

**Wilde, Wildeblood and the Welfare State: Exploring Homosexuality, Class and  
Culture on Page, Stage and Screen in Britain 1945-67**

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## **Abstract**

The emergence of the male homosexual as a recognizable subjectivity in the late nineteenth century was shaped by scandals involving aristocratic men caught in cross-class liaisons, the academic work of homosexual intellectuals seeking to align their own desires with examples from Classical sources and a growing anxiety about the presence of same-sex desires in educational institutions. These varying and overlapping discourses, produced through sexological, legal and journalistic sources, helped to intertwine homosexual representation with specific class experiences and, frequently, a relation to artistic or elitist cultures. This thesis posits that this relationship underwent a considerable shift in Britain following the conclusion of the Second World War, as a result of perceived challenges to traditional class hierarchies, changing conceptions of culture and several key developments in attitudes towards homosexuality. By focusing on how this relationship was explored in a range of texts from the end of the conflict to the decriminalization of homosexuality in the Sexual Offences Act 1967, it is possible to examine the significance of both class and culture to representations of homosexuality in a changing social context. I have chosen to organize the thesis according to form, to note how different art forms and traditions explored that relationship in different ways and argue that broader debates pertaining to cultural standards, values and hierarchies significantly shaped the relationship between homosexuality and class across novels, stage drama and film.

## Introduction

### The Project and Its Scope

There was a feeling, especially from the kind of working-class background that I came from, that queers were decadent, upper-crust type people. I wouldn't say that people who go to university have any wider knowledge of the arts, gay culture or literature, than anyone else. In fact a lot of them have less. You may recall the case of Lord Montague who was imprisoned along with his friends for having a jolly time with boy scouts and young 'working-class' airmen. Yes, I think the Wildean, Victorian concept of gays lived on in the 1950s and early 1960s when it very definitely all began to change!<sup>1</sup>

David Nott, an interviewee in Stephen Bourne's *Brief Encounters: Lesbians and Gays in British Cinema 1930-1971* (1996), outlines a presumed correlation between male homosexuality, class identity and artistic culture that was both predominant, and increasingly challenged, in the decades following the conclusion of the Second World War. In doing so, he provides an (abridged) argumentative foundation for this thesis, which posits that representations of male homosexuality and class identity have been particularly intertwined since the late nineteenth century and that social changes in the aftermath of the Second World War were consciously explored in a range of such texts from the period. Examining the historical context from which these representations emerged, the thesis traces the extent to which they engage with that context and variously illuminate and comment on changing conceptions of sexuality, class and culture. That engagement is determined to some extent by the form (for considerations of space: the novel, stage drama and film) in which it is articulated, and by various political and cultural factors. In summary, this thesis examines what happened to the 'Wildean, Victorian concept of gays' in welfare state-Britain.

Nott's decision to highlight the '1950s and early 1960s' as a key moment in the history of homosexuality in Britain is not incidental; the decades following the conclusion of the Second World War produced a marked interest in homosexuality as a social problem and political identity. Chris Waters, while acknowledging 'occasional references to homosexuality as a social problem before the war', argues that it was only in its aftermath that 'the concept flourished as an important means for

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<sup>1</sup> David Nott, quoted in Stephen Bourne, *Brief Encounters: Lesbians and Gays in British Cinema 1930-1971* (London: Bloomsbury, 2016), p. 249.

rendering homosexuality amenable to the investigative practices of postwar social science'.<sup>2</sup> The growing sociological interest in the topic was indicated by the emergence of sexological surveys and studies; the Royal Medical Society hosted a conference entitled 'The Social Aspects of Homosexuality' in 1947, the same year that the *British Medical Journal* published F.H. Taylor's 'Homosexual Offences and Their Relation to Psychotherapy' and R.H. Ahrenfeldt's 'Homosexuality and "Sexual Trauma"'.<sup>3</sup> These studies were primarily specialist and academic, but the issue of same-sex desire reached a wider audience thanks to the splash made, on both sides of the Atlantic, by Alfred Kinsey's *Report on the Sexual Behaviour of the Human Male* (1948) which shocked with its statistics on the prevalence of homosexual experiences among its interviewees.<sup>4</sup> Britain produced its own, smaller-scale, version, dubbed the 'Little Kinsey', in 1949, funded by, and partly printed within, the popular *Sunday Pictorial* newspaper. It contained an appendix on homosexuality, including a discussion of 'cliques' and case-studies of anonymised men.<sup>5</sup> The title of Gordon Westwood's book *Society and the Homosexual* (1952) indicated its focus on the relationship between a sexual identity and its broader societal context and offered an expansive discussion of the topic. Through academic conferences, articles and books, then, homosexuality became a prominent discourse as part of a broader nexus of concerns about familial dynamics and conventional morality, but not all discussions of same-sex desire were produced through the ostensible objectivity of the post-war social sciences.

A series of scandals involving prominent and respected figures brought homosexuality into the reaches of popular culture, but this information was mediated by the journalistic press. The 'Beaulieu affair' (1954), which saw Lord Montagu, Peter Wildeblood and Michael Pitt-Rivers accused of gross indecency with two airmen and

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<sup>2</sup> Chris Waters, 'The Homosexual as a Social Being in Britain, 1945-1968', *Journal of British Studies*, 51:3 (2012), 685-710 (p. 694).

<sup>3</sup> Waters, p. 691; F. H. Taylor, 'Homosexual Offences and Their Relation to Psychotherapy', *British Medical Journal*, 2:4526 (Oct 1947), 525-529; R. H. Ahrenfeldt, 'Homosexuality and "Sexual Trauma"', *British Medical Journal*, 2:4532 (Nov 1947), 795-796.

<sup>4</sup> 'Fifty per cent of males admitted erotic responses to their own sex, 37 per cent said they had had at least one post-adolescent experience leading to orgasm, 4 per cent were exclusively homosexual throughout adulthood'. Alan Sinfield, *Out on Stage: Lesbian and Gay Theatre in the Twentieth Century* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1999), p. 213.

<sup>5</sup> Waters, 'The Homosexual as a Social Being in Britain, 1945-1968', p. 701.

resulted in Wildeblood admitting his homosexuality in the subsequent trial, is the most significant of many incidents whereby reporting of homosexuality reached wide readership; Westwood notes that '[t]he only time that the problem comes out into the open is when a local or Sunday paper reports a recent court case in which the law has punished some individual'.<sup>6</sup> Douglas Warth's 'Evil Men' articles in the *Sunday Pictorial* presented same-sex desire as a hybrid of conspiracy and contagion that threatened the entire fabric of society.<sup>7</sup> Warth's was a particularly vitriolic, but hardly unique, example of a journalistic culture that reported frequently and intensely on male homosexuality both as a result of, and alongside, the increased sociological focus on the issue.

This climate of fear, concern and hostility led to a series of political interventions that marks the immediate post-war decades as a highly significant epoch in the history of male homosexuality in Britain. The formation of the Wolfenden Committee on Homosexual Offences and Prostitution (1954), a response to the outrage prompted by the Beaulieu affair, led to the publication of a report in 1957 which argued that the laws pertaining to homosexuality should be reformed. While it took a decade for its proposals to be legally enacted, Alison Donnell highlights that the report itself was 'something of a best-seller' and 'stimulated significant media attention, bringing the question of homosexual identity, as well as sexual freedoms, into public debate'.<sup>8</sup> The founding of the Homosexual Law Reform Society (1958) was accompanied by the launch of The Albany Trust charity and the journal *Man Alive*, both of which were manifestations of a growing sense of political organisation by and for homosexual men. These developments ultimately led to the Sexual Offences Act (1967) which decriminalised male homosexual acts in England and Wales for the vast majority of consenting adults. This development did not end prejudice, bigotry and oppression, but it is a watershed moment in British queer history as it marks a definitive change in the legal status of homosexuality. While acknowledging that no specific era begins or ends in any chronologically simplistic manner, establishing the conclusion of the Second World War as one significant historical event for British society and

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<sup>6</sup> Gordon Westwood, *Society and the Homosexual* (London: Victor Gollancz, Ltd, 1952), p. 21.

<sup>7</sup> Douglas Warth, 'Evil Men', *The Sunday Pictorial*, 25 May, 1 June and 8 June 1952.

<sup>8</sup> Alison Donnell, *Creolized Sexualities: Undoing Heteronormativity in the Literary Imagination of the Anglo-Caribbean* (New Brunswick, Newark and London: Rutgers University Press, 2022), p. 83.

decriminalisation as another allows for a focused, but not overtly narrow, timeline in which to position this study.

The potted history outlined above is, however, not the entire story. Sociological, journalistic and political discourses were essential for the societal visibility of homosexuality, but they were all in dialogue with artistic, literary and other forms of creative representation that can be broadly termed 'cultural'. This thesis posits that such cultural forms were a crucial means of representing homosexuality in the post-war era, interacting with the discourses outlined above while invariably informed by their own formal structures, generic conventions and ideas of audience. The realm of culture was not merely a passive surface onto which these historical changes could be reflected, but rather an active element within a broader societal shift. Even the *Wolfenden Report* acknowledged the significance of artistic and creative forms: 'Public interest in the subject has undoubtedly increased, with the consequences that court cases are more frequently reported and that responsible papers and magazines give considerable space to its discussion. In general literature, too, there is a growing number of works dealing incidentally or entirely with the subject'.<sup>9</sup> Rather than considering artistic productions as incidental to political and social changes, this thesis argues that these forms of representation shaped, and were shaped by, their historical moment.

There is, however, a tendency within these various cultural responses to prioritise the experiences and perspectives of specific social classes. This bias is particularly evident in the focus on the wealthier men in the Beaulieu affair or the Wolfenden Committee's decision to interview a journalist, an art historian and an eye surgeon as their sample of homosexual interviewees. The post-war years in Britain are, however, marked by the extent to which social changes were perceived to impact traditional class hierarchies. The years that saw the end of the Second World War and the beginning of the Labour Government's nascent welfare state experienced numerous challenges to established institutions and ideas about class in British society. Educational reforms and universal healthcare assisted in lessening social inequality, giving rise to the contested term 'affluence' to describe the changing position of the working classes. Contemporary historical accounts were keen to

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<sup>9</sup> Home Office & Scottish Home Department, *Report of the Committee on Homosexual Offences and Prostitution* (London: Home Office & Scottish Home Department, 1957), p. 19.

acknowledge it as a social reality, with Harry Hopkins's *The New Look: A Social History of the Forties and Fifties* (1964) arguing that 'the standard of living of the "workers" which had been rising intermittently over many years reached a level where it began to transform the whole character of our society'.<sup>10</sup> Recent critics have been more cynical, with John Kirk suggesting that the term is too historically vague to be conceptually useful: 'to homogenize working-class experience under the sign of affluence, and to suggest that the class rose en masse from a position of penury to one of plenty (as was the dominant representation) is to distort the picture'.<sup>11</sup> Film historian John Hill notes that the British working class were not particularly wealthier than their pre-war counterparts, but does concede that there 'can be little doubt that the key to understanding Britain in the 1950s resides in the idea of "affluence"'.<sup>12</sup> The perception that the working classes were experiencing material improvements led to a greater focus on the significance of class within Britain's broader cultural context. The emergence of the 'Angry Young Men' literary movement was greeted as a particular challenge to the class domination of specific artforms while Richard Hoggart's *The Uses of Literacy* (1957) and Raymond Williams's essay 'Culture is Ordinary' (1958), celebrated and validated working-class culture. Such historical developments shaped and informed homosexual representation, which necessitates a considered and comparative investigation into how this changing relationship was articulated across a range of artistic forms.

