the best-known example of eccentricity of his time, Quentin Crisp recaps his experiences before, during and after the Second World War in the auto-biography *The Naked Civil Servant* (1968). He invites the reader to join him in being amazed, shocked, flabbergasted and in the end enlightened for having glimpsed into a world completely detached from anything considered ‘normal’. Throughout his life, Crisp – born in Sutton, England, as Denis Charles Pratt (1908-1999) – lived as a “self-confessed”, “self-evident” (5) and consequently outcast homosexual, who wore make-up, high heels and strove for effeminacy

1 Quentin Crisp, *The Naked Civil Servant*, [1968], (London: Harper Perennial, 2007).

long before signs of an organised gay liberation movement were detectable in Western Europe. His lifestyle was not only unsavoury to 'civil society', but also to other homosexuals, who did not identify with Crisp's open effeminacy. This led to him being excluded from the heteronormative community as well as from its homosexual subculture. The above excerpt exemplifies Crisp's sarcasm and sharp humour when disclosing his excluded position and his unwillingness to conform to social standards. Moreover, Crisp's auto-biography denotes an often disengaged attitude towards the Second World War and its regulation of subjects, as well as his refusal to apologise for being homosexual.

After his discharge from military service in April 1940 on the grounds of "suffer[ing] from sexual perversion" (118), a friend of Crisp's responded to the military terminology by musing: "Shouldn't it be 'glorying in'?" (118) And glory Crisp did: during the war he continued to live his extravagant lifestyle, which he was slightly less harassed for as the war dominated life. Crisp therefore welcomed the imposed darkness on London, and the number of foreign soldiers and sailors entering the city because of the war. He gleefully states that "[n]ever in the history of sex was so much offered to so many by so few" (160).

However, whilst enjoying more freedoms, Crisp was excluded from the overarching discourse of combat. Self-consciously, he observes that "[p]eople did not like that sort of thing [being different] and could now add patriotism to their other less easily named reasons for hating me" (153). Rather than shaming Crisp for his homosexuality, people now censured him for not fighting. This collective patriotism altered the significance of class, gender, sexuality and other differentiating factors, as it emphasised the importance of distinguishing between *us*, the fighting nation, and *them*, the enemy, but also the non-fighter or conscientious objector, at times of national crisis. As a non-fighter and a homosexual, Crisp was thus doubly marginalised and excluded from the grand narrative of his time. He unsurprisingly recalls the war in very different ways compared to those authors, who were integrated in the war effort. His auto-biography *The Naked Civil Servant* thus exemplifies the difficulty of categorising war stories as either supportive or critical of the historical events taking place. Instead of displaying a coherent attitude, Crisp, and homosexual wartime fiction more broadly, often cover a spectrum of responses to the war that may be inherently contradictory and inconsistent.

Although Victoria Stewart rightly observes that "[t]he bringing into focus of the unfamiliar, via the narration of an individual's experiences and memories, is […] another means by which our understanding of the historical can be deep-

ened"[2], Crisp's auto-biography is, to my knowledge, not being read as part of the expanding canon of Second World War writings. This lack of attention derives from Crisp's narration of a war story that is disengaged from hegemonic discourse because it represents the increasing availability of sex, and the male soldier as the embodiment of homosexual fantasies. Petra Rau critically alludes to further themes often missing from hegemonic dramatisations of the Second World War:

> looting, striking, or black marketeering have been written out of the popular home front narrative altogether as have conscientious objectors or pacifists, many of whom did agricultural or clerical work or served in the fire or ambulance service.[3]

What Rau's observation most strikingly implies is a rethinking of the heroic soldier narrative when she detects "conscientious objectors or pacifists", who voluntarily passed on what Crisp sarcastically identifies as "a glorious and convenient death" (119) on the battlefield. In this book I will engage with four novels from different periods that concentrate on these sub-narratives identified by Rau in an effort to begin to close a glaring gap in the canonised recollection of an allegedly homogeneous and heteronormative war: Walter Baxter's *Look Down in Mercy* (1951), Mary Renault's *The Charioteer* (1953), Sarah Waters' *The Night Watch* (2006) and Adam Fitzroy's *Make Do and Mend* (2012)[4]. In order to give an overview of these novels, I shall briefly summarise the most significant storylines and character developments.

Walter Baxter's *Look Down in Mercy* (1951) comes closest to what can be considered a 'traditional' war writing: the protagonist Anthony Kent, known as Tony, is a heterosexual, married officer, who is responsible for an English platoon in Burma. The battle scenes between the English army and the Japanese are brutal and capture the atrocities of war. However, Kent's growing self-doubts over his masculine performance invest the text with a compassion for an increasingly compromised protagonist. When Kent additionally becomes conscious of his attraction to his batman Anson, the novel devastates heteronormative pa-

2 Victoria Stewart, *The Second World War in Contemporary British Fiction: Secret Histories* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2011), p. 14.

3 Petra Rau (ed.), *Long Shadows: The Second World War in British Fiction and Film* (Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 2016), p. 7.

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

rameters of war fiction by illustrating the transformation of Kent's identity from being a married officer to a homosexual war victim. *Look Down in Mercy* consequently challenges traditional accounts of the war, in favour of negotiating homosexuality at times of extraordinary circumstances.

Mary Renault's *The Charioteer* (1953) portrays a group of conscientious objectors who condemn the war due to their Quaker beliefs.[5] They perform alternative service as male orderlies in a hospital where the protagonist Laurie Odell (sometimes called Spud) is recovering from a knee injury incurred at the battle of Dunkirk. Laurie immediately falls in love with the young orderly Andrew Raynes, but because Laurie does not want to sacrifice Andrew's innocence, their love remains an abstract fantasy. The protagonist instead re-encounters Ralph Lanyon, his schoolboy crush, who introduces him to the homosexual subculture. Despite latently associating with these "advanced psychopaths" (199) – as Laurie calls them, signalling his strong aversion to effeminate homosexuals – neither Ralph nor Laurie want to fully identify with its promiscuity and flamboyancy. Laurie has to consequentially find a way of living up to his self-imposed standards of morality and integrity, which leaves him with few opportunities and eventually drives him away from Andrew and into the arms of Ralph.

In Adam Fitzroy's *Make Do and Mend* (2012), the protagonist Harry Lyon has a similar choice to make: he can either plunge into the homosexual subculture that is depicted in even more voyeuristic and promiscuous terms than in *The Charioteer* or enlighten the innocent farm labourer Jim Brynawel about his love for him. When Harry returns home on convalescent leave to his family estate in Wales called Hendra, he encounters Jim for the first time. Harry is immediately attracted to Jim and confesses his homosexuality, which enables the two men to fashion a relationship in surprisingly open terms. I am approaching *Make Do and Mend* as a modern re-write of Renault's novel that opts for an idealistic ending to signal its liberationist consciousness.

Contrasting *Make Do and Mend*, Sarah Waters' *The Night Watch* (2006) tries to be less obviously invested in its modern mindset and captures the lives of five

5 The *Oxford English Dictionary* (*OED*) defines Quaker as: "A member of the Religious Society of Friends, a religious movement founded by the Christian preacher George Fox in 1648–50, and distinguished by its emphasis on the direct relationship of the individual with the divine, and its rejection of sacraments, ordained ministry, and set forms of worship. The Society is also noted for pacifist principles and an emphasis on simplicity of life, formerly particularly associated with plainness of dress and speech. The name has never been officially adopted by the Friends themselves, but is not now regarded as a derogatory term." "Quaker, n." *OED Online*. Oxford University Press, June 2017. Web. 31 August 2017.

protagonists in more bleak ways than Fitzroy's novel. Proceeding back in time, *The Night Watch* consists of three parts moving from 1947 to 1944 and concluding in 1941. The characters Vivian (Viv) Pearce, Duncan Pearce, Helen Geniver, Julia Standing and Kay Langrish are variously connected and form interlinking bonds with each other. Viv is having an illicit affair with Reggie Nigri, who is a married soldier with two children. Their relationship begins with a chance encounter in a toilet stall on a train and subsequently takes place in various shabby hotel rooms ending with a botched abortion that almost kills Viv. Her brother Duncan Pearce has been convicted of attempted suicide and experiences the war behind prison bars. His past and sexuality are unknown for most of the novel, which substantiate the air of secrecy surrounding him. After the war, Duncan lives with Mr Mundy (a former prison guard), because his shameful history leads to his self-imposed exclusion from his childhood home. Duncan's relationship with Mr Mundy is governed by dependence and sexual assault until he re-encounters his former cell-mate Robert Fraser and falls in love with him. Not returning Duncan's affection, Fraser is instead attracted to Duncan's sister Viv, who is no longer involved with Reggie because she cannot forgive him for abandoning her after the abortion of their unwanted child. Rather than Reggie, it is the ambulance driver Kay who rescues Viv and gives her a ring to simultaneously conceal that Viv is not married, and that the alleged miscarriage was in fact an illegal abortion. Kay is in a lesbian relationship with Helen Giniver and the ring symbolises their unconventional love in the most conventional form. Helen later starts an affair with Julia Standing, a novelist who once was in love with Kay. The tragic love triangle between Kay, Helen and Julia leaves all involved unhappy and alone in the end. Since Duncan's love for Fraser is equally left unrequited, it seems that *The Night Watch* depicts homosexuality as failing. Viv, in contrast, becomes involved in a heteronormative relationship with Fraser that can be lived out in the street and does not need concealment like her affair with Reggie. However, Duncan is happy for his sister and the failure of Kay, Helen and Julia's relationships derives from their dishonesty and betrayal, which suggests a critique of modern, superficial relationships. Consequently, Waters' retrospective narrative infiltrates contemporary issues into a Second World War setting, to the effect of questioning both its heteronormative literary representation and modern conceptions of homosexuality, relationships and lifestyles.

Whilst these four novels form the centre of my analysis in this study, I am giving Quentin Crisp's *The Naked Civil Servant* leading position in this opening chapter in order to demonstrate that there is a variety of writings of and about the Second World War remarkably unaccounted for. It also shows that the selected novels can only stand as examples for an unknown number of other neglected

works that are not discussed here. Crisp's experiences during the war begin to bring into conversation the seemingly oppositional parameters of homosexuality and warfare. In order to elaborate on this controversial relationship, this study will focus on how the four novels represent homosexuality at times of war and to what extent the fictionalisation of same-sex desire challenges wartime order grounded in gender segregation. What effect has the scale of destruction on the characters' performance of gender when various scripts of peacetime heteronormativity lose their determining footing? At what point is the narrative of national patriotism, deriving its traction from a communal feeling of fighting in a People's War, challenged, and how does this collapse facilitate a re-negotiation of men's role during the war? In order to situate the novels into a broader framework with regard to their time of publication I will additionally analyse the place of pre-Stonewall literature within a growing canon of gay and lesbian fiction by asking if novels of the 1950s indeed rehearse a narrative of stigmatisation deriving from the homophobic discourse in which they were written. Can historical fiction refurbish a homosexual past in less woebegone language, or is it condemned to inscribe a modern consciousness into past times making it a derivative haunted by the present?

I will pursue a two-fold approach in answering these questions by simultaneously examining the structure of gender norms that organise social life at times of national crisis, and investigating how the novels challenge the dominant order when homosexual desire is inscribed into the discourse of war. My thesis proposes that the novels under discussion open scope for re-negotiating parameters that govern traditional wartime fiction such as nationalism and propaganda, in order to contest the relentless inscription of heteronormative masculinity onto the figurehead of warfare – namely the soldier. This reading against the grain of entrenched stereotypes is complemented by an analysis of the home as controversially protecting conservative scripts of conduct and sheltering the public from encountering deviance. In a close reading of the gendered politics of space, I shall disclose that gender norms remain deeply embedded within the foundation of society. Only through the symbolic as well as physical devastation of the home due to the war, can non-conforming characters begin to conceptualise an autonomous identity.

In 1970, Robin Morgan coined the term 'herstory' in her inspiring resistance book *Sisterhood is Powerful*[6] to denote the long-standing restriction and subordination of women within society. Later, the term was used by Second Wave Feminism to demonstrate firstly the consistent focus on men's lives when writ-

6 Robin Morgan, Sisterhood is Powerful: An Anthology of Writings from the Women's Liberation Movement (New York: Random House, 1970).

ing *his*tory, and secondly to point out biases in academic research more broadly. The *Oxford English Dictionary* (*OED*) has included the word and defines it as a "history emphasizing the role of women or told from a woman's point of view; also, a piece of historical writing by or about women"[7]. I propose that beyond *her*story there lingers an as yet largely unrecognised *queer*story that awaits retrieval and negotiation. Investigating history's queer stories simultaneously enables a re-reading of the canon of war literature and challenges the perception of gay writings before 1969 as homophobic[8], bleak and damaging for post-Stonewall gay and lesbian politics. The title of this study not only alludes to affectionate touches between historical fictions re-writing a homosexual past and novels written and published before Stonewall, it also points towards the multiplicity of stories that have not yet been told. In order to place *History's Queer Stories* into a wider context, I will now undertake an overview of the existing critical terrain surrounding war literature, examining in particular the retrospective and retroactive function of this genre within gay and lesbian studies. This introduction will take its lead from two distinct positions by calling to attention first the dominance of the male authored heteronormative war narrative, and second the historical and literary amnesia of the gay community deriving from the Stonewall riots in 1969 and the formation of a modern gay consciousness in its aftermath.

7 "Herstory, n." *OED Online*. Oxford University Press, September 2016. Web. 6 October 2016.

8 The term homophobia was coined in the early 1970s by George Weinberg. "In Weinberg's formulation, society itself was phobic or sick, while the homosexual, to the extent he was able to free himself from the ever present phobia, was healthy." (Daniel Wickberg, "Homophobia: On the Cultural History of an Idea" in *Critical Inquiry* Vol. 27, No.1 (2000), p. 47.) This original perception of 'suffering' from homophobia has quite a different ring to it than contemporary understanding, where the homosexual, in comparison to the heterosexual subject, remains fixed within the terminology of deviance and illness. The changing connotation illustrates that meaning is constantly in flux, which necessitates a thorough investigation of influential discourses on those who produce texts.