This thesis looks specifically at the impact of these historical changes in the field of cultural representation, arguing that it is often within fiction that dominant tensions, ambivalences and contestations are exposed. Alan Sinfield uses the concept of 'faultline stories' to explain how certain ideas are frequently revisited because they reflect broader societal uncertainties and ambiguities:

When a part of our worldview threatens disruption by manifestly failing to cohere with the rest, then we reorganize and retell its story, trying to get it into shape – back into the old shape if we are conservative minded, or into a new shape if we are more adventurous.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Harry Hopkins, *The New Look: A Social History of the Forties and Fifties* (London: Secker & Warburg, 1964), p. 12.

<sup>11</sup> John Kirk, *Twentieth-century Writing and the British Working Class* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2003), pp. 54-55.

<sup>12</sup> John Hill, *Sex, Class and Realism: British Cinema 1956-1963* (London: British Film Institute, 1995), p. 5.

<sup>13</sup> Alan Sinfield, *On Sexuality and Power* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004), p. 6.

This thesis argues that homosexuality formed a faultline in post-war Britain precisely because it generated responses that could be reactionary, radical or, as we shall see, often a contradictory combination of the two. The irresistible urge to return to a topic with such significance across numerous cultural forms, and various genres, points to a consistent preoccupation that deserves more precise critical attention and literary analysis than it has hitherto received.

### Critical Context

It is necessary to note the invaluable academic foundation provided by the works of numerous scholars working across literary, historical and sociological disciplines, while demonstrating that there remains a critical oversight that this project seeks to address.

This thesis will thus build upon existing scholarship to provide a unique and contextualised focus on post-war representations of homosexuality in novels, stage drama, and film. Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's *Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire* (1985) is a landmark work of queer theory that combines broader social analyses with close reading in order to argue for the significance of class in literary depictions of same-sex desire. Her assertion that '[o]nly a view of homosexuality that is not only fully historical, but plural, described in relation to class interests, and placed appropriately in the context of the various specific institutions and forms by which gender and class power are transmitted, will be of analytic value' provides something of a methodological basis for this thesis.<sup>14</sup> The final chapter, 'Toward the Twentieth Century: English Readers of Whitman', delineates the ways in which many forms of homosexual expression and identification were closely tied to class interests:

Unlike aristocratic homosexual men whose strongest cultural bond was with Catholic Europe (especially with the countries where the permissive Code Napoleon was in force), the educated middle-class man looked to classical Sparta and Athens for models of virilizing male bonds, models in which the male homosocial institutions (education, political mentorship, brotherhood in arms) and the homosexual seemed to be fully continuous, and fully exclude the world of women.<sup>15</sup>

The dominance of such men in Victorian discourses pertaining to homosexuality leads Sedgwick to note two pertinent features; firstly, that there is no evidence of 'a

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<sup>14</sup> Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985), p. 215.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 207.

homosexual role or subculture indigenous to men of the working class, apart from their sexual value to more privileged men' and that 'middle-class English male homosexuality seems to have been organized to a striking degree around the objectification of proletarian men'.<sup>16</sup> Sedgwick's inability to trace working-class homosexual subcultures is a result of the exclusion of such men from dominant and pervasive forms of cultural representation, but the marginalisation and objectification that she identifies underwent specific development and contestation in the changing post-war context. Indeed, it is the pointed focus on a relationship between class and sexuality in this historical period that marks this thesis as an original contribution to the field.

This project is not the first to examine the significance of class and homosexuality in post-war Britain, but it is the first to offer a prolonged and extensive investigation into the specific role of the arts in this relationship across numerous cultural forms. Several historians have noted the importance of class within representations of homosexuality, even cursorily discussing the significance of literature, but they do not perform textual analyses in order to elucidate the techniques and patterns through which this significance is articulated. Matt Houlbrook's *Queer London* (2005), for example, argues that the cultural dominance of privileged homosexual men and their political interventions 'excluded vibrant alternatives forged – primarily – by working-class men' but his research is historical, rather than literary, and obviously focused on the capital.<sup>17</sup> Helen Smith's *Masculinity, Class and Same-Sex Desire in Industrial England, 1895-1957* (2015) investigates the presence of same-sex desire and sexual acts among working-class men in the North-East of England and she asserts that the history of homosexuality in Britain from the Victorian period onwards 'has been focused on the capital and has been skewed towards middle and upper-class men, more often than not with literary tendencies that have ensured the survival of letters, memoirs, diaries and autobiographies'.<sup>18</sup> Both Houlbrook and Smith highlight the tendency for the history of homosexuality to be told through the perspectives of middle- and upper-class men, but the role of cultural representation

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid., 174.

<sup>17</sup> Matt Houlbrook, *Queer London: Perils and Pleasures in the Sexual Metropolis, 1918-1957* (London: The University of Chicago Press, 2005), p. 243.

<sup>18</sup> Helen Smith, *Masculinity, Class and Same-Sex Desire in Industrial England, 1895-1957* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), p. 4.

in that paradigm provides a contextual framing for their analyses, rather than being the object of study. Richard Hornsey's *The Spiv and the Architect* (2010), on the other hand, argues for the significance of class to homosexual representation in a manner that engages more directly with textuality:

Oral histories of the early twentieth century, for instance, often hinge on a volume of Plato or Edward Carpenter casually discovered in Father's study that provides a conceptual language through which to articulate a nascent queer identity. Such experiences were always dependent on class and education, yet the active public provision of culture in the postwar period, coupled with the widespread dissemination of popular sexology, expanded the domain in which such ideas might then be encountered.<sup>19</sup>

The impact of post-war social change on the relationship between homosexuality, class experiences and artistic culture is a key focus of this thesis, but it deviates from Hornsey's approach in its concentrated discussion across three different artforms. *The Spiv and the Architect* focuses more broadly on queer topographies of London, Joe Orton's defacing of library books and the formulation of queer citizenship, whereas the following chapters pinpoint comparative textual analysis in order to argue for the influence of relevant contexts on representation.

This project also owes a significant debt to the work of literary and cultural theorist Alan Sinfield, whose writings on post-war literary culture and homosexual representation provide an established critical foundation from which to expand. His assertion in *The Wilde Century* (1994), that Oscar Wilde's trial produced a wealthy, artistic and decadent homosexual stereotype which had a lasting resonance in popular culture, is an argumentative tenet of this thesis.<sup>20</sup> Tracing its development in a later historical context offers an original intervention because, although he touches on post-war examples of the Wildean stereotype, Sinfield's primary focus is before World War II. Sinfield does write more generally about post-war culture in *Literature, Politics and Culture in Postwar Britain* (2004) and the chapter 'Queers, Treachery and the Literary Establishment' provides a useful schema for positioning the relationship between homosexuality and class within a broader cultural nexus. He suggests that literary culture was often perceived through a series of binaries:

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<sup>19</sup> Richard Hornsey, *The Spiv and the Architect: Unruly Life in Postwar London* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010), p. 166.

<sup>20</sup> Alan Sinfield, *The Wilde Century Effeminacy, Oscar Wilde and the Queer Moment* (London: Cassell, 1994).

|          |              |                   |               |
|----------|--------------|-------------------|---------------|
| Dominant | The state    | The working class | 'masculinity' |
| literary | The personal | The leisure class | 'femininity'  |

Sinfield argues that the 'characteristics in the lower part of the table were perceived in opposition to the dominant characteristics above, and also in opposition diagonally across the columns (so that 'femininity' was regarded as opposed to the state and the working class, and the personal to the working class and to 'masculinity')' and posits that the idea of homosexuality lurked behind 'femininity' in a manner that sometimes reinforced the binary and sometimes undermined it.<sup>21</sup> Although Sinfield's framework provides a useful starting point for analysis, some of its categories became increasingly flexible in the post-war era, particularly towards the end of the 1950s. The association of 'dominant' culture with masculinity, for example, was reworked in some of the self-consciously resistant 'Angry Young Men' texts, which instead presented the establishment as passive and effeminate.

The oeuvre of Raymond Williams provides a critical perspective that was shaped by the historical context of post-war Britain and which contributes significantly to this project's approach to the contested term 'culture' which underpins its analysis. In 'Culture is Ordinary' (1958), *Culture and Society, 1780-1950* (1958) and *The Long Revolution* (1961), Williams traces the history of the term, discussing it as an amorphous concept whose flexibility could be moulded by class interests in order to validate the creative and social endeavours amenable to particular social groups. Williams's argument that culture was 'ordinary' reclaimed the term and allowed it to encompass both the creative productions and social conventions of working-class lives. This thesis engages with his work in order to highlight the significance and development of class discourse in the post-war era, but he also provides a theoretical framework for the complex and unstable term 'culture' which informs the project as a whole.

If Williams argues for the plurality and multiplicity of culture in 'Culture is Ordinary', and traces its genealogy in *Culture and Society*, then *The Long Revolution*

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<sup>21</sup> Alan Sinfield, *Literature, Politics and Culture in Postwar Britain* (London: Continuum, 2004), p. 75.

represents the culmination of his ideas into a comprehensive theoretical approach. Williams defines the common uses of the term 'culture' in three senses: the 'ideal' (when it refers to the values assumed to embody perfection); the 'documentary' (when it relates to a body of intellectual and imaginative work); and the 'social' (when it is the description of a shared experience), but argues that '[t]he variations of meaning and reference, in the use of culture as a term, must be seen [...] not simply as a disadvantage, which prevents any kind of neat and exclusive definition, but as a genuine complexity, corresponding to real elements in experience'.<sup>22</sup> Williams acknowledges the impossibility of isolating a singular definition of culture, instead approaching it as an intricate combination of institutional, intellectual and communal activities which inevitably inform one another to the extent that his 'theory of culture' is 'the study of relationships between elements in a whole way of life'.<sup>23</sup> This approach does not mean that artistic culture becomes just one of endless forms of expression without any specialised value; Williams is keen to assert that '[a]rt, while clearly related to the other activities, can be seen as expressing certain elements in the organisation which, within that organisation's terms, could only have been expressed in this way'.<sup>24</sup> Williams thus provides an invaluable interpretation of 'culture', recognising it as a term whose complexity is part of its significance, while nonetheless focusing on the specific importance of creative productions within this broader concept.

This emphasis on how culture has historically been discussed and defined has been termed 'metaculture' by Francis Mulhern. In *Culture and Metaculture* (2000), Mulhern describes the latter as that by which 'culture, however defined, speaks of itself'.<sup>25</sup> This definition allows for the many debates, theories and tensions surrounding the term to be historicised and critically analysed as a source of enquiry; the process by which certain texts are designated as 'culture' to begin with is a determining factor in how they are interpreted and received within their historical moment. Individual texts are my primary object of analysis, but their relationship to broader metacultural

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<sup>22</sup> Raymond Williams, *The Long Revolution* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1961), p. 43.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 46.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 45-46.

<sup>25</sup> Francis Mulhern, *Culture and Metaculture* (London: Routledge, 2000), p. xiv.

discourses is identified as a key factor in this relationship and thus a guiding principle of the overall methodology.

### Methodology

This project analyses a selection of works from what it argues is only a small sample of the breadth of cultural responses to homosexuality in post-war Britain. It examines well-known texts associated with that moment alongside more obscure and forgotten works. These choices aim to emphasise the extent to which artistic engagements with homosexuality can be found in a multiplicity of sources. They also indicate how ideas about cultural value, genre and audience can shape and limit representations and their place in literary history. Williams's idea of a 'selective tradition', where certain texts are 'selected for value and emphasis' during their own historical moment and afterwards is useful here.<sup>26</sup> Williams applies his concept to the literature of the 1950s, noting that only certain novels have been widely read during the decade and that subsequent generations will reduce this already-limited canon and thus potentially alter the valuation of the era. In its approach to forgotten and lesser-known texts, this thesis is a deliberate challenge to the conservative limits of the 'selective tradition' as defined by Williams; he notes that the process involves 'a rejection of considerable areas of what was once a living culture' and that 'selection will be governed by many kinds of special interest, including class interests'.<sup>27</sup> The recovering and discussion of more obscure texts can expand on academic understanding of post-war British culture and demonstrate the extent to which dominant ideas about homosexuality and class have limited our understanding of what constitutes the 'living culture' of the era than currently exists. These exclusions are partly the result of a narrative that insists on fundamentally class-based assumptions about homosexuality and its depiction.

The methodological approach of the project is predicated on expanding a limited idea of the 'canon' of homosexual representation, primarily focused on specific class experiences, which it identifies as a broader tendency in literary studies. In *The Cambridge Introduction to Modern British Fiction*, for example, "Class and Social Change", "Gender and Sexual Identity" and "Multicultural Personae" are separate chapters, an approach which confines class, sexuality, and race to distinct analytical

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<sup>26</sup> Williams, *The Long Revolution*, p. 71.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 72.

categories.<sup>28</sup> Instead, this thesis seeks to demonstrate that the claiming of certain texts as ‘class fiction’ or ‘queer fiction’ often reinforces a narrow view of what constitutes such representation. The novel *Escape to an Autumn Pavement* (1959), for example, is as much about queer sexual desires and the complexities of class identity as it is the racial politics of post-war Britain, but it is often perceived primarily in terms of the latter because its setting and characters do not match dominant conceptualisations of queer or working-class fiction. Similarly, the films *Boys in Brown* (1949) and *Now Barabbas* (1949) are rarely considered part of Britain’s queer film history primarily because their engagement with homosexuality exists outside conventional representations of Wildean dandies or repressed desire in public schools. Examining the broader cultural context that has designated these texts ‘queer’ or ‘working-class’ fictions complicates existing binaries and offers an opportunity for a more intersectional approach to literary analysis.<sup>29</sup>

#### A Note on Terminology

The use of the term ‘queer’ above indicates that this project situates itself within the field of queer studies, but it uses the term ‘homosexuality’ throughout to refer to the object of its analysis. Within the texts themselves, however, the word ‘homosexual’ is rarely used. Precise identities for same-sex desire are seldom uttered and, even when they are, the terms ‘queer’ and ‘invert’ are more likely to appear than ‘homosexual’. Although the texts under discussion might not necessarily share the usage of the term, this thesis argues that they are all connected by gesturing towards a similar idea of ‘homosexuality’ which might be obscured using the broader and more ambiguous term, ‘queer’. ‘Queer’ can be used as a relatively amorphous taxonomical label for a range of non-heteronormative practices, desires and identities but, within the limited scope of this project, it is necessary to be more

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<sup>28</sup> Dominic Head, *The Cambridge Introduction to Modern British Fiction* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002).

<sup>29</sup> This thesis defines intersectionality in the terms outlined by Kimberlé Crenshaw. Crenshaw originally used the term to examine the specific gendered and racialised experiences of Black women, but she also argued for its broader use as a tool for understanding various interlocking facets of identity: ‘By tracing the categories to their intersections, I hope to suggest a methodology that will ultimately disrupt the tendencies to see race and gender as exclusive or separable. While the primary intersections that I explore here are between race and gender, the concept can and should be expanded by factoring in issues such as class, sexual orientation, age, and color’. Kimberlé Crenshaw, ‘Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence against Women of Color’, *Stanford Law Review* 43:6 (1991), 1241-1299 (pp. 1244-45).

precise for the sake of brevity and the specificity of the analyses. David Halperin, in *Saint Foucault: Towards a Gay Hagiography*, notes the flexibility of 'queer' which has made it such an important tool for exploring forms of sexual desire and activity beyond binaries and prescribed identities: 'Queer is by definition *whatever* is at odds with the normal, legitimate, the dominant. There is nothing in particular to which it refers'.<sup>30</sup> Such a definition is too broad for this smaller project and, therefore, it focuses specifically on examining texts which manifest a more precise engagement with homosexuality. This thesis adopts the template provided by Halperin's *How to do the History of Homosexuality* (2002) which traces a sexuality that emerged in the late nineteenth century and involved the combining of three previously separate elements of a pathological orientation, same-sex desire and sexually deviant behaviour.<sup>31</sup> The term 'homosexual' is thus invoked, not because it is assumed that all queer men or same-sex desiring men from the era identified with the term, but because each of the texts studied engages with Halperin's definition of male homosexuality to varying degrees.

There has also been a general tendency within the field of queer studies to avoid using 'homosexual' in relation to working-class men, especially if there is little evidence that such men would have identified or claimed such a term for themselves. Helen Smith expresses a particularly rigid stance on the subject:

The 'British queer historians' such as Matt Houlbrook, Matt Cook and Harry Cocks have all challenged the appropriateness of using terms such as 'homosexual' and 'sexuality' as applied to men who had sex with other men at various times over the past 200 years, and this book takes that argument further to suggest that ideas of sexuality and a (homo)sexual identity were entirely inappropriate when applied to working-class men who desired other men during the period of study.<sup>32</sup>

There is, however, a danger here of depriving working-class men of an identity purely because they are not seen to embody its most stereotypical features, thus reinforcing the class distinctions of the label in the first place. Each textual analysis

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<sup>30</sup> David Halperin, *Saint Foucault: Towards a Gay Hagiography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), p. 62 [emphasis Halperin].

<sup>31</sup> 'So neither a notion of orientation, nor a notion of object-choice, nor a notion of behavior alone is sufficient to generate the modern definition of "homosexuality"; rather, the notion seems to depend on the unstable conjunction of all three'. Halperin, *How to do the History of Homosexuality* (London: The University of Chicago Press, 2002), p.131.

<sup>32</sup> Smith, *Masculinity, Class and Same-sex Desire in Industrial England, 1895-1957*, p. 9.

examines the terms used for same-sex desire in order to trace how they might be linked to class, but 'homosexuality' is the overall analytic focus of the project.

The language used to describe class identity, particularly the scope and range of the term 'working-class', is no less fraught than the vocabulary of sexuality. This thesis focuses on the depictions of class within texts rather than on establishing an objective analysis of that category in post-war Britain. Such texts reflect the complex negotiations and tensions within the class system and it is the way in which representations of class changed, rather than the system itself, that takes analytical priority. Andy Medhurst describes class as 'not just an objective entity, but also (and mostly?) a question of identifications, perceptions, feelings', and this thesis favours highlighting the complex interplay between the material, the ideological and the affective that often marks an understanding of 'class' as an identity.<sup>33</sup> Thus, while the terms 'working-class', 'middle-class' and 'upper-class' are subjective and flexible, it is useful to employ them in order to examine how they were being used within post-war culture and how they intersect with depictions of homosexuality.

#### Origins – Homosexuality, Class and Culture

In order to understand the extent to which post-war depictions of male homosexuality were shaped by broader societal and cultural factors, it is first necessary to historicise the dominant ideas that had been established in earlier forms of representation. Michel Foucault famously located the late nineteenth century as the 'birth' of modern homosexuality, tracing a transformation from the committing of deviant sexual acts into 'a personage, a past, a case history, a childhood' and a 'type of life' - the subject of medical, journalistic, legal and cultural discourses.<sup>34</sup> While historical accounts indicate that same-sex desire existed across the social spectrum in various forms, the most prominent representations in the late nineteenth century suggested that the homosexual had been born with a silver spoon in his mouth.

The widely reported homosexual scandals of the era involved aristocratic men in high-profile trials, best exemplified by the downfall of Oscar Wilde. Noel Annan

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<sup>33</sup> Andy Medhurst, 'If Anywhere: Class Identifications and Cultural Studies Academics', in *Cultural Studies and the Working Class: Subject to Change*, ed. Sally R. Munt (London: Cassell, 2000), pp. 19-35 (p. 20).