RESEARCHING THE WAR

THE SILENT WAR

Quentin Crisp's *The Naked Civil Servant*, published 1968, does not contain any typical references to the war such as the Blitz[9], or London's endurance characterised by its people coming together to fight a common enemy. Instead of retelling the horrors of war, Crisp polemically focuses on its positive side effects, specifically the rising number of art students, which the war seemed to produce, guaranteeing his employment as a model. His recollection of the time reads like an antithetical war story, indicated by his style of narration that challenges the mainstream parlance of inevitable devastation: "Perhaps drawing was a pleasant distraction from the bombs before which some people tended to go to pieces." (135) Disengaged from the danger of air raids, notable in his formulation "people *tended* to go to pieces", Crisp's comprehension of wartime is mostly shaped by the pleasure of having a job and of playing a part in the flourishing production of paintings as a reaction to the destructive force of bombs. His lightheartedness and involvement in art stands in direct contrast to how the war has been represented in scholarly research from the second half of the 20th century until the 1990s. During this period, it was assumed that the horrors of the time could not find aesthetic expression, that "[w]ar and culture are posited as antithetical"[10]. This antithesis has led to the presumption that there is virtually no literature written during the war years. In *Women's Fiction of the Second World War*, Gill Plain re-states this perception when saying: "The Second World War opened to the sound of silence, and the fragmented voices that later arose never achieved the cohesion of a single identifiable literary movement."[11] Plain's latest work, *Literature of the 1940s*, accounts for this silence by evaluating how authors such as Elizabeth Bowen perceived the changing "parameters of 'war writing'"[12]: "In every form, from the direct statement that the acts of war are inde-

9 Petra Rau explains: "In Britain, 'the Blitz' stands for the prolonged aerial attack on cities and ports over nine months from September 1940 to May 1941". For further information see Rau (2016), p. 4.

10 Mark Rawlinson, *British Writing of the Second World War* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2000), p. 9.

11 Gill Plain, *Women's Fiction of the Second World War: Gender, Power and Resistance* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1996), p. 1-2.

12 Gill Plain, *Literature of the 1940s: War, Post-war and 'Peace'* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2013), p. 8.

scribable, to metaphorical conceits of impossible reversals and unimaginable juxtapositions, there is an epic history of writers' acknowledgement that war defies representation."[13] Plain concludes that the perception of the non-literary war was not fashioned retrospectively and retroactively by scholars, but derived from authors themselves, who found it difficult to narrate the war – to put language to the unspeakable. Instead of literature, cinema was "the characteristic form of the 1940s, and new media was similarly dominant in the reporting of war and its aftermath"[14]. Radio served as a vital medium and brought news of the war to remote corners of the nation. It follows that the Second World War is constructed as a medial rather than a literary period, in contrast to the First World War's embedment in fictionalisations.[15]

Angus Calder's *The People's War* published in 1969 is clearly informed by the prevailing perspective of his time that the Second World War was a largely non-literary period. He claims that "very few memorable works of fiction or drama emerged during the war itself"[16], because if writers continued to find the time to practice their profession, they most often wrote propaganda or contented themselves with brevity in short stories, documentaries or poems. Calder's assertion details that it is particularly *novels* and *drama* that was thought to be absent from consciousness. Similar to Plain's evaluation that the cinema was a popular form of aesthetic expression, shorter literary texts, in addition to letters and diary entries, were continuously produced throughout the war – sometimes with more vigour than during peacetime resulting from the separation of lovers or married couples and from the distance between sons or fathers and their families. Kristine A. Miller's study on *British Literature of the Blitz* affirms that "[a]t no other moment in history have so many British citizens felt compelled to write so extensively about their daily lives and ideas"[17]. Her findings resonate with Calder's revision of the Second War as a non-novelistic rather than a non-literary period.

13 Plain, (2013), p. 8. Plain later refines this statement by stating: "In spite of the war's disruptive influence, the decade produced some rich and rewarding fiction." p. 23.

14 Plain, (2013), p. 4.

15 "Dem 'literarischen' Ersten Weltkrieg steht dann der '(massen-)mediale' Zweite Weltkrieg gegenüber." Zeno Ackermann, *Gedächtnis-Fiktionen: Mediale Erinnerungsfiguren und literarischer Eigensinn in britischen Romanen zum Zweiten Weltkrieg* (Heidelberg: Universitätsverlag Winter, 2015), p. 19.

16 Angus Calder, *The People's War: Britain 1939-1945* (London: Pimlico, 1969), p. 513. Plain similarity argues that "it is the short story that demands to be recognised as the characteristic 'form' of the decade." Plain, (2013), p. 24.

17 Kristine A. Miller, *British Literature of the Blitz: Fighting the People's War* (Hampshire and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), p. 4.

Consequently, different forms of writing *were* produced during the war period, but scholarly research was slow to recognise their importance. This slow recognition is also evident in Plain's refined statement that "[i]n spite of the war's disruptive influence, the decade produced some rich and rewarding fiction."[18] However, it was not until the turn of the century, largely due to the expanding number of feminist investigations into the Second World War, that scholars such as Plain began to carefully revise the apparently silent canon of Second World War fiction.

Damon Marcel DeCoste's essay "The Literary Response to the Second World War" explains this misconception of the silent war to arise from the fact that "novelistic responses to that war do not fit the model for war writing bequeathed to literary scholars by the Great War"[19]. Whilst Calder's observation has corrected the non-literary war into the non-novelistic war, DeCoste asserts that novelistic texts were as much produced in the 1940s as during the First World War, but that the status of the author had changed drastically. His evaluation shows that there is not a lack of novelistic material to draw from, that war and culture are not mutually exclusive, but rather, that this material does not originate from the soldier as author and authority of the front. Unlike the First World War, literary responses to the 1940s parted with the 'soldier poet' to include a range of diverse voices unheard (of) or silenced in the recollections of the Great War.[20] Not only was the ideology of the fighting soldier protecting hearth and home shattered by the nightly endangerment of civil society, including his family, his authority for having seen the effects of the war at close quarters was also no longer needed for (re-)telling its stories. DeCoste concludes that "[r]ather than the testimony of infantrymen disillusioned by combat, British fiction of the Second World War offers us the war away from the front, and especially on the home front"[21]. This shifted authorship and setting originated from the influence of the Blitz on civilians and adds a new dimension to the wartime paradigm when making virtually everyone a prime witness.

Miller observes that "[b]efore 1943, more British civilians than soldiers had been killed or wounded; by the end of the war, civilian fatalities equaled almost 25 percent of military fatalities, while the number of wounded civilians was

18 Plain, (2013), p. 23.

19 Damon Marcel DeCoste, "The Literary Response to the Second World War" in Brian W. Schaffer (ed.), *A Companion to the British and Irish Novel 1945-2000* (Malden and Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2005), p. 7.

20 Ackermann, (2015), p. 19.

21 DeCoste, (2005), p. 4.

more than 33 percent of the number of wounded soldiers."[22] This large number of civilian casualties changed the parameters of war writings. Whilst the language of threat, devastation and suffering characterised the situation of the soldier in narratives during the First World War, it became more universally used during the Second World War. Being exposed to the Blitz, letters by civilians to husbands, fathers and lovers became as much testimony of violence, as the soldiers' experiences at the front. This proximity significantly "transformed [the] communication between soldiers and civilians"[23] as their respective rhetoric became almost indistinguishable. Consequently, the Second World War produced a greater variety of writings by people from the home front, but they were not acknowledged as literature by those critics who were searching for the kind of texts produced during and in response to the First World War. These prototype texts were mostly 'realist' representations of the war, or rather what readers and critics "expected it to be"[24]. Ann-Marie Einhaus contends that "[n]ot formal innovation but the 'correct' ideological stance on the war qualifies a text for inclusion in [the] cultural canon"[25]: "they have to tick the right boxes in what they say about the war: disillusionment, horror, camaraderie in the trenches"[26]. Einhaus' evaluation buttresses the theory that wartime writing is traditionally synonymous with soldier experiences as well as tightly linked with nationalism and propaganda. Due to the unprecedented scale of the Second World War these core qualities were shaken, which led to an uncertainty over the distinguishing markers of Second World War literature.

THE PEOPLE'S WAR

In addition to the confusion over a literary canon on Second World War literature caused by an enlarged authorship, patriotism and propaganda were received less euphorically during the Second World War than before. When at the beginning of the century men looked with excitement towards the opportunity of fighting for their country, the second generation of soldiers, who often remembered the disastrousness of the First World War, identified with their roles in the military more reluctantly. The scale of destruction at the home front additionally led to critical voices questioning Britain's leadership. In order to maintain con-

22 Miller, (2009), p. 2.

23 Miller, (2009), pp. 4-5.

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

25 Einhaus, (2011), p. 298.

26 Ibid., p. 299.

trol, "[p]oliticians and the media emphasized the [apparently] unifying and levelling power of the Blitz" by claiming that the People's War would bring forth "changes in gender roles and class relations [which] might lead to post-war social reform"[27]. The speech "Westward, Look, the Land is Bright" given by Prime Minister Winston Churchill highlights these aspects:

> The sublime but also terrible and sombre experiences and emotions of the battlefield which for centuries had been reserved for the soldiers and sailors, are now shared, for good or ill, by the entire population. All are proud to be under fire of the enemy. [...] This is indeed the grand heroic period of our history, and the light of glory shines on all.[28]

The emphasis in the first sentence lies on the word 'sublime', which gives Churchill's speech an immediate sense of advocating something noble to the effect of not simply raising the cause he supports into higher spheres, making it just, necessary and beyond reproach, but also elevating the speaker himself. Neither the war nor Churchill can be exposed to criticism as it is an almost divine power that guides them. Thus, disguising the horrors of war, Churchill's style of speaking functions to vindicate a political power that leaves British citizens suffering. The word "sublime" is positioned at the beginning for emphasis and hovers as a modifier separated from its object until it is connected to the "experiences and emotions of the battlefield". That this battlefield is not exclusively sublime but also "terrible and sombre" is eclipsed by Churchill's syntax, which directs the focus to the beginning, rather than the middle, of the sentence. Yet, the "terrible and sombre" is not forgotten, it is acknowledged as a 'side-effect' without tarnishing the overall good of the war. Most importantly, the horrors are "shared [...] by the entire population", a unifying trope which constitutes the core of Churchill's message. It is no longer the soldier and the sailor, the male sex, who finds his honourable death on the faraway battlefield, but virtually everybody – women, children, old and young of all classes. The People's War on British ground becomes almost more significant than the front lines. "Proud to be under fire of the enemy", these citizens need to recognise their efforts and deaths as sublime, just like the soldier needs to accept the battlefield as his potential grave. To be sure that the people's suffering will not be in vain, Churchill pledges "the light of glory shines on all". It remains unclear what this glory constitutes of, but surely it will be sublime. Sonya O. Rose argues in *Which People's War*

27 Miller, (2009), p. 1.

28 Winston Churchill, "'Westward, Look, the Land is Bright,' Address Broadcast April 27, 1941" in Charles Eade (ed.), *The Unrelenting Struggle* (Boston: Little, Brown and Co., 1942), p. 93.

that this kind of rhetoric is a strategy "deployed to manage or organize the differences among people that have come to be sites of collective identity formation so that individuals see themselves as national beings regardless of their other loyalties and preoccupations"[29]. Churchill aims to unify Britons against a common enemy beyond class, gender or other differences.

However, rather than eliminating social distinctions, the Blitz brought them to light when people (most often women and children) waited in various kinds of shelters of varying quality depending on their social standing. Rau agrees that "[c]lass divisions remained visible and palpable throughout the war, which is why propaganda worked so hard to convince everyone that they had to be overcome if the war was to be won"[30]. Despite these efforts, individual war writings – letters, diaries, novels, short stories, etc. – demonstrate "an expression of imaginative freedom to disagree about the People's War"[31]. These texts represent the fracturing of British society and people's diverging attitudes towards the war. Miller concludes that "the imaginative representation of vastly different blitz experiences was an essential part of wartime life across social strata in British culture"[32]. It follows that there are rich accounts of and about the Second World War that negotiate individual perspectives of a collective event to subvert the dominant narrative of the People's War.

Crisp's response to the Government's propaganda is initially enthusiastic when he exclaims: "though some of the buildings [in London] had been ruined, most of the people had been improved. Everyone talked to everyone – even to me." (152) His allegory between ruined buildings and improved people illustrates a strange aestheticization of wartime, and he unwittingly recites People's War rhetoric when saying that despite bombed out and collapsed houses indicating the horrors of war, solidarity appears to be growing among Britons. Their lessened aversion against Crisp startles but delights him: it seems that despite its atrocity, the war has improved his life.

However, Crisp realises that his initial evaluation of change was premature because "[i]t was only superficially and only by day that strangers were friendly" (153). This statement displays Crisp's disappointment in discovering that the

29 Sonya O. Rose, Which People's War?: National Identity and Citizenship in Britain 1939-1945 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), p. 9.

30 Rau, (2016), p. 6.

31 Miller, (2009), p. 11.

32 Miller, (2009), p. 11. For further information see Calder, (1969) and Angus Calder, *The Myth of the Blitz*, [1991], (London: Pimlico, 1992). Similar to Miller, he analyses how people's personal lives were much too diverse to assume a coherent contribution to and belief in a People's War.

People's War was an increasingly failing fabrication. Differences were not overcome that easily, neither regarding class, let alone gender and sexuality. At one point, Crisp is severely beaten up in a train for no other reason than his effeminate looks, revealing how prejudices of various kinds continued to prosper. Consequently, whilst at times positive in their description of war circumstances, individual accounts such as *The Naked Civil Servant* remain to be infused with "conflicting discourses" [33], both welcoming and criticising the People's War, which contributes to the difficulties when trying to establish a coherent canon of Second World War literature.

THE GENDERED WAR

Whereas People's War propaganda sought to unite British citizens by declaring an end to social and gender differences, the military was paradoxically built on a stereotypical segregation of gender. Karen Schneider's *Loving Arms* shows that "[t]he assumption that war literature is properly written by and about men stems from the widespread if not altogether accurate identification of war as an essentially male activity and aggressive masculinity as an ontological condition"[34]. However, the following chapters will show that masculinity as such is a far less stable concept than the military portrays it to be, and that the potential of what Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick has coined "homosocial desire"[35] challenges the military's heteronormative self-image. The historian Allan Bérubé, who devoted his career researching and interviewing homosexual veterans of the Second World War, explains that in order to countermand any narratives that might threaten the masculine ideology of war, the US army and Navy developed screening processes to 'spot' homosexuals – a practice that had been unheard of during the First World War.[36] The detection of deviating sexualities within the military followed

33 Miller, (2009), p. 12.

34 Karen Schneider, *Loving Arms: British Women Writing the Second World War*, [1997], (Lexington, Kentucky: The University Press of Kentucky, 2015), p. 4.

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

36 Allan Bérubé, *My Desire for History: Essays in Gay, Community, and Labor History* (Capel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2011), p. 90. Carol Cohn also argues that the "U.S. armed forces have had policies prohibiting homosexuals from serving only since the beginning of World War II." Carol Cohn, "Gays in the Military: Texts and Subtexts" in Marysia Zalewski and Jane Parpart (eds.), *The 'Man Question' in International Relations*, [1997], (Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, 1998), p. 129).

the assumptions that homosexuality was an illness that was thought to negatively influence the performance of men during battle.[37] Such a categorical discharge of a group of men was only possible because homosexuality was considered to be a 'core identity'. This 'argument' is a relatively recent phenomenon that is aptly summarised by Michel Foucault:

> the psychological, psychiatric, medical category of homosexuality was constituted from the moment it was characterized [...]. Homosexuality appeared as one of the forms of sexuality when it was transposed from the practice of sodomy onto a kind of interior androgyny, a hermaphrodism of the soul. The sodomite had been a temporary aberration; the homosexual was now a species.[38]

Foucault argues that "the practice of sodomy" – by which he means sexual acts between men – was transformed by "psychological, psychiatric [and] medical" discourse into "a kind of interior androgyny" – a fixed, sexual identity. Whereas ancient Greek culture did not perceive sexuality in dualistic terms, but differentiated men based on gender, the late 19th century paved the way for a more rigid classification that turned 'acts' into 'identities' and "the homosexual [became] a species". Anne Fausto-Sterling details that "physicians began to publish case reports of homosexuality – the first in 1869 in a German publication specializing in psychiatric and nervous illness. As the scientific literature grew, specialists emerged to collect and systematize the narratives"[39]. The cartoon "Constructing Sex and Gender: A political, Religious and Scientific History" (Figure 1) printed

37 This 'argument' was still in use in 1993 when Bill Clinton lifted the prohibition on gay men serving in the military. In addition to the assumption that "gays in the military would undermine good order, discipline, and morals" (Cohn, 1998, p. 130) a newly evoked fear over their security among their homophobic peers was brought up to enforce their exclusion. Consequently, gay men are not simply unwelcome because of their alleged incompetence "but because heterosexual men do not want to serve with them" (Cohn, 1998, p. 135). The prevailing issue of HIV/AIDS and the apparent endangerment of the heterosexual soldier through blood transfusion or coming into contact with a wounded gay men, presented another line of 'argument' for "pro-ban sentiments" (Cohn, 1998, p. 131).

38 Michel Foucault, *The Will to Knowledge: The History of Sexuality Volume I*, [1976], (London: Penguin Books, 1998), p. 43.

39 Anne Fausto-Sterling, *Sexing the Body: Gender Politics and the Construction of Sexuality* (New York: Basic Books New York, 2000), pp. 13-14.

in Fausto-Sterling's *Sexing the Body* illustrates that homosexuality has been constructed differently at various periods in time. [40]

Figure 1: "Constructing Sex and Gender: A Political, Religious and Scientific History..."

Building on the argument that the late 19th century brought forth a significant change in the perception of same-sex erotisation, Carol Cohn observes that this shift "from punishing individual sexual acts" to "identifying and excluding a category of person" helped to judge homosexuals "as inherently unfit" [41] to join the

40 Fausto-Sterling, (2000), p. 11.

41 Cohn, (1998), p. 130.

military during the Second World War. Because homosexuality was understood as an identity rather than an act, a whole group of people could now be discharged. The newly arisen 'problem' with homosexuality, however, concentrated not on sexuality *per se*, but on those men who were "*openly* gay in the military"[42] and able to challenge the institution's demonstration of hegemonic masculinity and heterosexuality. Bérubé rightly concludes that these "screening[s], needless to say, identified only obviously effeminate men, many of whom were not gay"[43]. There is no absolute number of cases but relying on Alfred Kinsey's *Sexual Behavior in the Human Male*[44] and converting his findings onto the U.S. military, Bérubé calculates that between 650,000 and 1.6 million serving men were homosexual.[45] In consequence, this large number of serving homosexuals inherently challenges homogeneous wartime narratives habitually representing heteronormative soldier heroes.

Quentin Crisp's recollection of his discharge suggests that similar screening processes focusing on gender to detect homosexuality were practised in Britain[46]:

42 Cohn, (1998), p. 130.

43 Bérubé, (2011), p. 90. For further information see Kathy J. Phillips, *Manipulating Masculinity: War and Gender in Modern British and American Literature* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), especially chapter three "World War II: No Lace on His Drawers".

44 Alfred C. Kinsey, *Sexual Behavior in the Human Male*, [1948], (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1975).

45 Allan Bérubé "World War II" in B. R. Burg (ed.), *Gay Warriors: A Documentary History from the Ancient World to the Present* (New York: New York University Press, 2002), p. 226.

46 Unfortunately there appears to be no equivalent study to Bérubé's on the British military, but according to the BBC the number of homosexual men fighting for Britain ranged around 250,000. The website "WW2 People's War: An Archive of World War Two Memories – written by the public gathered by the BBC" bases its projections on the "1990-91 National Survey of Sexual Attitudes and Lifestyles which found that six per cent of men report having had homosexual experiences". BBC, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/history/ww2peopleswar/stories/36/a2688636.shtml> [last accessed: 06/10/2016]. For an account on gay soldiers in the Canadian army during the Second World War see Paul Jackson, *One of the Boys: Homosexuality in the Military during World War II*, [2004], (Montreal and Kingston: McGill Queen's University Press, 2010).

My appearance was at half-mast. I wore no make-up and my hair was hardly more than hooligan length. […] [B]ut of course my hair was still crimson from having been persistently hennaed for seven years and, though my eyebrows were no longer in Indian file, it was obvious that they had been habitually plucked. These and other manifestations of effeminacy disturbed the board deeply. […] I was told, 'You've dyed your hair. This is a sign of sexual perversion.' (117)

It is Crisp's outward appearance, especially his hair, which initially "disturbed the board deeply", leading them to conclude that Crisp is homosexual. Even this moderate display of femininity performed by a male body challenges the supposedly dualistic gender order.[47] Worse still, Crisp demonstrates that he is not ashamed of his sexuality or gender performance. By renouncing inferiority, Crisp provokes the military board whose conservative views cannot allow for sex and gender variance. He is perceived as a threat that needs to be discredited as a sexual pervert for the military board to handle their considerable irritation over finding their world-views challenged by a person they perceive as absolutely disgraceful. Marginalised as sexually deviant, the danger is redirected into another discourse, that of medicine and psychoanalysis, which can deal with Crisp without challenging the stereotypic gender order of the 'normal world'. After this point it is no longer of interest whether or not Crisp would be physically fit to join the military, the mere fact that his gender performance does not conform to military masculinity is sufficient to reject him and thus deny him a "glorious and convenient death" (119). When fighting and dying for one's nation means performing hegemonic masculinity, Crisp realises from his detached, sarcastic perspective that the nation at war was more prepared to let him live in effeminacy than reward him with a death that bestows masculinity upon him.

Not only men's lives were changed in the military or due to their discharge, women, too, saw transformations when they became active members of the war as nurses, ambulance drivers, members of the Women's Royal Naval Service (WRNS, more commonly known as Wren) or fire watchers.[48] Since the home

47 I use the term dualistic according to Paechter's definition: "A dualistic relation is one in which the subordinated term is negated, rather than the two sides being in equal balance." Carrie Paechter, "Masculine Femininities/Feminine Masculinities: Power, Identities and Gender" in *Gender and Education* Vol. 18, No.3 (2006), p. 256.

48 Miller states: "In the past, soldiers had fought and died on the battlefield, while civilians had watched and waited at home. The Blitz transformed the relationship between home front and front line by forcing civilians to fight like soldiers and soldiers to watch and wait like civilians: now everyone was fighting and everyone knew the danger that threatened loved ones." Miller, (2009), p. 5.

front became the chief narrative of death and survival during the Blitz, the British Government could not afford to maintain the myth of the soldier protecting his homeland whilst the female population was awaiting his return. A subsequent speech by Churchill highlights the changing role of women at the home front and pledges that their fighting during the war will continue to find recognition in the future.

> This war effort could not have been achieved if the women had not marched forward in millions and undertaken all kinds of tasks and work for which any generation but our own – unless you go back to the Stone Age – would have considered them unfitted [...]. Nothing has been grudged, and the bounds of women's activities have been definitely, vastly, and permanently enlarged.[49]

The military term "marched" situates women directly into the war discourse and, similar to the excerpt on the People's War, highlights civilian efforts as equally important as front line battles. The speech is thus immediately characterised as People's War rhetoric by parading the home front alongside the battlefield. Churchill's use of the definite article in "the women" has a simultaneously unifying and degrading effect: it emphasises women as a group and constructs solidarity among those who "marched forward in millions" to work together and to defend their country. It also treats women like objects when using the impersonal article "the". This female unity as an indefinite force to be reckoned with is fashioned in order to overcome class distinctions and to promulgate the Second World War as horrible yet beneficial in its facilitation of social change. Moreover, Churchill claims that "any generation but our own [...] would have considered [women] unfitted" to defend Britain at the home front. Narcissistically praising the courtesy of his generation, women's (presumably) altered social position is tightly linked to the generosity of men like Churchill, who have permitted this change to happen for the duration of the war. That his words are not seriously supportive of emancipation is clear when he claims that "[n]othing has been grudged". Because it is simply not true that "*nothing* has been grudged", as will be illustrated in the analysis of the mannish lesbian Kay in *The Night Watch*, Churchill's emphasis becomes implausible. Building on this note of doubt, his assertion that "the bounds of women's activities have been definitely, vastly, and permanently enlarged" appears similarly weak. Striking is that these "bounds of women's activities" are not equal to men's but have been "enlarged". 'Enlarged

49 Winston Churchill, "The Women of Britain" in Charles Eade (ed.), *Onwards to Victory: War speeches by the Right HON. Winston S. Churchill* (London: Cassell and Company Ltd., 1944), p. 285.

to what?' one immediately wants to ask. Churchill leaves this question unanswered and instead speaks of "a far more complete equalisation of the parts to be played by men and women in society"[50], which is as revealing as women's "enlarged" activities, leaving open the question: why not complete equalisation?

From the end of the 20th century, literary studies began to consider how Churchill's promises might be reflected in wartime writings by disregarding conventional narratives of the male soldier at the front, to instead focus on women's voices and female experiences. Works like Gill Plain's *Women's Fiction of the Second World War* and Karen Schneider's *Loving Arms* contribute to a continually growing body of feminist writing aimed at reclaiming a male dominated past.[51] Schneider seeks to expose the symbiotic connection between war as a masculine endeavour and "gender-encoded ideology"[52] more broadly. Her evaluation deliberately breaks with male-centred analyses of war literature when focusing on fiction written by female authors, featuring female protagonists who tell a story of war from a female perspective. She claims:

> if we are to know an 'other' story of war – if we are to denaturalize the gender-encoding implicit in war and its stories, if we are to consider their ideological power for individuals, cultures, and humanity at large, if we are to understand without illusions the seduction of loving arms, then we must hear the war stories women tell.[53]

Schneider's analysis of works by Stevie Smith, Katharine Burdekin, Virginia Woolf, Elizabeth Bowen, and Doris Lessing renders visible other wartime voices and seeks to reveal the ambivalence with which women of the time perceived the war: caught between patriotism, nationalism, pacifism and their role as female novelists. Due to the enlarged scope of possibilities for women, including transformed feminine fashion and behaviours, gender norms where simultaneously more relaxed yet increasingly patrolled by a Government that feared the emancipation of its subordinated subjects. Schneider concludes that "[b]ecause of the war's double threat to the stability and legitimacy of its own sex-gender system, Britain's patriarchal hegemony made every attempt to (re)assert its political and

50 Churchill, (1944), p. 224.

51 For an account on women's private correspondences and their perception of the war's influence on their lives see Jenny Hartley, *Millions like Us: British Women's Fiction of the Second World War* (London: Virago, 1997) and Phyllis Lassner, *British Women Writers of World War II: Battlegrounds of their Own* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 1998).

52 Schneider, (2015), p. 3.

53 Ibid., pp. 5-6.

narrative authority over the feminine (feminized) Other."[54] Whereas Plain carefully suggests that "[w]ar can be understood in metaphorical terms as a transcendental deconstructor, with the power to overshadow, disrupt and displace all other discourses"[55], Schneider articulates the many ways in which conventions regarding gender not only prevailed, but became reified at a time where stability was hard to come by otherwise. She argues that the common narrative of subordinating the feminine is rehearsed and strengthened in the greater conflict between Britain and Germany when two "patriarchal nations [are] quarreling about which is the better man, which can force the (feminizing) surrender of the other"[56]. Schneider's polemic but insightful remark exposes the ever-present gender-game as a determining factor at times of peace, but more so during war.