<sup>34</sup> Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality: The Will to Knowledge*, trans. Robert Hurley (London: Penguin Books, 1998), p. 43.

outlines a series of society scandals from the late nineteenth century which implicated the aristocracy in acts of same-sex desire, including Lord Henry Somerset, Lord Euston and Lord Roseberry.<sup>35</sup> While some of these instances circulated primarily through the avenues of society gossip, others were reported and publicised. The Boulton and Park (1871) and Cleveland Street (1889) affairs revealed wealthy men indulging in illicit sex with younger men and garnered considerable publicity, but they pale in comparison to the infamy of Wilde's *cause célèbre*. Following his unsuccessful attempt to sue the Marquess of Queensbury for libel, Wilde's subsequent trials exposed his homosexuality, revealed that he took various lower-class men as lovers and ultimately destroyed his career and reputation. As Sinfield's *The Wilde Century* demonstrates, Wilde's trial did not only bring an awareness of homosexuality into Victorian culture; it consolidated elements of Wilde (cultured, artistic) and his lover Lord Alfred Douglas (aristocratic) to produce a dominant and class-specific stereotype of homosexuality.<sup>36</sup>

These nineteenth-century scandals usually involved wealthy or aristocratic men engaging in cross-class sexual encounters. As Seth Koven argues, press reports of such events brought the British public 'closer to developing a vocabulary and an intellectual framework by which to understand the relationship between same-sex desires and behaviours on the one hand, and homosexual identity on the other'.<sup>37</sup> Whereas Wilde became a recognisable homosexual subject, the working-class men that he paid for sex were ignored within emergent discourses about sexuality; although vilified for their willingness to engage in prostitution, they returned to obscurity when the trial concluded. Establishing Wilde as the central figure within this narrative reinforced a distinction in which, as Sinfield notes, his persona became a 'queer bricolage of effeminacy, aestheticism and class, [which] in its whole derivation, stood at an opposite extreme from mainstream working-class values'.<sup>38</sup> This representation of the emergent homosexual in precise, and limited, class terms accords with Katie Hindmarch-Watson's observation that the lower-class telegraph boys revealed as sex workers in the Cleveland Street scandal 'weathered the storm

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<sup>35</sup> Noel Annan, *Our Age: The Generation that Made Post-War Britain* (London: Fontana, 1991), p. 135.

<sup>36</sup> Sinfield, *The Wilde Century*, p. 123.

<sup>37</sup> Seth Koven, *Slumming: Sexual and Social Politics in Victorian London* (Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2004), p. 72.

<sup>38</sup> Sinfield, *The Wilde Century*, p. 146.

relatively well, depicted as innocent victims sacrificed to rich men's vices'.<sup>39</sup> The predominant image of the homosexual coalesced around figures of wealth and privilege and the role of lower-class men in their dalliances was minimised or obscured.

At the same time as scandals exposed several aristocrats for their involvement in homosexual subcultures, some literary and philosophical thinkers were articulating a different model for same-sex relationships. Again, however, that model derived from the social and educational background of these men, who had inherited the prejudices of their class. John Addington Symonds produced scholarly work on the history of same-sex desire in *A Problem in Greek Ethics* (1873), considered its role in contemporary society in *A Problem in Modern Ethics* (1891) and collaborated with Havelock Ellis to produce the sexological text *Sexual Inversion* (1897).<sup>40</sup> Symonds' attitude to homosexuality in lower-class contexts was complex and sometimes contradictory. Josephine Crawley Quinn and Christopher Brooke note that he developed 'a tradition of homosexuality that transcended class by locating it throughout the social body', while Jana Funke observes that Symonds' essay 'Soldier Love' presents 'same-sex desire in lower-class men [as] natural, since they have not been exposed to classical literature and other possibly corruptive influences'.<sup>41</sup> Such texts, although perhaps inclusive in intention, were invariably only circulating among other educated men and can be perceived as an attempt to eroticise class difference. Sinfield notes that 'Symonds's "comrade" travelled with him as a servant', an indication that 'there was perhaps an element of self-deception' to these egalitarian aspirations.<sup>42</sup> Indeed, as Emily Rutherford notes, Symonds'

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<sup>39</sup> Katie Hindmarch-Watson, 'Sex, Services, and Surveillance: The Cleveland Street Scandal Revisited', *History Compass*, 14 (2016), 283-291 (p. 283).

<sup>40</sup> John Addington Symonds, *A Problem in Greek Ethics*, 2016. Project Gutenberg. Retrieved September 30 2023 from: <https://www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/32022>; John Addington Symonds, *A Problem in Modern Ethics*, 2010. Project Gutenberg. Retrieved September 30 2023 from: <https://www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/32588>.

<sup>41</sup> Josephine Crawley Quinn and Christopher Brooke, "'Affection in Education": Edward Carpenter, John Addington Symonds and the Politics of Greek Love', *Oxford Review of Education*, 37:5 (2011), 683-698 (p. 691); Jana Funke, "'We Cannot be Greek Now": Age Difference, Corruption of Youth and the Making of *Sexual Inversion*', *English Studies*, 94:2 (2013), 139-153 (p. 150).

<sup>42</sup> Sinfield, *The Wilde Century*, p. 149.

relationships with other men were ‘fraught with class inequality and exploitation’.<sup>43</sup> Edward Carpenter, author of *The Intermediate Sex: A Study of Some Transitional Types of Men and Women* (1908), was a pioneering figure and advocate for same-sex desire, but – like Symonds - his numerous relationships with lower-class men reinforce, rather than undermine, the centrality of educated and literary men in the history of homosexuality. It is not only that men like Symonds and Carpenter had emerged from certain class backgrounds, but their position and education allowed them an association with literary culture, as both readers and contributors, that shaped contemporary accounts of same-sex desire. Annan, questioning how Carpenter did not attract more ire for his controversial views, suggests that ‘[t]he mystery, perhaps, lay in his tact, his charm and his cunning use of words’ and notes that he was able to use these literary skills to ensure that ‘[n]o word or hint of impropriety ever sullied his page while in fact he was endorsing numbers of outrageous acts’.<sup>44</sup>

The ensuing correlation between homosexuality and scholarly or artistic men developed via numerous channels, but began with many of the key figures themselves. Wilde was a famous novelist and playwright and, at his trial, described ‘the love that dare not speak its name’ as ‘such as you find in the sonnets of Michelangelo and Shakespeare’ and an emotion that ‘pervades great works of art’.<sup>45</sup> Symonds’s works deploy a knowledge of numerous literary texts including Plato’s *Symposium* and *Phaedrus*, Plutarch’s *Eroticus* and Athenaeus’ *Deipnosophistae*. This association was also articulated in emergent sexological and psychoanalytic accounts of homosexuality. *Sexual Inversion* featured numerous case studies from same-sex desiring men and noted their interest in artistic pursuits and an ‘overpowering love for all things beautiful’.<sup>46</sup> In *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality* (1905), Freud stated that ‘inversion’ was ‘found in people whose efficiency is unimpaired, and who are indeed distinguished by specially high intellectual

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<sup>43</sup> Emily Rutherford, ‘Impossible Love and Victorian Values: J. A. Symonds and the Intellectual History of Homosexuality’, *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 75:4 (2014), 605-627 (p. 624).

<sup>44</sup> Annan, *Our Age*, p. 146.

<sup>45</sup> Joseph Bristow, *Oscar Wilde on Trial: The Criminal Proceedings, From Arrest to Imprisonment* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2022), e-book.

<sup>46</sup> Havelock Ellis, *Studies in the Psychology of Sex, Volume II, Sexual Inversion*, 3rd ed. (Philadelphia: F. A. Davies, 1915), p. 127.

development and ethical culture'.<sup>47</sup> However, these associations were not always affirmatory. Raymond Williams traces a backlash against artistic culture that gathered force in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries 'in association with a comparable hostility to aesthete and AESTHETIC' (capitals Williams).<sup>48</sup> This hostility surely coincided with the revelation that the most (in)famous advocate of aestheticism had engaged in homosexual activity.<sup>49</sup> In Noel Langley's *There's a Porpoise Close Behind Us* (1936), a character launches the following defence of his homosexuality which relies on an invocation of artistic culture: 'You people hate us because we get more out of life than you do – more excitement, more artistic appreciation, deeper knowledge, because we aren't chained to an obsolete animal instinct'.<sup>50</sup> The enduring resonance of this idea meant that it could still be deployed decades later; Warth's virulent 'Evil Men' articles offered (presumably accidental) support to the correlation when he quoted a psychiatrist: 'It must be admitted that sexual abnormalities do, in the main, occur in the more intellectual and artistic types whose abilities are so worth preserving in the future representatives of the race'.<sup>51</sup> This prevailing association between homosexuality and artistic culture need not always be articulated as a socially valuable quality, but it was nonetheless a persistent element of discourses pertaining to it.

Homosexuality was not only linked to 'culture' in terms of artistic endeavours and aesthetic appreciation, but also through the idea of culture as a 'way of life'. This tendency was particularly evident in the class-specific hierarchies and intimacies of public schools and universities. In 1895, W.T. Stead archly commented: 'Should everyone found guilty of Oscar Wilde's crime be imprisoned, there would be a very surprising emigration from Eton, Harrow, Rugby and Winchester to the jails of Pentonville and Holloway'.<sup>52</sup> Philip Dodd argues that the Victorian public school was

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<sup>47</sup> Sigmund Freud, *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality*, trans. James Strachey (Mansfield: Marino Publishing, 2011), p. 17.

<sup>48</sup> Williams, *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society* (London: Fourth Estate, 2014), p. 89.

<sup>49</sup> Ellen Moers notes that the posters for Wilde's lecture tour of English provinces proclaimed him 'THE GREAT AESTHETE' [capitals Moers]. Ellen Moers, *The Dandy: Brummell to Beerbohm* (New York: The Viking Press, 1960), p. 298.

<sup>50</sup> Noel Langley, *There's a Porpoise Close Behind Us* (Penguin: Harmondsworth, 1961), p. 89.

<sup>51</sup> Warth, 'Evil Men', *The Sunday Pictorial*, 25 May 1952.

<sup>52</sup> Quoted in Westwood, *Society and the Homosexual*, p. 102.

defined by 'its construction of masculinity, and its exclusion of women' and concedes that 'one might go so far to argue that the core of the curriculum was masculinity'.<sup>53</sup> This emphasis could produce a homosociality so intense that it bordered on erotic, which Gordon Westwood discussed in a post-war context when he notes the 'dangers of frustrated sexual impulses in our all-male public-schools' and warns that the 'intense cultivation of games in England has an echo in the Athenians' worship of the male human body'.<sup>54</sup> Various cultural representations had historically promulgated and consolidated this connection, including *Sins of the Cities of the Plain* (1881), an infamous pornographic novel, and Alec Waugh's more respectable, but also controversial, *The Loom of Youth* (1917), both of which depicted same-sex desire within boarding schools.<sup>55</sup> The homosexuality believed to be circulating in these institutions formed part of a homophobic rhetoric in post-war Britain which reinforced its emergence from a specific class context; Warth described it as 'a decadent vice, which to a large extent has spread downwards from the over-civilized and public school classes'.<sup>56</sup> Sinfield described these schools as 'crucial in the development of homosexual identity', but it was not environment alone that fostered this relationship.<sup>57</sup>

The appropriation of Classical texts was another means by which a form of cultural representation with a particular class emphasis contributed to the historicising and valuation of same-sex desire. Annan argues that 'Ancient Greece exerted a tyranny over English intellectuals' because they 'identified their own country, the incidents in their lives and their fantasies with the tales of Homeric heroes and the swains of Theocritus', and Linda Dowling posits that the general scholarly focus on this era and its literature meant that it was used to develop 'a homosexual counterdiscourse able to justify male love in ideal or transcendental terms: the "spiritual procreancy" associated specifically with Plato's *Symposium* and more generally with ancient

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<sup>53</sup> Philip Dodd, 'Englishness and the National Culture', in *Englishness: Politics and Culture 1880-1920*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., eds. Robert Colls and Philip Dodd (London: Bloomsbury, 2014), pp. 25-52 (p. 29).