Contradicting her earlier assertion that war is a "transcendental deconstructor" that "overshadow[s], disrupt[s] and displace[s] all other discourses", Plain ultimately agrees with Schneider when claiming that "[t]he patriarchal system [...] stands firm despite the chaos of war"[57]. Whilst doubting that the war altered dominant gender roles, Plain concedes that it brought forth an alteration in the distribution of masculine power.[58] This means that instead of replicating the "hegemony of masculinity" as conducted by First World War literature, narratives of the Second World War often concern themselves with the "hegemony of masculine *power*"[59]. In Plain's account, masculinity was no longer just performed by men but also by women. Regardless of this relaxation in the performance of gender norms, Plain evaluates women's writing of the Second World War to reveal how they were "asked to assume temporarily the *semblance* of masculinity – to act like men, but to remain constantly aware of their femininity"[60]. The war did not liberate women from their imposed femininity, nor did it attribute a lasting masculinity to their bodies. It only allowed for brief alterations of heteronormative conventions for the sake of winning the war. Both Plain and Schneider thus point towards the difficult position British women had to adopt during the war and the force with which parameters of 'decent gender' prevailed.

That Crisp who believes himself to be "indistinguishable from a woman", is challenged by a policeman for his effeminate outfit, exemplifies the ambivalence with which wartime society perceived and greeted altered gender norms. His ap-

54 Schneider, (2015), p. 26.

55 Plain, (1996), p.22.

56 Schneider, (2015), p. 26.

57 Plain, (1996), p. 26.

58 Ibid., p. 26.

59 Ibid., p. 27, [emphasis original].

60 Ibid., p, 28, [emphasis original].

pearance demonstrates what Judith Butler decades later will come to famously call 'gender performativity' which "revolves around [...] the way in which the anticipation of a gendered essence produces that which it posits as outside itself"[61]. Gender performativity is not a conscious decision or a translation of a gender essence but "a repetition and a ritual, which achieves its effects through its naturalization in the context of a body"[62]. The body becomes the surface on which the socio-historical as well as cultural regulation of subjects is marked in terms of (non-)conformity. According to Butler, any claim for an inner core or gender identity is a misleading conception deriving from the fantasy of sex-gender coherence, meaning the deceptive ideology that one's gender automatically follows one's sexed body: biological women are seen as feminine whilst biological men are regarded as masculine. Butler continues arguing that the discursive power structures that render a subject intelligible produce gender as a mechanism of control and regulation.

A subject's wish for recognition is followed by the consequential threat of qualifying the opposite as the Other, the "less-than-human"[63]. The power relations that regulate, who becomes a recognisable human are also those that promulgate a normative system to punish those who "misbehave"[64]. The relation between the human and the less-than human puts the discourse of power into a delicate but ultimately asymmetrical balance in which elements of norm and Other are mutually dependant and at the same time transgressive over time and space. "As a result, the 'I' that I am finds itself at once constituted by norms and dependant on them but also endeavours to live in ways that maintain a critical and transformative relation to them."[65] Accordingly, subjects are constituted to perform gender without recognising it as a performance and, at the same time, need to make these performances visible in order to change them. "[T]o intervene in the name of transformation means precisely to disrupt what has become settled knowledge and knowable reality, and to use, as it were, one's unreality to make an otherwise impossible or illegible claim."[66]

In perceiving himself as "indistinguishable from a woman", Crisp makes such a claim and challenges the assumption of sex-gender coherence to disclose the perception of gender identity as illusionary. His cross-dressing is not a per-

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

62 Ibid., p. xv.

63 Judith Butler, Undoing Gender (London and New York: Routledge, 2004), p. 2.

64 Butler, (2004), p. 25.

65 Ibid., p. 3.

66 Ibid., p. 27.

formance on stage but a felt identity, and thus parodies what is thought to be the property of women – namely femininity. Surprisingly, the policeman keeps relatively calm despite Crisp's daring gender trespass. Only upon Crisp's witty response – "Are you blaming me because everybody else is so eccentric?" – does the policeman raise his voice, clearly feeling threatened by Crisp's confrontational frankness. However, the policeman's outrage does not primarily concern Crisp's feminine appearance or his homosexuality, but his audacity to imply that women have become *voluntarily* eccentric – that 'ordinary people', too, may come to question the rules of gender identity. His exaggerated response to Crisp's observation of 'female eccentricity' indicates that the *unashamed* association of men's clothes with female bodies was intolerable for wartime society because women were, according to Plain, only allowed to perform masculine power as long as their femininity remained unquestioned. The policeman's terror at the thought of masculine women, compared to his relative disinterest in Crisp's effeminacy highlights the hypocrisy of the gender system.

Moreover, Crisp's military papers clearly state that he is "suffering from" and not "glorying in" sexual perversion, which reflects the contemporaneous perception of homosexuality and effeminacy as simultaneously perverse and malaise. The medical discourse highlighted in the military papers depicts Crisp as an unfortunate figure burdened by an illness and contrasts him from women who *voluntarily* part with femininity by wearing trousers. The *Naked Civil Servant* therefore shows that a woman positively taking to displays of masculinity and savouring in men's clothing was less acceptable than Crisp's public demonstration of his 'homosexual illness'. How, then, are women fictionalised at a time where they were required to 'do their part' for the cause of winning the war, which involved getting their hands dirty, whilst needing to constantly preserve their femininity? Can a narrative such as Waters' *The Night Watch* challenge the paradigm of female femininity when inscribing a contemporary mindset of gender performativity into the discourse of the 1940s, or does the depiction of Kay as a mannish lesbian reiterate the narrative of masculine warfare? These questions shall be addressed in the last chapter of this study in an analysis of queer bodies, space and time.

THE RETROSPECTIVE WAR

Crisp does not only challenge the gender order of the 1940s when observing the transformations of women's clothing, he also questions the dominant position of heterosexuality in war writings by insinuating that (at least some of) these women were "butch" (152) lesbians surfacing the streets of London since gender reg-

ulations slackened. Although coming slowly into common parlance in the United States during the war, it was not until the 1950s that 'butch' became more widely used to denounce a masculine woman in Britain. The contemporary meaning of 'butch' as "a lesbian of masculine appearance or behaviour"[67] was fashioned in the 1960s and possibly informed Crisp's usage of it when writing and publishing his auto-biography in the late 1960s. *The Naked Civil Servant* is thus a memory informed by different discourses, not only giving insight into a life of a self-affirmed homosexual rejected by the military, but also into his retrospective construction of this period. War novels reflecting first-hand experiences of male soldiers are thus once more disengaged from their authenticity claim when searching for a war story from the vantage point of 1968.

Despite a steadily growing canon, and Plain's insight that "the war lived on in the mind of the nation even as many looked forward to the prospect of a new Britain"[68], both she and Schneider (among others) continue to retrieve and investigate narratives of the time instead of incorporating contemporary perspectives into their studies in order to enable a more diverse reflection. Zeno Ackermann criticises that scholars too often look for the war's commemoration in wartime itself instead of exploring more contemporary material.[69] He explains that this phenomenon is specifically British and stands in opposition to German, French or American scholarship, where commemoration of the Second World War generates greater critical attention.[70] Ackermann further criticises that when studies do concentrate on the memory of the war by drawing on retrospective and retroactive accounts, literary negotiations are often mentioned for the sake of completeness rather than for their rich and diverse contents and ability to critically question the cultural memory of the Second World War. One such study is Juliette Pattinson and Lucy Noakes' *British Cultural Memory and the Second World War*. Their take on "learned historical memory" [71] intriguingly traces commemo-

67 "Butch, n.1." *OED Online*. Oxford University Press, September 2016. Web. 20 September 2016. Paul Barker deploys another theory involving the American Airforce: American soldiers brought words such as 'butch' as well as 'crouse', 'blow-job' and 'naff' to wartime London. For more information see Paul Barker, *Polari – The Lost Language of Gay Men*, [2002], (London and New York: Routledge, 2003), p. 35.

68 Plain, (2013), p. 7.

69 Ackermann, (2015), p. 21. He polemically calls this being trapped in the gravity centre of the war and its culture. Original: „Gefangensein im Schwerkraftzentrum des Kriegs oder der Kriegskultur." p. 29.

70 Ibid., p. 21.

71 Juliette Pattinson and Lucy Noakes, *British Cultural Memory and the Second World War* (London: Bloomsbury, 2014), p. 2 and p. 4.

ration as an individual as well as public phenomenon that is always selective, interpretative and a narrative creation that involves forgetting as much as recalling. Historical, political, cultural and economic discourses are as relevant for the creation of collective memory as personal involvement. The constant cultural and medial evocation of the Second World War after 1945 leads Pattinson and Noakes to argue that later generations have adopted "the memories as their own"[72] in slogans such as 'Keep Calm and Carry On' and Sara Ahmed claims that "[t]he very failure of individual memory is compensated for by a collective memory"[73]. Both statements emphasise that collective memory emerges from the past to serve a communal purpose in the present. By doing so, the 'memory' of the Second World War is a contemporary product and not a 'truthful' representation of events, because it is re-negotiated and re-interpreted in each appropriation. It is also characterised by erasures and amnesias of the unsavoury past such as the Japanese success in Burma, or the disastrous battle of Dunkirk, which obscure the taintless victory of the British nation. Novels like Walter Baxter's *Look Down in Mercy* (1951) challenge this constructed memory by portraying an English officer in Burma fighting for his life against the Japanese, and Mary Renault's *The Charioteer* (1953) remembers the horrors of Dunkirk in the depiction of a soldier named Laurie Odell, who was severely injured during an attack leaving him burdened with a permanently stiff knee. Whilst bringing into conversation various forms of medial commemoration that shape the construction of the war's legacy on British culture, Pattinson and Noakes pay little attention to such fictional negotiations of pain and despair that begin to re-shape a collective memory of the war in Britain.

More inclusive works with extensive literary material are Victoria Steward's *The Second World War in Contemporary British Fiction* and Eva M. Pérez Rodríguez's *How the Second World War Is Depicted by British Novelists since 1990*.[74] The incorporation of largely disregarded fictions about the Second World War written by novelists who did not personally experience the war widens its conventional reception beyond mainstream premises. Stewart's focus lies on the issue of secrecy, and how commemoration and retrospective wartime novels continue to negotiate and reveal war secrets. She argues that secrecy was not only used during combat as a means to conceal information from the enemy,

72 Pattinson and Noakes, (2014), p. 2.

73 Sara Ahmed, *Strange Encounters: Embodied Others in Post-Coloniality* (London and New York: Routledge, 2000), p. 77.

74 Stewart, (2011); Eva M. Pérez Rodríguez, How the Second World War Is Depicted by British Novelists since 1990: The Passage of Time Changes Our Portrayal of Traumatic Events (New York: Edwin Mellen Press, 2012).

it also, perhaps with more far-reaching effect, influenced the immediate post-war period and how the war was henceforth remembered. The possibility that many stories have not yet been told, whether due to their military delicacy or because they did not comply with contemporaneous dominant discourse, calls into question our trust in the knowledge we believe to have of the past.

Stewart consequently incorporates Sarah Waters' *The Night Watch* (2006) into her analysis in order to negotiate the discrepancy between "what was known then and what is known now"[75], because Waters looks into the past through a different lens, one which is often disinterested in recollecting collective memory in favour of focusing on issues disregarded by novels of the time. Like Quentin Crisp's homosexual auto-biography, Waters' lesbian war story "disrupts this homogeneity by incorporating less familiar aspects of the war into [the narrative], and in the process, ask[s] why these have come to be concealed or neglected"[76]. The question why certain texts have become collective memories whilst others have been disregarded is the central issue of Stewart's work and inserts into my own study.

Pérez Rodríguez's work on *How the Second World War Is Depicted by British Novelists since 1990* takes a perspective similar to Stewart's when tracing the impact of the war on later generations of various nationalities. Accordingly, retrospective war novels do not simply glimpse into the past but also question "the economic, political and social systems that shape their world" in the twenty-first century. Like Steward, Pérez Rodríguez values the implication of homosexuality as a way of calling to attention aspects of war writings conventionally forgotten in dominant discourse, and she seeks to disclose what British identity meant in the 1940s and how it is represented through a contemporary mindset. In doing so, she also concentrates on *The Night Watch* and its challenging of "a conventional chronology"[77], expressed in Waters' backward narrative beginning in 1947 and working its way back to 1941, which simultaneously reveals the disorder of the war years, and modern British society's confusion over its place in the world. The post-war depiction of the characters Helen and Viv working as matchmakers for example, is read by Pérez Rodríguez as "a reflection on the contemporary degree of social upheaval"[78] in Britain because the characters' non-conforming relationships place them in opposition to the heteronormative couples they want to bring together. This paradox shows that whilst advocating gender and sexual diversity in contemporary Britain, heteronormative standards continue to domi-

75 Stewart, (2011), p. 2.

76 Ibid., p. 2.

77 Pérez Rodríguez, (2012), p. 3.

78 Ibid., p. 31.

nate social life. Retrospective war novels can therefore not only call into question Britain's collective memory of the Second World War as traced by Stewart but may also inscribe a contemporary discourse of homosexuality into the past in order to address current social and political issues. The value and challenge of retrospective war writings is therefore twofold: simultaneously correcting the image of the soldier poet by implementing untold aspects of the war, whilst reflecting on and infiltrating a modern consciousness into the past that questions the present. Consequently, in analysing retrospective narratives it needs to be carefully considered at what point a (homosexual) past is being created to serve a present (political) purpose.