<sup>54</sup> Westwood, *Society and the Homosexual*, p. 31.

<sup>55</sup> Unknown Author, *The Sins of the Cities of the Plain or the Recollections of a Mary-Anne, with short essays on Sodomy and Tribadism* (1881). Accessed on 30 September 2023 from Project Gutenberg: <https://www.gutenberg.org/cache/epub/53964/pg53964-images.html>; Alec Waugh, *The Loom of Youth* (London: The Richards Press, 1947).

<sup>56</sup> Warth, 'Evil Men', 25 May 1952.

<sup>57</sup> Sinfield, *The Wilde Century*, p. 65.

Greece itself'.<sup>58</sup> A chastened Wilde evoked the Grecian ideal of platonic love at his trial, defining his relationship with Lord Arthur Douglas as 'such as Plato made the very basis of his philosophy'.<sup>59</sup> As Dowling notes, academics like Walter Pater and J.A. Symonds saw that, by celebrating and disseminating these sources for their depictions of same-sex desire, 'the whole idiom of "effeminacy" which had generated such fear and loathing of male love could now be suddenly reversed in its moral implications'.<sup>60</sup> The positive representations of same-sex desire to be found in Classical sources provided a means of affirmation for many men with access to them into the twentieth century; Houlbrook notes that the anonymous author of sexological study *The Invert* (1927) 'included a detailed queer reading of Greek texts in his literature chapter [...], pointedly highlighting the positive constructions of same-sex desire they offered'.<sup>61</sup> The culture of elite education combined with specific elements of literary culture to centre public schools in both the formation and expression of homoerotic desire. The term 'culture', in all of its overlapping and equivocal definitions, thus played a key role in the history of homosexual representation, reliant on access to and production of literary texts within specific social contexts.

While it is impossible to trace or recount the numerous texts which depicted homosexuality across the first decades of the twentieth century, E. M. Forster's *Maurice* (1971) provides a significant example of familiar narrative and thematic tropes which foreground certain class experiences. Forster began *Maurice* in 1913, sharing it among a like-minded literary coterie until its eventual posthumous publication. The text's composition spans several decades of the twentieth century, suggesting that Forster reworked the narrative to respond to ongoing debates about homosexuality in society and how it could and should be represented. The narrative trajectory of the novel traces the eponymous protagonist as he confronts, and ultimately rejects, several dominant ideas about homosexuality. Maurice is from conventional, middle-class stock and his fear, and implicit repudiation, of the scandal, transgression and degeneracy associated with aristocratic men is articulated when he dares to mention 'unspeakables of the Oscar Wilde sort' to the

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<sup>58</sup> Annan, *Our Age*, p. 137; Linda Dowling, *Hellenism and Homosexuality in Victorian Oxford* (London: Cornell University Press, 1994), p. xiii.

<sup>59</sup> Bristow, *Oscar Wilde on Trial: The Criminal Proceedings, From Arrest to Imprisonment*, e-book.

<sup>60</sup> Dowling, *Hellenism and Homosexuality in Victorian Oxford*, p.xv.

<sup>61</sup> Houlbrook, *Queer London*, p. 207.

family doctor.<sup>62</sup> Maurice's relationship with a fellow undergraduate (who Forster later described in a synecdochic manner as 'Cambridge') initially appears to offer a welcome alternative to the Wildean stereotype, but Clive's insistence on chastity and fanatical devotion to Hellenism cannot last; he abandons Maurice and marries.<sup>63</sup> It is instead Maurice's romance with lower-class gamekeeper Alec Scudder which provides the most positively valued homosexual relationship in the novel, although it is fraught with various tensions relating to their class difference. Maurice and Alec eventually decide to leave society and live in exile, where Maurice believes they 'must live outside class', but Forster revealed that he wrote, and later abandoned, an additional ending in which Maurice's sister, Kitty, encounters the two men living as woodsmen years later.<sup>64</sup> Although Forster claims that the proposed epilogue 'partly failed' because the timeframe of the novel would have involved depicting the First World War, its excision also suggests a tacit acknowledgement of the limits of Maurice's optimistic attitude towards class difference.<sup>65</sup>

Forster's novel depicts a lower-class man in a homosexual relationship, but it does so within a specific cross-class framework that balances the utopianism required of their union with an awareness of how the relationship is structured by hierarchy and difference. The novel itself was inspired by a similar relationship; Forster describes its production as 'the direct result of a visit to Edward Carpenter' and even humorously links the genesis of the story to being fondled by Carpenter's working-class lover, George Merrill.<sup>66</sup> Forster's gesture to egalitarianism is presented as a source of considerable tension within the novel, in which class inequality constantly threatens Maurice and Alec's precarious relationship. The embarrassment of transgressing class boundaries, even in the context of legally prohibited homosexual relationships, occurs to Maurice after his first sexual encounter with Alec, when he

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<sup>62</sup> E.M. Forster, *Maurice* (London: Penguin, 2005), p.135.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, 220.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, 212, 223.

<sup>65</sup> 'I was encouraged to write an epilogue. It took the form of Kitty encountering two woodcutters some years later, and gave universal dissatisfaction. Epilogues are for Tolstoy. Mine partly failed because the novel's action-date is about 1912, and "some years later" would plunge it into the transformed England of the First World War'. *Ibid.*, 223.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, 219; 'George Merrill also touched my backside – gently and just above the buttocks. [...] It seemed to go straight through the small of my back into my ideas, without involving my thoughts'. *Ibid.*, 219.

ponders the financial transactions that might buy his silence.<sup>67</sup> This fear is confirmed when a slighted Alec attempts to blackmail Maurice. His pointed remark in an incriminating letter demonstrates how their relationship has undermined traditional class hierarchies: 'I am not your servant, I will not be treated as your servant'.<sup>68</sup> Their eventual reconciliation does not negate this uneasy tension because Maurice can only regain control in the relationship by reinforcing his class power: 'I'd have broken you. It might have cost me hundreds, but I've got them, and the police always back my sort against yours'.<sup>69</sup> Depicting this tension suggests Forster's awareness of class prejudice within such relationships, but the narrative focus nonetheless remains primarily on the middle-class Maurice and his experiences. This confused impulse between equality and hierarchy, between complementary partnership and the erotic potential of difference, was a key characteristic of subsequent representations of homosexuality and would become particularly pronounced in a post-war context of shifting class hierarchies.

Thus, while the male homosexual emerged as a recognised figure in late-Victorian and twentieth-century Britain, he did so as part of competing and contradictory narratives. These discourses were united, however, in their association of homosexuality with certain class experience marked by relative privilege and a shared educational background. Aristocratic gentlemen, aesthetes, and middle-class scholars might have had little in common in terms of their political beliefs or understandings of sexuality, but they shared and perpetuated similar frames of reference marked by their reading, education, and participation within literary culture. The result, of course, was a fundamentally limited and class-centric reading of homosexuality that persisted into the years following World War II.

Peter Wildeblood's *Against the Law* (1958) provides a post-war example of how representations of homosexuality continued to be informed by specific class experiences and invokes several of the elements discussed above. Wildeblood's memoir, published after his release from prison, was unique in offering a biographical account from an openly homosexual man, but his narrative reinforces a familiar

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<sup>67</sup> 'He would have to give Scudder some handsome present now, indeed he would to, but what should it be? What could one give a man in that position?'. *Ibid.*, 176.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, 192.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*, 200.

background of boarding school, an elite university, associations with ‘a number of people connected in various ways with the theatre and other arts’ and the discovery of his desires through literature.<sup>70</sup> Most significantly, he recalls the importance of Classics in shaping those desires: ‘I wanted someone who would make me brave, and whom I would make wise. A sentence in Plato’s *Symposium* haunted me: “An army of such lovers could conquer the world”’.<sup>71</sup> In his social background, literary knowledge and artistic connections, then, Wildeblood highlights the ongoing relevance of class-specific experiences within mainstream depictions of homosexuality. The dominance of these representations would, however, become increasingly challenged by numerous changes and developments, coalescing around issues pertaining to class identities and cultural values.

### Post-War Change

Following the conclusion of the Second World War, an intense focus on male homosexuality overlapped, and in some cases was closely entwined, with broader anxieties relating to shifting class hierarchies, cultural value and dominant artforms. Post-war social change suggested that such ideas would be increasingly threatened and challenged. The most influential of these developments began during the War itself. The Butler Act, democratising secondary education by extending school leaving age and allowing more lower-class children to attend Grammar Schools, was enacted by Churchill’s wartime coalition, but Clement Atlee’s Labour Government continued the process of reform by introducing a child benefits system (1945), national insurance (1946) and a national health service (1948). These political decisions are often seen to define a new political epoch in Britain and their impact was to be explored frequently across cultural representation of the next few decades.

These interventions to mitigate social inequality applied to all areas of life, but Sinfield highlights that the arts were a key element of the overall project: ‘[c]ulture, in welfare-capitalism, is one of the good things (like economic security and healthcare) that the upper-classes have traditionally enjoyed, and it is now to be available to everyone’.<sup>72</sup> At the outbreak of war, artistic culture was threatened in both material and ideological terms; paper shortages, closing theatres early and the loss of

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<sup>70</sup> Peter Wildeblood, *Against the Law* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1957), p. 23.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*, 28.

<sup>72</sup> Sinfield, *Literature, Culture and Politics in Postwar Britain*, p. 56.

numerous institutions in bombings might have represented the most immediate dangers, but the very idea of British culture was also under attack from the threat of invasion. CEMA (Committee for the Encouragement of Music and the Arts) was set up by Royal Charter in 1941 with John Maynard Keynes as its first Chairman. The promotion of a former member of the Bloomsbury Group to this governmental position suggested that the cultivation of the arts was perceived as an essential element of the war effort. Dan Rebellato, in *1956 and All That*, notes that CEMA encouraged the establishment of arts centres throughout 1945, 'toured a model of a potential centre, produced a document promoting it (Plans for an Arts Centre) and organised an exhibition at the Royal Academy'.<sup>73</sup> The emphasis on the arts as part of the social reconstruction of post-war Britain into a more egalitarian society was thus a key element of both wartime and post-war political discourses.