Adam Fitzroy's *Make Do and Mend* (2012) illustrates this challenge more extensively than *The Night Watch*, as some scenes are very explicit in their display of sexual intercourse, which betrays its modern basis in sexual liberation. The protagonist Harry Lyon serves as a submarine officer until an accident causes severe injuries to his lungs and the death of two of his men. Unfit for active service, Harry recovers at his childhood home called Hendra where he makes the acquaintance of Jim Brynawel – a farm worker and pacifist who performs alternative service. Their bond soon becomes more intimate but is temporarily cut off when Harry has to go to Liverpool to work for military intelligence. In Liverpool Harry encounters a rampant homosexual subculture, which hardly conceals its promiscuity and he describes the room he rents to have "served rather different functions before the war" (174). Such euphemistic language is quickly abandoned when Harry concedes that he is living in former "knocking-shop" facilities (174). While the first impression suggests a decidedly modern consciousness where sexuality is hardly (if at all) censored, a comparison to Walter Baxter's *Look Down in Mercy* reveals that the term "knocking-shop" (*LD* 23) was already present and in use in 1951 when the novel was published. It follows that rather than infiltrating a liberal mindset into the 1940s, Fitzroy rehearses the language of the time. However, when Harry has oral sex with an acquaintance named Clive, *Make Do and Mend* is so explicit as to leave no doubt over its contemporary context: "Now he participated fully, licking and sucking and leaving his throat open do be plundered, finally accepting the spasming ejaculation as if through a feeding tube directly into his stomach, bypassing his brain and his emotions altogether." (179) This quote is representative of many more of its kind and emphasise *Make Do and Mend* as a novel from the 21st century. Fitzroy's varying style of dramatising intercourse shows that modern novels use the language of the time and garnish it with current parlance to create a hybrid version of the past.

This section has focused on the critical terrain regarding Second World War fiction, from the immediate post-war claims of not having produced any literary work, to its retroactive and retrospective negotiation, shows that critics have repeatedly engaged themselves with the past. The following will trace similar efforts regarding gay and lesbian scholarship in order to disclose the complicated history of homosexual liberation as well as the amnesia regarding the past that succeeded the Stonewall riots in 1969.

STONEWALL AND GAY LIBERATION

June 28, 1969 has become the benchmark for the gay liberation movement, which was provoked when police raided the Stonewall Inn, a nightclub in New York City located on Christopher Street (hence the German adaptation of Christopher Street Day) known for its gay and lesbian scene.[79] During these regular raids, the police never encountered or even anticipated resistance from customers whom they regarded as having low morals, but little violent potential due to their fear of legal forces or of being publicly 'outed.' Similar to Crisp at the beginning of that century, men dressed as women were most severely scrutinised that night and forced to undress to identify their 'true' sex. Contrary to the police's expectations, however, visitors of the Stonewall Inn did not oblige to the order, but began to perform exaggeratedly in the streets, celebrating instead of hiding their effeminacy. Having nothing to lose, these men as well as other customers of the Stonewall Inn and bystanders attracted by the noise began to fight the police with beer cans and stones turning the raid into a riot. The following nights saw similar scenes, which led to escalating demonstrations and calls for liberation and legal rights among lesbians, gays, bisexuals, trans*[80] people and intersexuals, later to be named LGBTQI[81] community. Further uproars were happening in Europe, especially in Britain, where the Gay Liberation Front (GLF) was formed to organise resistances and to publicly demonstrate against homophobia

79 Elizabeth A. Armstrong and Suzanna M. Crage, "Movements and Memory: The Making of the Stonewall Myth" in *American Sociological Review* Vol. 71, No. 5 (2006), pp. 724-751.

80 I use the umbrella term "trans" with an asterisk rather than differentiating between transgender and transsexual people in order to include a variety of gender identities and those who are pre or post surgery or feel no need for medical assimilation.

81 Current activism uses the lable LGBTQI+ in oder to signify the openness of this classification.

throughout the 1970s.[82] In the commemoration of the Stonewall riots, June 28, 1969 thus marks the beginning of a new mindset where homosexuality was no longer considered a perversion or curse and being gay, lesbian, bisexual, trans* or other turned into a cause for pride. At this point, the formerly dismissive and disrespectful term 'gay' became common usage among the LGBTQI community "as a badge of positive self-identification"[83]. It forged the turning of an "internalized […] negative image[...] of homosexuality and homosexuals"[84] into an affirmative gay consciousness.

The second half of the 20th century became vital for gay and lesbian scholarship grounding their research in experiences following the Stonewall riots. In this new legal environment culminating and manifesting into contemporary queer studies, various disciplines covering philosophy, sociology, psychoanalysis, anthropology, and literary studies converged in the interest of making visible structural reiterations of homophobia within heteronormative societies. Existing feminist studies were revived and complemented with new aspects on identity, sexual fluidity and gender embodiments. This new way of thinking profited from and contributed to poststructuralist theories that called into question the former school of structuralism sought to order the world on a comprehensive scale to grasp its depth. Social critics such as Michel Foucault (among others) challenged the structuralist approach for its focus on and creation of hierarchical binaries like signifier/signified, but also man/woman, public/private etc. In determining these binary positions, structuralists tried to perceive the essence of "'meaning', 'truth', 'subjectivity', 'freedom', 'power', and so on"[85], whereas poststructuralists pressed for a rethinking of these concepts as inherently constructed within a set of power relations. Foucault argued that these power relations and systems of knowledge form the discourse in which 'truth' is engendered and becomes naturalised.[86] Similar to Butler's theory on gender performativity, Foucault determines that there is no 'core truth' but only production and re-production of truth-

82 Chris Waters, "The Homosexual as Social Being in Britain, 1945-1968" in Brian Lewis (ed.), *British Queer History: New Approaches and Perspectives* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2013).

83 Les Brookes, *Gay Male Fiction Since Stonewall: Ideology, Conflict, and Aesthetics* (New York and London: Routledge, 2009), p. 8.

84 Claude J. Summers, *Gay Fictions: Wilde to Stonewall: Studies in a Male Homosexual Literary Tradition* (New York: Continuum, 1990), p. 16.

85 Nikki Sullivan, A Critical Introduction to Queer Theory (New York: New York University Press, 2003), p. 39.

86 Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, [1975], (London: Vintage Books, 1995).

effects – of knowledge that appears to be genuine whilst being a cultural fabrication. This process becomes disguised as universal knowledge through socio-historical discourses that turn the idea of, for example, heterosexuality, into something perceived as 'normal' and 'natural', whereas homosexuality becomes the Other.[87] This process does not make heterosexuality 'natural' and 'normal' *per se* since it "is a (historically and culturally specific) truth-effect of systems of power/knowledge" that engender its currently dominant social position.[88] In order to deconstruct this system of truth-effects, poststructuralism concentrates on the analysis of difference, non-compliance and struggle by focusing on dynamic processes between subjects and/or groups. While poststructuralist approaches to the subject differ among themselves, they share "a rejection of the belief that the subject is autonomous, unified, self-knowing, and static"[89].

Within this atmosphere of rethinking and change, gay liberation and gay scholarship was formed, but poststructuralist notions of an unstable and more importantly not autonomous self significantly hampered efforts of liberation. Moreover, Foucault's assertion that power does not reside in an elite group able to wield it against others, but builds on structures that afflict and enable everybody, took away a great deal of potential agency for gay liberationists. Nikki Sullivan nicely summarises the futile situation: "since resistance is not, and cannot be, external to systems of power/knowledge, then an oppositional politics that attempts to replace supposedly false ideologies with non-normative truths is inherently contradictory"[90]. If there is no single power-possessing group to resist and if any attempt of changing dominant order reifies new power hierarchies, how could the LGBTQI community possibly become liberated without themselves becoming drawn into the swirl of deceptive power formations? Within this climate of striving for change and theorising increasingly more complex ways to understand social structure, post-Stonewall activism faced many obstacles.

Unlike wartime researchers who took to re-evaluating the image of the silent war by analysing unfamiliar works of female novelists, LGBTQI theorists seldom looked into the unexplored literary past to make more powerful claims for their futures. This reluctance is partially caused by to inner conflicts following the Stonewall riots over the place of homosexuality within heteronormative society, which made genealogical efforts secondary. Les Brookes explains:

87 Foucault, *The Will to Knowledge* (1998), p. 43.

88 Sullivan, (2003), p. 39.

89 Ibid., p. 41.

90 Ibid., p. 42.

The subculture of the early 1970s was in fact a battlefield: on one side were those who had no great quarrel with the social order, while on the other were those who wished to see it razed to the ground. The former were keen to show their allegiance to heterosexist norms, seeing such loyalty as evidence of their right to social inclusion […]. The latter group, on the other hand, were so determined to break free of these norms that relationships of more than a night's duration were condemned as showing abject deference to the heterosexist ideal of lifelong partnership.[91]

Brookes' study *Gay Male Fiction Since Stonewall* evaluates the role of literature in the construction of a gay consciousness and people's negotiation of identity. In order to do so, he taps into the historically important and contradictory standpoints of radicalism and assimilation of the 1970s and asks: "In what way does gay male fiction since Stonewall engage with the longstanding conflict in gay culture and politics between […] the need for integration into the wider social scene on the one hand and the need to assert an independent identity on the other?"[92] This pressing question includes an often ambivalent standpoint and mixture of both sides, which defies clear-cut positions or answers, thus infesting its literature with tensions and controversies. Brookes acknowledges that these tensions are not an exclusively post-Stonewall phenomenon but have a long history "stretching back to that period in the late nineteenth century when homosexuality first became conceptualized"[93]. *The Naked Civil Servant* not only illustrates Brookes' claim that homosexuals formed communities long before the Stonewall riots, but also that these were ridden with ambivalences over their place in society similar to later generations. While presenting himself as openly homosexual through his effeminacy, which suggests a radical attitude towards heteronormative society, Quentin Crisp nevertheless "regarded all heterosexuals, however low, as superior to any homosexual, however noble" (69). His criticism is not only self-reflexive but primarily directed against the homosexual subculture that disguised their sexualities and engaged in "teasing flirtations" with women which amount to "masquerade[s]" when the "admiration or respect or love aroused were really for some other man of the same name" (87). After having been excluded from homosexual bars several times for his open display of effeminacy and his critique on assimilated gays, Crisp concludes that "[h]omosexuals were ashamed. They resented not being in the mainstream of

91 Brookes, (2009), p. 2.

92 Ibid., p. 4.

93 Ibid., p. 12. For further information see Foucault, *The Will to Knowledge* (1998), p. 43 and the Cartoon "Constructing Sex and Gender: A Political, Religious and Scientific History..." Figure 1.

life" (87). Crisp's experiences indicate that the struggles between radicals and assimilationists have a long-standing history and the lingering dispute among homosexuals over their place within society explains why the newly formed gay community after 1969 was not particularly interested in refurbishing a past (literary or otherwise) when their future seemed so uncertain.

Despite the diverse and fundamental struggles accompanying the period, there were efforts to fabricate a homosexual tradition. In 1971, two years after the Stonewall riots, Rictor Norton filed a motion to teach a course entitled "The Homosexual Literary Tradition" at Florida State University.[94] After passing the first round of approval, the faculty eventually rejected the seminar for being too outspoken – their preferred title was "Friendship in Literature"[95]. In his paper "The Homosexual literary Tradition: Course Outline and Objectives" Norton retrospectively reflects on the course, which he was only allowed to give on a non-credit basis. In consideration of his students who were confronted with such a subject matter for the first time, Norton (consciously or not) confirms a positive gay subject position in order to ease the mind of his students (and his own?) when stating:

> During the first few days of the course, treat the subject of homosexual love in a fairly light-hearted manner. Remember that guilt and anxiety rarely appear in homosexual literature until the late nineteenth century, and don't become the major theme of *Angst* until after 1914.[96]

My aim is neither to refute nor to validate his claim, but to call to attention how students came to encounter the topic in the immediate post-Stonewall period. Feeling the newness of public attention, gay scholars such as Norton began to transfer a positive and possibly assimilated image of homosexuality into the past in order to calm down protests. In her critical study *Feeling Backward: Loss and the Politics of Queer History*, Heather Love similarly argues that "[e]arly work in gay and lesbian studies" "responded to the history of violence and stigmatization by affirming the legitimacy of gay and lesbian existence"[97]. In the course of this self-validation, academia produced accounts of historical and homosexual figures such as Alexander the Great or Sappho from Lesbos – what Gregory

94 Rictor Norton, "The Homosexual Literary Tradition: Course Outline and Objectives" in *College English* Vol. 35, No. 6 (1974), p. 674.

95 Ibid., p. 674.

96 Ibid., p. 677.

97 Heather Love, *Feeling Backward: Loss and the Politics of Queer History* (Cambridge and Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2007), pp. 1-2.

Woods calls "lists of praiseworthy inverts"[98] –, but these efforts remained strictly set within the bounds of discovering historical gay-affirmation rather than struggles or denials.

Michael Bronski's *Pulp Frictions* uncovers a broader picture to explain why pre-Stonewall novels have either become forgotten or restricted to a small number of familiar names such as Radclyffe Hall, E. M. Forster, Gore Vidal or Christopher Isherwood.[99] The example of Norton's efforts into teaching a homosexual literary tradition demonstrates that a more positive gay consciousness became established, and this positive outlook had to be manifested, despite conflicts within the community. Bronski calls this the "'Is it good for the gays?' argument", which questions whether gays and lesbians are represented in literature as "heroic, likable, or even neutral? Or are they presented in ways that draw upon injurious and untrue stereotypes that reinforce pre-existing prejudices?"[100] With this activist form of interrogation, pre-Stonewall novels were read within a post-Stonewall mindset which meant marginalising or even falsifying their impact during a time characterised by obscenity laws and censorship. Censorship is, according to Butler, "that which is directed against persons or against the content of their speech"[101]. She continues stating that "censorship appears to follow the utterance of offensive speech: speech has already become offensive, and then some recourse to a regulatory agency is made."[102] This "regulatory agency" that decides over which texts became censored in Britain, was the board acting according to the Obscene Publications Act of 1857. It "amalgamated the previous common law offence of obscene libel to make to publication and sale of obscene writing a legal offence and extended the power of the police to target publishers"[103]. Since the definition of what constitutes 'obscene writing' was extremely

98 Gregory Woods, *A History of Gay Literature: The Male Tradition* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1998), p. 7. Woods gives further examples of historical figures "with Uranian temperament" such as "Michel Angelo [sic], Shakespeare, Marlowe, Alexander the Great, Julius Caesar, or among women, Christine of Sweden, Sappho the poetess", p. 4.