The idea of the arts as the collective inheritance of post-war society inevitably clashed with those who saw elitism as essential to the survival of artistic culture. One of the most detailed and rigorous defences was T. S. Eliot's *Notes Towards the Definition of Culture* (1948). Eliot's text begins with a dictionary definition of the word 'define' as 'the setting of boundaries', hinting at the strategies of enclosure and exclusion that he employs to safeguard a specific concept of culture.<sup>74</sup> While Eliot claims that his text is apolitical and accuses all politicians of regularly misunderstanding his definition of culture, he selects two Labour Politicians – then Prime Minister Clement Attlee and ex-Education Minister Ellen Wilkinson – as specific targets for criticism.<sup>75</sup> Perhaps in reference to the egalitarian spirit of the nascent welfare state, Eliot concedes that all levels of society produce their own cultural activities.<sup>76</sup> He maintains, however, that the higher echelons advance 'a more conscious culture and a greater specialisation of culture'.<sup>77</sup> The cultural activity

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<sup>73</sup> Dan Rebellato, *1956 and All That: The Making of Modern British Drama* (London: Routledge, 1999), p. 49.

<sup>74</sup> T.S. Eliot, *Notes Towards the Definition of Culture* (London: Faber & Faber, 1962), title page.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*, 14.

<sup>76</sup> 'Taking now the point of view of identification, the reader must remind himself as the author has constantly to do, of how much is here embraced by the term culture. It includes all the characteristic activities and interests of a people: Derby Day, Henley Regatta, Cowes, the twelfth of August, a cup final, the dog races, the pin table, the dart board, Wensleydale cheese, boiled cabbage cut into sections, beetroot in vinegar, nineteenth-century Gothic churches and the music of Elgar'. *Ibid.*, 31.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*, 48.

produced by the upper classes was to the benefit of all, but should not be viewed as ‘something [...] to be shared equally by all other classes’.<sup>78</sup> In Eliot’s formulation, class inequalities are essential to valuable cultural production. During a historical moment in which social changes threatened class elitism, *Notes Towards the Definition of Culture* links class and cultural hierarchies so that they seem mutually dependent. Eliot’s assertion that valuable cultural production requires social stratification presents it as antithetical to egalitarianism and aligns it primarily with the values of the upper classes.

Other cultural theorists did not necessarily share Eliot’s emphasis on class inequality as a prerequisite for cultural value, but they did foster an elitist idea of culture through education. F. R. Leavis, author of *Mass Civilization and Minority Culture* (1930) and editor of the periodical *Scrutiny* (1932-1953), depicted industrialism, consumerism and mass culture as denigrating and posited that only a critical minority, taught to interpret literature correctly, could be the bearers of cultural value. However, his ideas relied more on the cultivation of critical thinking than an inherited understanding of it based upon social class; Christopher Hilliard suggests that Leavis’s intention was ‘to train an intellectual elite distinct from the social elite’.<sup>79</sup> Although this formulation removed class position as a barrier to cultural authority, it nonetheless maintained a strict hierarchy of ‘good’ and ‘bad’ culture which mirrored the distinctions of the class system. Sinfield states that, within Leavisean principles, ‘literature was presented as a universal culture, detached from the class faction that had produced and sponsored it, and then used as a criterion for entry to a different faction’.<sup>80</sup> Although Leavis, his wife Q. D. Leavis, and like-minded academics at the *Scrutiny* periodical had been producing work since the late 1920s, the post-war period represented a time of fruition for their ideology. Francis Mulhern argues that the considerable impact of their scholarship was felt as those influenced by Leavis began to take academic or educational roles across the country.<sup>81</sup> It was, however,

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<sup>78</sup> Ibid., 35.

<sup>79</sup> Christopher Hilliard, *English as a Vocation: The ‘Scrutiny’ Movement* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), p. 74.

<sup>80</sup> Sinfield, *Literature, Politics and Culture in Postwar Britain*, p. 62.

<sup>81</sup> ‘1945 was not only the year in which Butler’s meritocratic educational reforms began to take effect; it also saw the emergence of the first whole generation of specialist teachers of English trained in the spirit of “the critical revolution” - a generation deeply influenced by Richards and Leavis but relatively lacking in the inter-disciplinary competence that had

two critics with self-confessed debts to Leavis's intellectual legacy that helped to move post-war discourses about culture away from elitism and towards an acknowledgement of plurality and diversity.

Two of the most famous cultural critics of the post-war era, Richard Hoggart and Raymond Williams, worked in adult education, described by Christopher Hilliard as 'the hub of post-war "left-Leavisism"' and both acknowledged the influence of Leavis on their work, even as they reformulated his ideas.<sup>82</sup> Hoggart's *The Uses of Literacy* has been described as a 'Leavisian case against Leavisian premises', and its argument is indeed both a development of, and a challenge to, the dominant idea of culture expounded by Leavis.<sup>83</sup> Hoggart's text outlines his definition of working-class culture in the North of England during the inter-war years, citing communal singing, locally produced periodicals and domestic decor as examples. While the latter half of the text is more Leavisian, in that it offers a narrative of cultural decline in which the working classes are exploited by post-war mass media, Hoggart's assertion that working-class culture has value, meaning and is a legitimate area for academic study provides a stark contrast to the dismissive attitude common to many cultural commentators.

In his essay 'Culture is Ordinary', Williams similarly critiques the dominant definitions of culture, railing against 'this extraordinary decision to call certain things culture and then separate them, as with a park wall, from ordinary people and ordinary work'.<sup>84</sup> Using his own trajectory from signalman's son to Cambridge graduate, Williams questions the efficacy of pitting a cultured minority against ignorant masses and instead argued that no single class can claim total control of the variety of activity, expression and creativity that defines culture. He also links his own work and the recent increase in writing outside of the elite when he mocks the anxieties of cultural gatekeepers: '[T]hey must be hearing rude noises from outside, from a few scholars

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produced their innovations and sustained them in practical form'. Francis Mulhern, *The Moment of 'Scrutiny'* (London: Verso, 1979), pp. 323-324.

<sup>82</sup> Hilliard, *English as a Vocation*, p. 142; *Ibid.*, 18; Raymond Williams, 'Our Debt to Dr Leavis', in *Border Country: Raymond Williams in Adult Education*, eds. John McIlroy and Sallie Westwood (Leicester: NIACE, 1993), pp. 103-105 (p. 103).

<sup>83</sup> Hilliard, *English as a Vocation*, p. 148.

<sup>84</sup> Raymond Williams, 'Culture is Ordinary', in *The Routledge Critical and Cultural Theory Reader*, eds. Neil Badmington and Julia Thomas (Abingdon: Routledge, 2008), pp. 82-94 (p. 84).

and writers they call – how comforting a label is! - angry young men'.<sup>85</sup> This reference to the 'angry young men' movement, even as the label itself is critiqued, positions this emergent literary culture as a challenge to existing hierarchies that Williams welcomes.

It is not only that post-war Britain saw an increasing backlash against an idea of cultural value based on traditional class hierarchies, but rather that culture itself became the terrain on which changes to the class system were marked and evaluated. John Kirk describes culture as 'a key arena for contestation' in post-war Britain, arguing that '[c]lass as economic category, or political entity - strongly expressed in 1940s' writing - yields to class as primarily cultural identity, thus the insistence by both Williams and Hoggart on the validity of working-class culture'.<sup>86</sup> Irene Morra argues that the 'larger postwar moment responded to prominent concerns about contemporary creativity and culture by enforcing what has come to be a prevailing valuation of the national, performative role of the arts', highlighting events like the Festival of Britain (1951) and the Coronation of Queen Elizabeth II (1953) as fostering the idea of a unified national post-war identity through performance.<sup>87</sup> These events, and particularly the 'New Elizabethanism' rhetoric surrounding the Coronation, identified in the performing arts a means of collective identity that, as Morra notes, 'depended on the stratification of the national audience, on the maintenance of social structures to ensure an art through which to represent and articulate the historical reality (and exuberance) of a totalizing whole'.<sup>88</sup> Within such a conservative schema, cultural expression becomes primarily 'a performative - and thus sufficient - manifestation of a social or political agency', a remark which reiterates the importance of cultural representation as the dominant arena for class politics during the post-war era.<sup>89</sup>

The cultural landscape of post-war Britain was thus a beleaguered and contested terrain, with competing and contrasting ideas regarding the value of artistic culture existing in tension with one another. The significant political interventions that

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<sup>85</sup> Williams, 'Culture is Ordinary', p. 84.

<sup>86</sup> Kirk, *Twentieth-century Writing and the British Working Class*, p. 59.

<sup>87</sup> Irene Morra, 'History Play: People, Pageant and the New Shakespearean Age', in *The New Elizabethan Age: Culture, Society and National Identity after World War II*, eds. Irene Morra and Rob Gossedge (London: I.B. Tauris, 2016), pp. 308-336 (pp. 311-2).

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*, 320.

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*, 329.

produced the welfare-system gestured towards egalitarianism, but the traditional class hierarchies which they sought to challenge were ideological as well as material. This thesis does not seek to claim, therefore, that conservative definitions of culture were replaced with egalitarian alternatives and that this produced a simple shift from class-specific depictions of homosexuality to those from across the social landscape. Instead, it focuses on how the frictions between these various discourses produced complex, and sometimes contradictory, responses. Hilliard's observation that the 1950s were characterised by 'a double helix of deference and democratization' is applicable more broadly to the first few decades of the post-war era and is useful here for describing how these texts are not simplistic reflections of a specific ideological standpoint but are instead shaped by complex negotiations between dominant and emergent ideas relating to class, culture and sexuality in their historical moment.<sup>90</sup> The extent to which this relationship was examined or critiqued was often dependent on the history, status and audience of the form through which it was explored.

### Structure

The division of the thesis into three chapters reflects its methodological approach to examine how formal conventions of structure, reputation and genre delineated homosexual representation in the post-war era. Stuart Laing's methodology in *Representations of Working-Class Life 1957-1964* seeks to avoid 'that kind of generalising "cultural history" in which the institutional determinations and formal characteristics of different cultural practices are dissolved as a consequence of the pressure to seek thematic similarities' and, instead, he places emphasis on 'the significant variations between forms of representation in the handling of common issues placed on their agenda by general political and social developments'.<sup>91</sup> This thesis likewise argues that while stylistic, thematic and generic similarities across literature, stage drama and film can be used to note recurring patterns, a focus on form is vital for a comprehensive and considered analysis. Williams's maxim that 'finding the form is literally finding the content' underscores the tendency for structural conventions to dictate a text's approach to its subject.<sup>92</sup> Each chapter will

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<sup>90</sup> Hilliard, *English as a Vocation*, p. 250.

<sup>91</sup> Stuart Laing, *Representations of Working-Class Life 1957-1964* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1986), p.1.

<sup>92</sup> Williams, *The Long Revolution*, p. 26.

begin by contextualising the chosen form in relation to the timeline of the thesis before working through specific examples.

Selecting relevant texts from the broad and diverse range of the era can present difficulties, but, once again, Williams's work offers an approach which seeks to elucidate broader patterns while acknowledging necessary limitations: 'Lines indeed have to be drawn, to make any account possible, but it is always necessary to see ourselves as drawing them, and willing to redraw them, rather than to suppose that the marks on this one of many maps are hard features, of similar content and isolation, on the ground'.<sup>93</sup> The chosen texts should, therefore, be seen as those which are particularly illuminating examples of the argument, rather than any attempt to categorise the vast field of post-war cultural representation into a hierarchy of significance. The thesis analyses established and recognisable texts, which have historically attracted critical interest, alongside more obscure works, in order to expand common understandings of the era, its literature and, specifically, its engagement with the relationship between homosexuality and class. Richard Dyer argues that '[t]he traditions of proletarian and non-white queer sub-cultures and lifestyles are indisputable and, as already noted, were foundational for the development of [an] idea of queerness, yet they keep disappearing from view in dominant constructions of queerness'.<sup>94</sup> The structure of this project seeks to ensure that the constructions which did engage with these more diverse forms of representation are acknowledged and accorded the academic attention that they deserve.

The thesis begins with an examination of several post-war novels which are united in their shared focus on examining the relationship between homosexuality, class and culture in a specific post-war context. While some authors used the established association between homosexuality, class experiences and artistic culture to foster exclusive forms of representation, others were keen to examine how this relationship was being challenged and undermined by social developments. The emergence of the 'Angry Young Men' movement was likewise predicated on an acknowledgement

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<sup>93</sup> Raymond Williams, 'British Film History: New Perspectives', in *British Cinema History*, eds. James Curran and Vincent Porter (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1983), pp.9-23 (p. 10).

<sup>94</sup> Richard Dyer, *The Culture of Queers* (London: Routledge, 2002), p. 6.

of this correlation, but it was used to critique a dominant cultural establishment by aligning it with effeminacy. The chapter concludes by examining texts which offer alternatives to the narrow range of class experiences featured in the 'Angry' novels and which demonstrate an interactional approach to their depictions of same-sex desire.

The second chapter focuses on stage drama, opening with an outline of the historical association between the theatrical space and homosexuality through the transgressive possibilities of performance, the association of the West End with illicit sexualities and, most significantly, the long shadow of Oscar Wilde. It therefore begins with the assumption that post-war discourses were negotiating an established relationship between the stage and same-sex desire that was explored, challenged or reworked in a range of texts from the era. Theatrical censorship, enforced by the Lord Chamberlain, produced a more repressive culture for depictions of homosexuality which required a stronger emphasis on extra-textual elements (such as performance) to produce queer connotations. The chapter traces an example of this style to the gradual emergence of openly acknowledged homosexual representation on the stage. The 'Angry Young Men' label, which had originated in the theatre, was defined partly as a retaliation against the perceived dominance of a theatrical elite preventing the emergence of serious drama. This backlash was often articulated through an association of a narrow range of class experiences on the mainstream with an effete, conservative aesthetic that was frequently, implicitly and explicitly, linked to the sexuality of key theatrical figures.

The final chapter examines several films from the era to argue that the history of homosexuality in British film during this period is more expansive than the general emphasis on Basil Dearden's *Victim* (1960) implies. Through analysing a diverse section of texts, it proposes that there were alternative depictions of same-sex desire that have been historically marginalised because they do not conform to the most common stereotypes regarding homosexual representation or because they fail to adhere to the injunction to be 'serious' about the topic. This chapter also examines the adaptation of several 'Angry' texts from novels or plays in order to posit that the filmed versions were responding to the mythology of the label in a manner that often refigured their approach to the relationship between homosexuality.

As the brief summaries above indicate, the organisation of the chapters allows for the exploration of differing formal expectations and conventions while maintaining a continuous preoccupation with the interplay between the varying definitions of culture and their relationship to class across representations of homosexuality.

## **Culture Clashes: The Post-War Novel, Class and Same-Sex Desire**

### Introduction

As we have seen, homosexual representation in Britain has, since the late nineteenth century, often been intertwined with specific class experiences. These class experiences, however, are also closely linked to certain ideas of 'culture' and this connection is manifest across the many, and overlapping, definitions of the amorphous term. Oscar Wilde, who provided the most recognizable homosexual stereotype following his conviction, was also an outspoken advocate for aestheticism, and the apparent propensity of homosexual men for contributing to, or appreciating, art was used by emergent sexologists in their nascent taxonomies. The cultural repository of antiquity provided a source for homosexual men to articulate and justify their desires from texts which they had often learnt in the culture of public schools and/or universities and which were likewise perceived as particularly amenable to the cultivation of same-sex passions. The invoking of varying definitions of culture, whether referring to 'the 'best' that's been thought or written', 'a kind of historical tradition which relates works to the traditions and societies in which they appeared' or 'a description of a particular way of life, which expresses meanings not only in art but also institutions and ordinary behaviour', was a formative element in the tendency to align homosexual representation with specific class experiences.<sup>1</sup> The most perceptible, widespread or infamous forms of depiction often involved a link to certain kinds of cultural activities conditional upon privilege, access and awareness. The development of this association in the post-war era, in which both prevailing definitions of class identities and cultural standards would undergo significant change, is evident across several novels from the era. They differ in style, tone and genre, but are united by a shared thematic and narrative interest in examining how an established association between homosexuality, class and artistic culture might be threatened, reworked or undermined in the light of social developments. This chapter combines the individual close reading of novels with analysis of relevant historical contexts, linking both to their position within broader cultural and metacultural discourses. Debates pertaining to literary culture, whilst often appearing to be primarily a matter of subjective preferences, are, as Andrzej Gąsiorek notes 'frequently underpinned by covert political assumptions' and this

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<sup>1</sup> Williams, *The Long Revolution*, p. 61.

chapter examines the relative cultural positions of the novels discussed in order to make this connection between text and context explicit.<sup>2</sup>

Evelyn Waugh, in *Brideshead Revisited* (1945) exploits the established association between homosexuality and artistic culture to argue for the value of an elitist social order which it perceives as threatened by approaching post-war egalitarianism; while it evinces an ambiguity as to whether homosexuality can survive in conventional society beyond the spatial and temporal confines of interwar Oxford, it perceives it as a valued component within an exclusive cultural heritage. The novel itself becomes part of protecting this heritage, as representation becomes the means of preserving vanishing class hierarchies and their cultural contributions. Whether through the invigorating presence and artistic expertise of dandy-aesthete Anthony Blanche or the romantic friendship of Charles and Sebastian, same-sex desire is presented as a significant element of an elitist social order, but which is hermetically sealed within Waugh's novel and has little relevance for a post-war world and its eroded class hierarchies. Rodney Garland's *The Heart in Exile* (1953), on the other hand, demonstrates a self-conscious desire to subvert associations of homosexual representation with nostalgia and elitism by locating its depictions of same-sex desire both within its contemporary moment and across the class system, as well as invoking popular and mainstream forms of literature by adopting elements of the detective novel and the domestic romance. Garland sketches a broad and diverse homosexual culture in London but examines whether post-war social changes are assisting in undermining or reinforcing the historical significance of class within it. While he suggests that artistic culture, in the form of the novel, has the potential to offer new, sympathetic and more socially diverse forms of homosexual representation, Garland's narrative repeatedly depicts class difference as a predominant, and inescapable, element of post-war homosexual culture.

The chapter will then examine the notable significance of broader cultural debates on the relationship between class and sexuality, primarily through the movement which eventually came to be known as the 'Angry Young Men'. This disparate group of authors was perceived to be attacking the dominant cultural establishment for its valuing of artistic pretensions over authentic representations of post-war Britain. The

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<sup>2</sup> Andrzej Gąsiorek, *Post-war British Fiction: Realism and After* (London: Edward Arnold, 1995), p.4.

established link between artistic culture, homosexuality and elitism was exploited by writers, critics and commentators to present the literary establishment as effeminate and snobbish, and to position this emergent movement as a masculine and contemporary engagement with social reality. This movement was often hailed as promoting a more diverse range of working-class experiences in mainstream culture, but such representations were overwhelmingly focused on the heterosexual working-class male.

Andrew Salkey's *Escape to an Autumn Pavement* (1960) critiques the available dominant narratives for depicting both post-war class experiences and homosexuality in its exploration of Johnnie Sobert, whose sense of alienation and anger is mediated considerably by his position as a middle-class Jamaican experiencing various, and intersecting, forms of prejudice as a lower-class Londoner. The novel critiques a tendency to compartmentalize facets of identity pertaining to class and sexuality, suggesting that both are intersected by race and nation to an extent that mainstream society does not wish to acknowledge. Gillian Freeman's *The Leather Boys* (1961) depicts a same-sex relationship emerging from within a working-class environment between two teenagers, providing a specifically homosexual slant to the emphasis on alienated youth and disaffected working-classes associated with the 'Angry' movement. The boys struggle to position their romantic feelings for one another in relation to an understanding of same-sex desire based around fleeting and conditional sexual acts, their investment in the masculine atmosphere of a biker gang and their distaste for effeminacy. Freeman's novel provides an example of a text attempting to shift homosexual representation away from class-specific settings, but the narrative ultimately reinforces that their relationship cannot thrive in such a context. Through an examination of these four texts, alongside a discussion of the significant impact of the 'Angry Young Men' movement on literary culture more broadly, it is possible to outline a recurrent preoccupation in the post-war novel which returns frequently to Sinfield's 'faultline' of class, culture and sexuality – but with notably different results each time.

Waugh Memorial: Class, Culture and Cults in *Brideshead Revisited*

In *Brideshead Revisited* (1945), Evelyn Waugh depicts homosexuality within the spatial and temporal confines of adolescence at Oxford University, entwining its representation with a social and cultural elitism to which it implicitly contributes through an association with aesthetic beauty. Written as a defensive response to wartime social levelling, and the possibility of further egalitarianism in the looming post-war world, the novel suggests that valuable cultural production is contingent upon traditional class hierarchies. Within this dominant ideological schema, it implicitly endorses various forms of same-sex desire for contributing to this threatened cultural heritage. For protagonist Charles Ryder, his romantic friendship with Sebastian Flyte and his association with dandy-aesthete Anthony Blanche are emotional, spiritual and aesthetically enriching experiences that are conditional upon the privileged contexts which enable them. Waugh locates these depictions of homosexuality in an idealized past, suggesting that the social context which produced them will disappear as it is undermined by post-war social change, but similarly suggesting that cultural representation itself can become a repository for these class values and their significance.