99 Michael Bronski, *Pulp Friction: Uncovering the Golden Age of Gay Male Pulps*, [2003], (New York: St. Martin's Griffin, 2013).

100 Bronski, (2013), p. 10.

101 Judith Butler, *Excitable Speech: A Politics of the Performative* (London and New York: Routledge, 1997), p. 128.

102 Ibid., 128.

103 Rachel Potter, "Introduction" in David Bradshaw and Rachel Potter (eds.), *Prudes on the Prowl: Fiction and Obscenity in England, 1850 to the present* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), p. 2.

broad, many authors and publishers faced prosecution, because their texts allegedly "deprave[ed] and corrupt[ed] the minds and morals of those who are open to such immoral influences"[104]. Benjamin Hicklin composed this ambiguous definition, commonly known as the 'Hicklin ruling', which was not only very far-reaching, but also highly subjective in qualifying at what point "the minds and morals" of some people become offended. Michael Warner rightly claims that 'obscene' is "a word designed to shame dissenters into silence"[105]. He concludes that "it enlists the government in the politics of shame, making sure that nothing challenging to the tastes of the majority will be allowed to circulate"[106]. Censorship laws thus function to preserve an alleged universality of 'norms' and 'moral standards' that echo the "tastes of the majority". These laws disguise that the supposedly universal standards are deeply embedded in a patriarchal and nationalistic system that arbitrarily shames a spectrum of acts raging from violence to sodomy.

Censorship laws impaired novelists in the freedom of speech, which needs to be taken into account when judging the value of pre-Stonewall novels. For instance, the evaluation of Radclyffe Hall's *The Well of Loneliness* (1928)[107] as a prominent example of gloominess and "sufficiently self-hating to be almost palatable to certain types of anti-homosexual readers" [108] exposes how a contemporary discourse can be obtruded onto a text from 1928. By the time Hall published *The Well of Loneliness*, the Obscene Publications Act of 1857 was still in operation and the novel subsequently banned for indecency in 1928. Such rulings did not decrease after the Second World War, but became even more common. Alan Travis observes that compared to 39 prosecutions for indecency in 1935, the number rose to 132 almost two decades later in 1954, and "111 people were founded guilty of publishing obscene libels compared with only 39 in 1939"[109]. The rapidly rising number of censored texts resulted from an increasing "[f]ear of Americanization"[110] after the Second World War, prompted by a "dread of

104 Definition of 'obscenity' by Benjamin Hicklin in 1868, known as the 'Hicklin ruling'. Potter, (2013), p. 2.

105 Michael Warner, *The Trouble with Normal: Sex, Politics, and the Ethics of Queer Life* (Cambridge and Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1999), p. 12.

106 Ibid., 13.

107 Radclyffe Hall, *The Well of Loneliness*, [1928], (New York: Anchor Books, 1990).

108 Woods, (1998), p. 205.

109 Alan Travis, *Bound and Gagged: A Secret History of Obscenity in Britain* (London: Profile Books, 2000), p. 94.

110 David Bradshaw, "American Beastliness, the Great Purge and its Aftermath (1946-1959)" in David Bradshaw and Rachel Potter (eds.), *Prudes on the Prowl: Fiction*

transatlantic contamination as the popularity of American films, music, comics, and pulp fiction gathered pace"[111]. The infiltration of British culture with "American fictional imports"[112] that were considered 'immoral' according to the vague definition of the 'Hickling ruling' also increased efforts to cleanse national texts from 'depravations'.

Interestingly, whereas Hall's novel caused upheaval at the beginning of the 20th century for being too outspoken and controversial, modern perceptions focus on its largely depressing and restrained tone. This discursive transformation in answering to an unchanged text illustrates that modes of assessment are constantly in flux and not grounded in stability. Whilst "there was an almost systematic lack of frankness in approach to sexual matters"[113] until the passing of a new Obscene Publications Act in 1959, modern narratives are saturated with what used to be censored. Michel Warner observes that "[p]leasures once imaginable only with disgust, if at all, become the material out of which individuals and groups elaborate themselves"[114]. His argument that former "disgust" will turn into pleasure, explains the repeated misreadings of pre-Stonewall literature: whereas novels such as *The Well of Loneliness* were allusive in the discussion of silenced desires, modern culture demands self-affirming clarity. The discrepancy between these expectations illustrates why the arguably depressing depiction of the protagonist Stephan and her struggle to live as a masculine woman cannot speak to a modern version of "Is it good for the gays?": Stephan, and Hall in creating her, faced very different obstacles than contemporary gay communities as well as novelists. When judging *The Well of Loneliness* according to a post-Stonewall mindset, it is removed from its legal and cultural context. What follows from such a reading is the assumption that pre-Stonewall novels depict sad, self-hating characters, who do not fit the new gay spirit of the liberated refusing nostalgic gazes into this depressing past.

Heather Love persuasively argues that despite severe criticism, *The Well of Loneliness* is one of the most read and analysed texts representing female homosexuality. This enduring popularity derives from a sense of fascination with and inspiration from the text (whether positive or negative) that "compels readers in

and Obscenity in England, 1850 to the present (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), p. 138.

111 Ibid., 139.

112 Ibid., 139.

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

114 Warner, (1999), p. 12.

a way that brighter stories of liberation do not"[115]. Despite this merit, gay and lesbian scholarship remained largely critical of Hall's and other 'damaging' novels. Even texts that did not portray homosexuals as explicitly burdened characters came under critique, for they renounced the place of outlawed desire in society or homosexual existence altogether when homosexual characters "appeared repeatedly in novels of the period as the *almost* unthinkable other"[116]. In vague and alluding language these narratives make "homosexuality hover indeterminately between that which may be recognized – the novel asks the reader to recognize it – and that which the 'good' narrator hardly knows"[117]. Such hesitant representations fit the new gay consciousness just as bad as explicitly negative accounts.

However, since obscenity laws were still in operation during the Cold War period, novelists often *had* to encode homosexual contents in allusive language. Drewey Wayne Gunn and Jaime Harker elaborate on this:

> Those [authors] who chose to be more open [...] often wrote about [homosexuality] in appropriately depressing ways in order to escape the charges of obscenity and immorality. Though the number of novels with happy endings published between 1906 (*Imre*) and 1959 (*Sam*) is greater than is usually thought, it became a literary truism that homosexual men and women were filled with self-hatred and led miserable, unhappy lives that ended in bodily violence or death, often by suicide, unless they converted to heterosexuality.[118]

In agreement with this evaluation, Michael Bronski emphasises: "It is really a myth that all these pre-Stonewall novels end in total misery. We seem to want to see the 1940's and 1950's as a time of unmitigated queer-hating, without social, political or emotional nuance."[119] Bronski gives ample evidence for his thesis that a vital and often positive subculture continued to flourish in response to the Second World War, despite the growth of institutionalised violence against homosexuals in its aftermath. Bérubé similarly argues that the roots of a greater homosexual (literary) consciousness can be found during the Second World War

115 Love, (2007), p. 3.

116 Sinfield, (1989), p. 68.

117 Sinfield, (1989), p. 68.

118 Drewey Wayne Gunn and Jaime Harker, "Introduction" in Drewey Wayne Gunn and Jaime Harker (ed.), *1960s Gay Pulp Fiction* (Amherst and Boston, Massachusetts: University of Massachusetts Press, 2013), pp. 3-4.

119 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.

where homosexual men formed a network of friendship groups through which they "discovered and contributed to the rich gay nightlife – parties, bars, and nightclubs – that flourished in the war-boom cities"[120]. With the exception of Baxter's *Look Down in Mercy*, all narratives discussed here give insight into this subculture, whether dauntingly critical as Renault's *The Charioteer*, invitingly supportive as Waters' *The Night Watch*, or flamboyantly sexual as Fitzroy's *Make Do and Mend*. These varieties call into question Claude J. Summers' assertion that "the subculture centered around bars is often depicted very negatively in gay fiction"[121]. Furthermore, the novels place Bérubé's findings concentrating on the U.S. military on a greater scale by suggesting that for Britain, too, "[t]he experiences of homosexuals serving in World War II led to their greater awareness of their numbers, and writers began to treat homosexual themes more freely in the 1940s and 1950s"[122]. Not without reason does Bérubé conclude:

> A later generation of gays would point to the famous 1969 bar fight at Greenwich Village's Stonewall Inn as the beginning of gay liberation. But the current spirit of resistance and solidarity predates the 1960s. It was born under fire during World War II and the Cold War.[123]

Bérubé criticises that due to the scale of the war and its long-term effects on society, economy and its unfathomed destruction, the memory of the early roots of a gay liberation was lost. I will argue that this memory is not lost but disregarded and subsumed under mainstream stories of both popular war literature and contemporary gay literature which concentrate on more recent themes such as the Stonewall riots, the outbreak of AIDS, and the development of a gay consciousness and its abjection.[124] Even in literature designed to address people's experiences beyond heteronormative standards, certain issues have become more thoroughly discussed than others, and homosexuality during the Second World War has not been researched as thoroughly as the gay liberation movement or its setback during the AIDS epidemic. This is significantly noticeable in the relative lack of research material to draw from, especially regarding the British canon.

120 Bérubé, (2002), p. 230.

121 Summers, (1990), p. 23.

122 Gunn and Harker, (2013), p. 3.

123 Bérubé, (2011), p. 112.

124 For further information see: Calvin Thomas, *Masculinity, Psychoanalysis, Straight Queer Theory: Essays on Abjection in Literature, Mass Culture, and Film* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008). Or Monica Pearl, *AIDS Literature and Gay Identity: the Literature of Loss* (New York and London: Routledge, 2013).

Whereas Renault's *The Charioteer* and Waters' *The Night Watch* have received a fair amount of critical attention and become increasingly read in conjunction, Adam Fitzroy's *Make Do and Mend* is arguably absent from academic scholarship. It is particularly striking that Walter Baxter's *Look Down in Mercy* has not been given more far reaching acclaim considering that he was friends with E. M. Foster, who recommended his work to Christopher Isherwood. Commenting on Baxter's second novel *The Image and the Search* (1953)[125], Foster writes in a letter to Isherwood:

> Walter Baxter's new novel has much progressed – it sounds completely different from its predecessor and I am longing to read it. We meet or correspond regularly. He has just read Maurice and is terribly upset by its sadness but was drinking all the time he read. I hope to see him this week again. I hate him being sad. I shall read the 'new' chapter to him and see how he feels then.[126]

The familiarity with which Foster speaks of Baxter indicates their close friendship, which makes the neglect of Baxter's work all the more curious. Foster must have trusted Baxter to keep the knowledge of *Maurice* (written between 1913 and 1914 but posthumously published in 1971) secret. Whereas Foster was afraid of releasing a novel that dealt with the issue of homosexuality head on, Baxter's *Look Down in Mercy* was composed *and published* at a time when Foster did not dare to do the same. Their friendship compared to their different degree of publicity illustrates how little attention non-heteronormative war writings have gained and how arbitrary the selection of works for public celebration seems to be. This last point gains more traction with view to the enthusiastic review of *Look Down in Mercy* in *Time* magazine from 1952: "In an uncommonly good first novel, Author [sic] Walter Baxter tells the story of an ordinary British captain and how his codes and courage crack wide open under the strain of retreat, ambush and torture in Burma in World War II."[127] In an obituary of Fergus Provan, Baxter's long-term partner, the *Independent* wrote in 1997 that Baxter's "novel *Look Down in Mercy* (1951) was hailed, like Gore Vidal's *The City and the Pillar* (1948)[128], as a pioneering study of gay relationships in a hostile and

125 Walter Baxter, *The Image and the Search* (London: Hutchinson, 1953).

126 Richard E. Zeikowitz, *Letters Between Forster and Isherwood on Homosexuality and Literature* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), p. 153.

127 *Time*, "Books: Man Under Pressure" <http://content.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,816164,00.html> [last accessed: 24/08/2016].

128 Gore Vidal, *The City and the Pillar*, [1948], (New York: Vintage Books, 2003).

indifferent world"[129]. Lastly, an essay by Henri Peyre published in an article on "The Most Neglected Books of the Past Twenty-Five Years Selected by Writers, Scholars and Critics" values *Look Down in Mercy* as a "very remarkable English novel[…], even [a] truly great novel[…]" that has "not been acknowledged as such by the majority of American [and I want to add British] critics"[130]. When scholars and book critics from different fields and periods agree on the literary merit of Baxter's work, why then did it not receive more far-reaching acclaim?[131] Bronski explains that "gay liberation was a youth movement whose sense of history was defined to a large degree by a rejection of the past. [...] The idea that some books were not 'good for the gays' is closely tied to why they are not better known today and why they were lost to gay history."[132] However, what happened after the "youth movement" matured and developed into queer theory?

QUEERING THE PAST

While the immediate post-Stonewall period was preoccupied with legitimating LGBTQI existence and experience, the late 20th and early 21st century saw a turn toward a queer consciousness that "attempt[ed] to counter stigma by incorporating it"[133]. In an influential essay on "the usefulness of 'queer'", Shane Phelan argues that "'queer' is to the 1990s as 'gay' was to the 1970s, a mark of pride, a throwing off of closets and politeness, and a bid for an autonomous culture"[134]. Unlike the positive re-claiming of the term 'gay' by activists in the 1970s, "queer was adopted in the late 1980s [...] because it evoked a long history of insult and abuse – you could hear the hurt in it"[135]. In *Feeling Backward*, Heather

129 *Independent*, "Obituary: Fergus Provan", <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/people/obituary-fergus-provan-1247639.html> [last accessed: 24/08/2016].

130 Henri Peyre, "The Most Neglected Books of the Past Twenty-Five Years Selected by Writers, Scholars and Critics" in *The American Scholar* Vol. 25, No. 4 (1956), p. 492.

131 This question can, of course, be broadened to include a critique on the largely 'white' tradition of gay and lesbian writers gaining scholarly acclaim. For an intriguing debate on this issue see Brookes, (2009), pp. 193-194.

132 Bronski, (2013), p. 12, p. 11.

133 Love, (2007), p. 2.

134 Shane Phelan, "The Shape of Queer: Assimilation and Articulation" in *Women & Politics* Vol. 18, No. 2 (1997), p. 57.

135 Love, (2007), p. 2.

Love argues that "[t]he emphasis on injury in queer studies has made critics in this field more willing to investigate the darker aspects of queer representation and experience and to attend to the social, psychic, and corporeal effects of homophobia."[136] However, it took until 1990 before a single case study devoted itself to Anglo-American fiction with homosexual contents "written in the advent and aftermath of the [Oscar] Wilde scandal of 1895 and in the period following World War II, but before New York's Stonewall riots of 1969"[137]. Summers' *Gay Fictions: Wilde to Stonewall* is acutely aware that it is indebted to the Stonewall riots for making its investigations possible, but nevertheless maintains that the liberal spirit of the late 1960s finds its roots almost a century earlier. Summers' study sets out to "explore [...] the necessary preconditions to gay liberation", which rest on the Criminal Law Amendment Act adopted in Britain in 1885 criminalising all same-sex behaviour.[138] While designed to harass and prosecute homosexuals, the law generated a first sense of self-affirmation among people, who shared the fate of victimisation based on their deviating sexuality. Their increasing visibility enhanced open hostilities and homophobia, and the Oscar Wilde trial became a public cause for both conservative heterosexuals and newly inspired homosexuals who began to resist their stigmatisation and developed a kind of collective consciousness. Summers concludes that, as an effect, fictional representations of homosexuality were becoming more numerous and more daring, notably Wilde's own texts. In him, Summers sees the first prominent figure of gay liberation and his literary negotiations of "self-realization, the yearning for escape from moralistic prohibitions, the desire to recover an Arcadian past in which homosexuality is valued and respected, and the depiction of divided selves"[139] are equally deployed by later novels. By drawing a parallel between Wilde's writings and post-Stonewall fiction in form and content, Summers begins to establish a literary genealogy.

However, in Summers' reading of Renault's *The Charioteer*, Bronski's 'Is it good for the gays?'-paradigm becomes once more apparent. Although accounting for Renault's effort to fashion "a portrait of homosexual love as potentially elevated and dignified", Summers' evaluation of *The Charioteer* as a "'homosexual problem novel[...]'"[140] is more a reflection on his assessment of the Cold War as a bleak period for homosexuals facing harassment and stigmatisation, than an analysis of the novel, which is much more diverse in its treatment of

136 Ibid., p. 2.

137 Summers, (1990), p. 12.

138 Ibid., p. 17.

139 Ibid., p. 20.

140 Summers, (1990), p. 26.

homosexuality. His further claim that "[t]his guilt and self-doubt [of the period] is apparent in *The Charioteer*"[141] positions the protagonists' struggles exclusively as a result of their sexuality, and forgets the narrative's setting in the Second World War, which provides a second important narrative strand and reason for the characters' challenging negotiations of their sexuality and masculinity within the military. The remarkable freedoms the protagonist Laurie experiences in the military hospital are overshadowed by Summers' enhanced interest in the characters' alleged self-doubts and self-hatred.

Regardless of these oversimplifications deriving from the objective of *Gay Fictions* to "place the fictions within their appropriate ideological context"[142], Summers' study gives vital insight into the development of homosexual representations in literature when detecting a displacement of influence from the late 1940s onwards. His examinations show that "[w]hile the first wave of serious gay fiction in English is the outgrowth of the early homosexual emancipation movement and the Wilde scandal, the second wave is part of the post-World War II literary boom, and *it is predominantly American rather than British*."[143] This shift is not only evident in Summers' own work on American authors such as James Baldwin and Gore Vidal as examples of this new kind of literature, but also in Joseph Bristow's chapter on censorship in *The Cambridge Companion to Gay and Lesbian Writing*. Whereas detailing the exact circumstances of the trial of Hall's *The Well of Loneliness* in 1928, Bristow leaves unmentioned the interim period until 1979, when *Gay News* was prosecuted under the blasphemy law.[144] He concludes that "[f]or over twenty years, Hall's *Well* was not republished in Britain, and in the intervening period a number of works that had homosexual content were seized and destroyed"[145]. One of these books that were withdrawn shortly after publication is Walter Baxter's second novel *The Image and the Search* (1953) leading Baxter to permanently terminate his career as a

141 Ibid., p. 26.

142 Ibid., p. 12.

143 Ibid., p. 23, [my emphasis].

144 For more information on novels with homosexual contents written after the Second World War see Sonya L. Jones, *Gay and Lesbian Literature Since World War II: History and Memory*, [1998], (New York: Routledge, 2014) and Anthony Slide, *Lost Gay Novels: A Reference Guide to fifty Works from the First Half of the Twentieth Century*, [2003], (New York: Routledge, 2003). Neither study includes Mary Renault's *The Charioteer* (1953) or Walter Baxter's *Look Down in Mercy* (1951).

145 Joseph Bristow, "Homosexual Writing on Trial: from *Fanny Hill* to *Gay News*" in Hugh Stevens (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Gay and Lesbian Writing* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), p. 30.

writer.[146] Vital scenes in Baxter's *Look Down in Mercy* have also been altered, but neither novel is mentioned in Bristow's account of censorship thus illustrating the lack of attention given to British writings with a homosexual content in the 1950s and 1960s.

Gunn and Harker's *1960s Gay Pulp Fiction* also focuses on the American literary canon and observes that, like British novels with a homosexual subject matter written before Stonewall, American gay pulp fiction of the 1960s has disappeared from public as well as academic consciousness. They explain that gay pulp fictions of the 1970s and 1980s "were essentially dismissed as erotica or pornography"[147]. Whilst "in the 1970s [pulps] served as little more than masturbatory aids, their quality degenerate[ed] even further in the 1980s when publishers tried to compete with videotapes as erotic stimuli"[148]. This dismissive attitude towards gay pulp fictions derives from the fact that "critics [had] no sense of a need to examine such seemingly marginalized literature"[149]. Additionally, the gay liberation movement made 'mainstream publishers' more daring and "literature [notably not pulp fictions] by, about, and for gay and lesbian readers became publicly celebrated for the first time"[150]. Whereas before, the publishing of homosexual literature bore severe risks of becoming prosecuted under obscenity laws, the public celebration of Foster's *Maurice* (1971) or Isherwood's *A Single Man* (1964), among others, permanently changed the public perception of these novels. Gunn and Harker conclude: "As such writers successfully blurred the division between mainstream and marginalized literature, theirs and similar works furthered the roles that 1960s gay pulps had performed."[151] Consequently, in the

146 In his diaries of the sixties Christopher Isherwood writes about Baxter that he "has become a rather tragic self-pitying drunken figure with a philosophy of failure. What use was success, [Baxter] asked. Oh yes, he *could* write again if he wanted to, but it would mean giving up drinking, smoking and sex – and was it worth it? The only thing that interested him, anyway, was to record some of his very early sex experiences; and those couldn't possibly be published ..." Isherwood's description shows how gravely the censoring of *Look Down in Mercy* (1951) and the banishment of *The Image and the Search* (1953) distressed Baxter. He felt like his writings could only ever encounter resistance from a public that was not prepared to read about homosexuality. Christopher Isherwood, *The Sixties: Diaries Volume Two 1960-1969* (London: Chatto and Windus, 2010), p. 120, [emphasis original].

147 Gunn and Harker, (2013), p. 16.

148 Ibid., p. 15.

149 Ibid., p. 15.

150 Ibid., p. 14.

151 Gunn and Harker, (2013), p. 14.

course of establishing a modern queer consciousness neither 1960s American gay pulps nor non-conforming and little-known British novels of that and earlier periods have become equally celebrated.

Following this outline of war literature and gay and lesbian fiction and their respective negotiation within academia, this study pursues to focus on various objectives: firstly, challenging wartime writing as a heteronormative endeavour by implicating a homosexual subject matter. Secondly, engaging with the Second World War as a memory that is repeatedly negotiated in retrospective fictions to enable a re-telling of events from a marginalised subject position. Thirdly, retrieving pre-Stonewall novels from their place of banishment in order to re-negotiate a literary amnesia that succeeded efforts of gay liberation and emancipation. The next section will clarify my approach to Walter Baxter's *Look Down in Mercy* (1951), Mary Renault's *The Charioteer* (1953), Sarah Waters' *The Night Watch* (2006) and Adam Fitzroy's *Make Do and Mend* (2012), as well as the methodological procedure of discussing these novels.

FEMINIST NARRATIVE THEORY: APPROACH AND OUTLINE

In order to clarify my use of terminology, I wish to begin this section by defining key terms like 'fiction' and 'narrative' as well as their distinctions and characteristics with regard to a homosexual subject matter. Norman W. Jones' *Gay and Lesbian Historical Fiction* dissects the term 'historical fiction' to characterise *fiction* set at a time different from the author's.[152] This is contrasted to nonfiction histories as *narratives* "which more clearly denote [...] nonfictional as well as fictional stories"[153]. Linda Hutcheon equally states that "both historians and novelists *constitute* their subjects as possible objects of narrative representation"[154] –

152 Norman W. Jones, *Gay and Lesbian Historical Fiction: Sexual Mystery and post-Secular Narrative* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), p. 29.

153 Jones, (2007), p. 30.

154 Linda Hutcheon, *A Poetics of Postmodernism: History, Theory, Fiction* (New York and London: Routledge, 1988), p. 111, [emphasis original]. In the 1970s Hayden White developed the understanding of history as subjective rather than empirically and universally true. Building on White's claim, Natasha Alden summarises that "the truth about the past lies not in a rationally organised, empirically based sequence of static facts taken from a stable reality, but in the chaotic dialogue between competing narratives." Natasha Alden, *Reading Behind the Lines: Postmemory in*

a definition which is acutely aware of discursive and ideological influences on authors of both historical fiction and nonfiction histories. In light of this, "historical fiction novels offer intellectually valid ways of exploring history – sometimes more intellectually honest ways than totalizing, endpoint-oriented nonfiction history writing"[155]. According to Jones it is *because of*, not despite, "the muddiness of historical fiction", that it bears potential for correcting an often homogeneous and reductive historicization of the past.[156] In this way, Jones takes up feminist criticism regarding *his*torical reconstructions and reveals the measure by which they erase not only female voices but also accounts on homosexuality or subordinated nationalisms. These issues are not detached from dominant reconstructions but mingled within them in a reciprocal connection. Rau translates the value of reconstructing aspects of an unknown past into the present when stating that "its margins, blind spots, codes, and clichés, its hyperbole and omissions, are of an unplumbed complexity that might help make sense of where Britons think they are today"[157]. It follows that retrospective narratives not only help to re-imagine untold queer stories, but also to uncover a nation's current self-understanding and, more specifically, its attitude towards marginalised subject matters such as homosexuality.

Brookes' definition of 'gay male fiction' as "fiction by self-identified nonheterosexual men, who may or may not choose to call themselves gay" is an example for inflicting a contemporary mindset onto earlier periods. [158] Although responsive to the identity struggles within the gay community when allowing for variance in authors' self-identification as gay or otherwise, and despite the understandable urge for "a convenient shorthand term"[159], specifying 'gay male fiction' with the authors' sexuality in mind homogenises and categorises writings along constructed parameters. Brookes' inclusions of a *potential* heterosexual readership does not convincingly soften the implications inherent in his definition, which not only excludes novels with homosexual contents produced by heterosexual authors, but also restricts novelists to their gender and sexuality as if their experiences gives them sole authority to represent male homosexuality. Similar to the soldier poet as the preferable author of wartime fiction, narrowing the scope of 'gay male fiction' to novels by "self-identified nonheterosexual

Contemporary British War Fiction (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 2014), p. 9.

155 Jones, (2007), p. 28.

156 Ibid., p. 33.

157 Rau, (2016), p. 28.

158 Brookes, (2009), p. 8.

159 Ibid., p. 8.

men" disregards writings by (lesbian) women such as Mary Renault whose novel *The Charioteer* features male protagonists entangled in a homosexual love triangle. According to Brookes' definition, Renault's work is an (almost) impossible conundrum. Claude J. Summers gives a much more nuanced definition of his title and subject matter *Gay Fictions* to variously mean:

> the fictional representation of male homosexuals by gay male and lesbian writers; the evolution of concepts about homosexual identity; and the construction, perpetuation, revision, and deconstruction of fictions (including stereotypes and defamations) about homosexuality and homosexuals.[160]

Without denominating solely gay or lesbian authors or a homosexual readership, but instead alluding to pressing themes of identity and a deconstruction of the familiar, Summers finds a much broader basis for the term 'gay fictions' which, unfortunately, turns it into a blurry and unfeasible concept, making the shorthand an umbrella term.

In contrast to both Brookes' and Summers' efforts of incorporating 'gay' as a badge for self-affirmation, Quentin Crisp continued to use the less glorious terms 'homosexual' and 'homosexuality' even whilst living and publishing in New York City at the peak of gay liberation. His ambivalence in identifying with this new movement which caused many young gays and lesbians to dissociate themselves from him even before he infamously called the outbreak of AIDS a "fad"[161], shows that even the post-Stonewall area was less homogeneous than the category 'gay male fiction' suggests. Consequently, I will refrain from using the term 'gay male fiction' not only due to my inclusion of female authors, or the anachronism when using the term 'gay' for a Second World War setting, but more broadly because the current understanding of 'gay male fiction' is either too reductive or too broad in its conceptions of authors, readership and subject matter. A more accurate classification, if one so desires, is to think of Renault's *The Charioteer* (1953) and Baxter's *Look Down in Mercy* (1951) as wartime fictions based on personal experiences as nurse and soldier respectively, negotiating the increasing visibility of homosexuality during the war. Their counterparts

160 Summers, (1990), p. 1.

161 Crisp had used the words 'fad' in the context of the increasing AIDS epidemic in Chicago 1983 during his one-man-show after someone had asked him about his opinion regarding the quickly spreading disease. His reaction and the consequent hostilities brought against Crisp is recalled in his second biographical film adaptation *An Englishman in New York* (2009), Dir. Richard Laxton, DVD, Momentum Pictures.

in the 21st century, Sarah Waters' *The Night Watch* (2006) and Adam Fitzroy's *Make Do and Mend* (2012), are historical fictions as identified by Jones, that retrospectively and retroactively construct these stories of homosexuality during the Second World War. Instead of involuntarily disseminating a modern ideology and consciousness into the past, I will speak of novels and plots negotiating homosexual tendencies, characters, desires or subcultures. Sometimes I will also be referring to the word 'queer' in order to denote a more contemporary mindset.

In her doctorate thesis *Wolfskins and Togas: Lesbian and Gay Historical Fictions, 1870 to the Present*, Sarah Waters argues (self-reflexively) that "historical fiction tells us less about the past than about the circumstances of its own production – reveals, if nothing else, the historiographical priorities of its author, or its author's culture"[162]. Similar to Linda Hantcheon, Waters thus draws attention to the importance of the author as well as to the context of writing and publishing a text. Whilst Roland Barthes' "The Death of the Author"[163] and Michel Foucault's "What is an Author?"[164], rendered the role of the author insignificant, feminism, black activism and other marginalised groups rightfully insisted on its prominence. In *Sexual Politics*, Kate Millett challenges the anonymity and death of the author proclaimed by Foucault and Barthes, when examining the sexist subtext of literature deriving from a male author position.[165] According to Millett and feminists pursuing her work such as Waters, it matters who is telling a story and in which context it has been produced because knowledge of authors and their background allows for perceiving a text in a more specific socio-historical context.

In recent years critics like Susan Lanser[166] and Robyn Warhol have defended what they call '(queer and) feminist narrative theory' "[b]ecause the term 'narratology' still connotes for many a theoretical approach cut off from questions of

162 Sarah Waters, *Wolfskins and Togas: Lesbian and Gay Historical Fictions, 1870 to the Present* (London: University of London, 1995), p. 8.

163 Roland Barthes, *Image Music Text, Essays Selected and Translated by Stephen Heath* (Fulham: Fontana Press, 1977), pp. 142-148.

164 Michel Foucault, "What is an Author?" in James D. Faubien (ed.), *Aesthetics, Method, and Epistemology: Volume two, Essential Works of Foucault 1954-1984* (New York: New Press, 1998), pp. 205-222.

165 Kate Millett, "Instances of Sexual Politics", *Sexual Politics*, [1970], (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2000), pp. 3-22.

166 Susan Sniader Lanser, *Fictions of Authority: Women Writers and Narrative Voice* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1992).

history and context"[167]. This history and context plays an important role for queer and feminist literary critics because a marginalised subject position cannot be grasped if, as Foucault determines, one's "task of criticism is not to bring out the work's relationships with the author, not to reconstruct through the text a thought or experience, but rather to analyze the work through its structure, its architecture, its intrinsic form, and the play of its internal relationships"[168]. Such a sole emphasis on form and structure of the text disguises the often damaging dominant culture that influenced the author and their work. Consequently, Warhol concludes, "[f]eminist narrative theory [...] tries always to frame its analysis with as much socio-historical context as can be known for the author and readers in question"[169]. In such a reading, literature creates a reciprocal conjugation with culture, simultaneously being influenced by it and being an active part in its formation.[170]

By incorporating auto-biographical knowledge of the authors under discussion (as far as available) and by considering censoring practices especially during the 1950s, my approach to the novels follows Warhol's 'feminist narrative theory'. My reading of Renault's *The Charioteer* is especially influenced by the author's political views as they reveal most thoroughly why her novel cannot be perceived as an inherently negative representation of homosexuality. Her privileged position as a white European living in South Africa hesitant to engage in anti-apartheid protests betrays her own often conflicting moral and social attitudes, which she fictionalises in *The Charioteer*. Homogenising Renault's work as a "homosexual problem novel[...]" as proposed by Summers[171], marginalises the merit of dramatising her troubled and incoherent thoughts on the subject matter. Whilst Summers acknowledges that "Renault challenges the sexual ideology of the 1950s by sketching her characters as individuals responding to universal human dilemmas and by her insistence on the preeminent value of self-knowledge", he cannot refrain from constantly qualifying such positive evaluations by pointing at the "guilt and self-doubt", "the gay subculture as pathological" and the "conception of homosexuality as a personal failure"[172]. The following chapters will show that whilst Summers' is right to read *The Charioteer* as

167 Robyn Warhol et. al., *Narrative Theory: Core Concepts and Critical Debates* (Columbus, Ohio: The Ohio State University Press, 2012), p. 9.

168 Foucault, "What is an Author" (1998), p. 207.

169 Warhol, (2012), p. 10.

170 Alan Sinfield, *Literature, Politics and Culture in Post-war Britain* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1989), p. 36.

171 Summers, (1990), p. 26.

172 Ibid., p. 26.

"mirror[ing] the homophobia of its day", the conclusion that this yields to the characters' "guilt and self-doubt" lacks textual foundation. Neither the protagonist Laurie nor his lover Ralph actively loath themselves for being homosexual but criticise society's narrow-mindedness. In fact, with the exception of Baxter's *Look Down in Mercy*, the exaggerated signs of suffering due to sexual deviance as detected by Summers, are predominantly noticeable by their absence. And when scenes of despondency emerge, they need to be considered within the context of the Cold War as a period of heightened homophobia that made publication for writers of homosexual fiction all the more difficult.[173]

To better compare and contrast the novels' approach with regard to how homosexuality is represented, and in what way the intersecting fields of gender, sexuality, nationalism, patriotism and propaganda work to induce conformity into national citizens, I will merge readings of each text in every chapter. The chapter on "Re-Negotiating the Homosexual Problem Novel" will engage with the overarching question of how the novels approach the complex issue of homosexuality during the Second World War. In order to reveal the influence that publication practices during the 1950s had on both Mary Renault and Walter Baxter, I am focusing on methods of self-regulation and official censorship respectively. Whereas Renault inscribes an appropriated medical view on homosexuality into her novel in order to suggest a homophobic sub-tone, Baxter's writing is ridden with incongruities regarding the vastly different versions for the American and British readership. I will reveal the hypocrisy of censorship practices that disguised homosexual passion in the British edition, but explicitly referenced non-consensual intercourse between the protagonist Kent and his mistress Helen. Due to the homophobic discourse at the time of publication, allegedly 'obscene' scenes between men were deleted, or defended through a psychoanalytic sub-narrative in order to avoid complete censorship.

Modern narratives such as Waters' *The Night Watch* and Fitzroy's *Make Do in Mend*, in contrast, are more liberal in the depiction of homosexuality. However, despite making use of such freedoms in the explicit description of same-sex

173 I believe that Summers' evaluation of Cold War paranoia causing self-doubt in homosexuals is too sweeping. He claims that "[t]he popular consensus that homosexuals were immoral, emotionally unstable, and untrustworthy justified their punishment and stigmatization, and unavoidably engendered guilt and self-doubt in gay people themselves." Summers, (1990), p. 26. Whilst this causal connection between external projections of homophobia onto homosexuals, who internalised their own abjection might well be true for some people of the time, it cannot be uncritically translated onto *The Charioteer* considering the number of characters who actively defend their desires.

conduct, Fitzroy's novel reveals an assimilated attitude of homosexuals living in heteronormative society. Whereas Laurie in *The Charioteer* and Kent in *Look Down in Mercy* disturb dominant knowledge simply by the fact of secretly engaging in forbidden sex acts, Harry and Jim in *Make Do and Mend* are, troublingly, relegated to and controlled by society's margins. This marginalised storyline becomes most obvious at the end of the novel when Harry and Jim stay at a remote farm hut, whereas Harry's brother Jack and his wife Kitty enjoy their public marriage with the whole village wishing them well. Displayed in the epilogue of the novel, the homosexual characters are literally 'Othered' compared to the heterosexual couple. Unlike the otherwise activist writing in *Make Do and Mend* when Baxter exaggerates homosexual promiscuity, Waters' *The Night Watch* approaches sexuality in less excessive language and concentrates on rewriting an invisible lesbian past. The novel is preoccupied with the issue of retroactively retrieving history when its narrative structure proceeds from 1947 to 1944 and ends in 1941. This backward narration as well as the characters' observation that the past is more interesting than the future functions as a self-reflexive comment, not only on Waters' writing, but on the perception of pre-Stonewall narratives as bleak and self-loathing.

The next chapter on "Nation, Masculinity and War" concentrates on how the novels represent nationalistic efforts to convince men to die for their country and how these are built on the power of myth[174] – that of the Unknown Soldier according to which men who fight heroically will become immortal and praised in narratives of national glory. In *Long Shadows* Petra Rau elaborates on the term 'myth' by saying:

> Myth should not be understood as fabrication or fiction, nor is it mendacity. Rather, it functions to disguise its own mechanics [...]. Myth lingers because it simplifies a very complex set of circumstances into a much more straightforward and emotionally resonant *fact* that appears to need no explanation.[175]

174 For an excellent evaluation of the means and merit of myth see Ackerman, (2015), pp. 14-15. He asserts that what Calder's *The Myth of the Blitz* (1992) describes as 'myth' can better be grasped as a powerful discourse that was institutionalised through various agents under guidance of the state. Original: "Was hier mit dem traditionale Überlieferungszusammenhänge und bündige Narrative evonzierenden Begriff des „Myth" gefasst wird, wäre präziser als mächtiger Diskurs zu beschreiben, der in einer bedrohlichen historischen Situation durch eine breite Koalition von Akteuren unter staatlicher Leitung und mit Hilfe moderner Medien institutionalisiert wurde." p. 14.

175 Rau, (2016), p. 6, p. 7, [emphasis original].

I will simultaneously discuss the myth of the People's War and that of the Unknown Soldier to carve out the manipulative role of the nation in guiding men into battle and determining their reputation as masculine or cowardly. The inclusion of two narratives by male authors – Walter Baxter's *Look Down in Mercy* and Adam Fitzroy's *Make Do and Mend* – will help to challenge the perception that male writing largely contributes to the dominant reiteration of (soldier/heroic) masculinity when they disclose the public image of *the* male soldier as equally deceptive as *the* female nurse. The insight of the changing parameters of war writings deriving from the importance of the home front will be expanded upon by analysing the nation's relentless oppression of men when turning them into soldiers, which discloses the traumatic experience of having to perform in a manner befitting masculine ideals. Through repeatedly hesitating or actively challenging national narratives designed to induce conformity, homosexual characters open scope for retrieving and re-negotiating the Second World War as a damaging period for men's self-worth. Whereas Waters' lesbian character Kay in *The Night Watch* bravely saves the city, Kent in *Look Down in Mercy* is repeatedly rendered motionless by the threat of war and his responsibilities as an officer. These differences between the characters call to attention the arbitrariness of bestowing 'strong' masculinity on male bodies and 'weak' femininity on women.

The last chapter on "Queering Space, Body and Time" therefore engages with Waters' portrayal of Kay as a mannish lesbian performing (female) masculinity – a more masculinist version of Halberstam's female masculinity. The analysis highlights Kay's female complicity within the patriarchal power structure when she subordinates her girlfriend Helen whilst claiming a more phallic version of what Plain has identified as "the *semblance* of masculinity"[176] performed by fighting women. I have positioned this analysis after the chapter on "Nation, Masculinity and War", because Kay's heroism as an ambulance driver complements my reading of male characters' failure to live up to the damaging ideal of hegemonic masculinity during war. I will expand on this reading of injurious masculinity for men by examining homelessness at the front as well as at the home front in order to disclose the spatial restrictions that the characters face and fear. Moreover, the destruction of buildings results in a sense of non-belonging which symbolises the characters' difficult position within a society that seems totally transformed through the war. At the same time as contributing to the horror of the time, the demolition of houses enables a re-reading of gender

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

norms when uncovering hidden societal scripts regarding the gendered politics of home as a domestic space that stereotypically restraints female bodies.

After having outlined the general aim and approach of this thesis, the following chapter will engage with an analysis of how homosexuality is depicted in the novels and how the dramatisation of outlawed desires changes according to varying censorship practices. Whereas Renault and Baxter, writing and publishing in the early 1950s, encountered diverse challenges to their work, Waters and Fitzroy enjoy a liberal publishing market that allows them to approach homosexuality during the war more freely. I will firstly disclose how *The Charioteer* (1953) and *Look Down in Mercy* (1951) circumvent censorship by using euphemistic language, inscribing a medical discourse or changing significant scenes, to then examine how historical fiction like *The Night Watch* (2006) and *Make Do and Mend* (2012) take liberties in approaching the past. Rather than revealing differences and oppositions between novels of the time and contemporary rewritings, I will look at the continuation of a thematic emphasis on the characters' individuality and their resistance in accepting stigmas and stereotypes associated with their sexual desires. In doing so, I challenge various presumptions regarding both world war fiction, and gay and lesbian historiography: firstly, the propagation of a heterosexual war that excluded homosexual men from service. Secondly, the dominant narrative of the homosexual subject in the first half of the 20th century as a burdened individual who despises himself for his sexual proclivities. Thirdly, the assumption that historical fictions are upbeat re-writings of a depressing past that project affirmation into a time that renounced homosexual existence. My analysis will show that whilst the novels are diverse in their treatment of homosexuality, they collectively challenge the dominant image of a heteronormative Second World War.