The novel's nostalgia is a reactionary response to an egalitarianism that Waugh identified in his contemporary context. Waugh's 1959 preface to the text states that it was 'a souvenir of the Second World War rather than of the twenties or of the thirties, with which it ostensibly deals', a remark which reiterates the centrality of its wartime context to its narrative.<sup>3</sup> Charles may tell the reader that his 'theme is memory', but there is more at stake here than simply reliving bygone days; his narrative instead appropriates nostalgia in order to make political statements about its own historical moment (p.215) Waugh presents a romanticised version of interwar Britain as part of a defensive gesture against the repudiation of elitism and the lowering of cultural standards that he perceives in wartime social changes. Developments for post-war Britain were already underway during the conflict itself, indicating a degree of social levelling and egalitarianism hitherto unseen and, with such changes suggesting the eventual emergence of a more financially stable and better educated lower class, the

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<sup>3</sup> Evelyn Waugh, *Brideshead Revisited* (London: Penguin, 2000), p. 8. All further references are to this edition and are provided parenthetically in the body of the text.

implicit challenge to traditional class hierarchies was evident.<sup>4</sup> Sinfield locates a dominant attitude among the post-war intelligentsia that ‘the 1945 Labour Government was committed to egalitarian reforms which seemed to threaten the class fraction that had sustained literature’, a stance Waugh presciently adopts in his text.<sup>5</sup> He was certainly aware that the novel might be perceived as a rebuttal to this proposed levelling - describing the reviews as ‘adulatory except where they were embittered by class resentment’ – and in the novel, he depicts an emergent post-war society in explicitly pejorative terms.<sup>6</sup> While it would be reductive to claim that the narrator and author are indistinguishable, Waugh evinces an evident sympathy for Charles’s perspective which, combined with the biographical information outlined above, suggests the author’s general validation of his protagonist’s attitudes towards class hierarchies.

This attitude is manifest most potently through symbolic figures introduced at the very beginning of the text: the aristocratic estate of Brideshead, former home of the Flyte family, and Charles’s boorish deputy, Hooper; one is a decaying remnant of former glory and the other a gloomy portent of what is to come. In the 1920s, when Charles first visits Brideshead, he describes it as ‘a world of its own of peace and love and beauty’ and the narrative focuses on scenes of privilege, luxury and leisure. Embedded in this vaunted depiction is an awareness of its impermanence; the title of the first chapter, ‘Et in Arcadio Ego’, evokes the sense of paradise lost. During the war, Brideshead is requisitioned by soldiers who drive lorries into the balustrade and throw cigarettes into its ornate fountain (p. 327). While Charles bristles at this mindless destruction of beauty, he reserves his greater ire for Hooper, who represents a far more insidious form of cultural decline. Waugh explicitly signposts Hooper’s metonymic function when Charles describes him as ‘a symbol of young England’ and subsequently characterizes him as stupid, boorish and vulgar. Waugh’s reference to Hooper’s ‘flat, Midland accent’ also suggests his social position in a

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<sup>4</sup> *Social Insurance and Allied Services* better known as the Beveridge Report, was published in 1942 and, the following year, the Government voted to act on its findings of a national insurance system after the War. In 1944, the Butler Education Act provided free secondary education for all pupils and raised the school leaving age to fifteen.

<sup>5</sup> Alan Sinfield, ‘Culture, Consensus and Difference: Angus Wilson to Alan Hollinghurst’, in *British Culture of the Post-War: An Introduction to Literature and Society, 1945-1999*, eds. Alastair Davies and Alan Sinfield (Hoboken: Taylor and Francis, 2013), pp.83-102 (p. 84).

<sup>6</sup> Waugh, *The Diaries of Evelyn Waugh*, ed. Michael Davie (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1976), p. 628.

manner that entwines an unflattering depiction with class snobbery (p.13) Charles combines the house and Hooper in an extended metaphor in which Hooper's arrival signals the ruination of the aristocratic estate and the beauty that Waugh perceives within it. He claims that the original house was 'enriched and extended' across the generations 'until, in sudden frost, came the age of Hooper' (p.331). Hooper is representative of a general lowering of standards in the same way that Brideshead represents traditional class hierarchies and a way of life that Charles values. In both cases, it is not so much about the individuals, (indeed, as Annan succinctly observes, Waugh 'romanticized the Flyte family - though, it is worth pointing out, none of the individual Flytes') but rather their broader symbolic resonance within a social hierarchy.<sup>7</sup>

Waugh articulates the difference between Charles and Hooper in terms which justify class snobbery in terms of cultural distinction. It is by evoking a particular idea of culture that Waugh most successfully delineates, and implicitly defends, Charles's elitism. Charles uses references to a literary canon to both articulate and reinforce a fundamental distinction between them:

Hooper had wept often, but never for Henry's speech on St Crispin's day, nor for the epitaph at Thermopylae [...] a hundred such names whose trumpet-notes, even now in my sere and lawless state, called to me irresistibly across the intervening years with all the clarity and sense of boyhood, sounded in vain to Hooper' (pp.14-15).

Charles constructs an idealised cultural heritage from which Hooper is excluded, and the poorer for it, but that distinction is produced through educational differences and thus informed by class. The invocation of cultural difference is presented as an inalienable marker of social distinction. When, as Raymond Williams notes, 'culture' can be used as both an evaluative term for the best creative productions of a society and an anthropological register of a social group's activities, the slippage can be exploited so that the cultural activities perceived as most valuable become entwined with the pursuits and interests of specific classes. Within such a conception, class hierarchies become a necessary component in the production of cultural excellence. Williams notes that, within such a limited idea of culture, those in the dominant class would 'argue that, if their class position goes, the culture goes too; that standards depend on the restriction of a culture to the class which, since it has produced it,

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<sup>7</sup> Annan, *Our Age*, p. 222.

alone understands it'.<sup>8</sup> This idea is one that Waugh returns to throughout the novel; entwining social hierarchy and ideas of cultural value as part of its implicit critique of an irrevocable loss of 'culture' in the social levelling of wartime Britain. Eliot articulates a similar concept in *Notes Towards the Definition of Culture*, in which class privilege and a conveniently vague ambience combine to produce a beneficial function that cannot be equaled by educational reform. Eliot expresses dissatisfaction with the 'equality of opportunity' narrative underpinning post-war education policy and proposes that the historical successes of the English public school system 'were not brought about, either, by mere privilege; but by a happy combination of privilege and opportunity, [...] of which no Education Act can ever find the secret'.<sup>9</sup> In *Brideshead*, the precise delineations of the culture being valued are ambiguous; it is not simply wealth (because Julia Flyte's husband Rex Mottram is rich but an interloper to the aristocratic culture) and it is not entirely about education (because neither Charles nor Sebastian complete their Oxford studies), but, instead, a nebulous combination that relies on its lack of definition in order to perpetuate an elitism that is primarily a smokescreen for class snobbery.

This general validation of traditional class hierarchies and their cultural value is not incidental to Waugh's depiction of homosexuality but closely embedded within it. The novel presents same-sex desire as emerging from within the specific privileged context of interwar Oxford, both a product of, and contributing to, the culture that Waugh so evidently values. In *Our Age: The Generation that Made Post-war Britain*, Annan traces the emergence of what he calls 'The Cult of Homosexuality' in Oxford and Cambridge of the 1920s, in which embracing the performance of a type associated with homosexuality, or expressing same-sex desire, became 'a way of jolting respectable opinion and mocking the Establishment' because it 'had all the thrill of being illicit [...] and all the pleasure of being certain to outrage the older generation'.<sup>10</sup> Although viewed as rebellious, and counterproductive to a masculine public-school ethos at the time, Waugh suggests, from his vantage point in the 1940s, that this 'cult' was a generally beneficial element of the class and cultural context from which it emerged, and presents it as an enriching source of emotional,

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<sup>8</sup> Williams, *Culture and Society*, p. 420.

<sup>9</sup> Eliot, *Notes Towards the Definition of Culture*, p. 102.

<sup>10</sup> Annan, *Our Age*, p. 154.

spiritual and aesthetic pleasure for his protagonist. Charles, like Waugh, is not from the aristocratic background that he admires so fervently, but his interactions with this social set during his youth are both valuable and formative in a manner that becomes more pronounced in retrospect.

Sebastian Flyte and Anthony Blanche are both, through the 'cult' of homosexuality circulating in their Oxford milieu, able to be relatively liberated in their expressions of sexual difference in a manner that likewise attracts Charles. Sebastian and Blanche are frequently linked by other characters in a manner that suggest that they are both subversive, but to different degrees; Charles's cousin Jasper states that 'Flyte *may* be all right, but Anthony Blanche – now there's a man there's absolutely no excuse for', while Blanche himself subtly alludes to an affinity between himself and Sebastian when he tells Charles about an illicit relationship with a former tutor: 'The things he knew about me, which I thought no one – except possibly Sebastian – knew' (p. 43, 52). Sebastian's homosexuality is similarly implied in Charles's observation that his housemate Collins, 'who was reading Freud, had a number of technical terms to cover everything' when they view him around the campus, suggesting a psychosexual diagnosis for his behaviour (p. 30). Charles's association with these men signals his own sexual ambiguity. Blanche takes Charles to a 'queer' bar called The Blue Grotto and describes it to him as '[n]ot quite your milieu, my dear, but mine, I assure you' (p. 257). Blanche is aware of Charles's 'tastes' regarding same-sex desire but also suggests that he cannot articulate them in an explicit manner and thus a 'queer bar' is 'not quite' right for Charles (but, implicitly, not wholly wrong either). Charles can ostensibly distance himself from explicit accusations of homosexuality but is nonetheless depicted by Waugh as heavily influenced by the homosexual subculture within Oxford.

His relationship with Sebastian is afforded significant narrative and thematic significance through Waugh's deployment of the 'romantic friendship' trope that was already associated with elitist expressions of same-sex intimacy. Halperin identifies the romantic friendship as predating the emergence of the homosexual as a distinct and pathologized identity in the late nineteenth century and defines it as emphasizing 'equality, mutuality, and reciprocity in love between men [...] who

occupy the same social rank, usually an elite one'.<sup>11</sup> This dynamic is not necessarily defined by the manifestation of a particular, stereotyped identity and has thus confused subsequent critics who expected more direct clarification to confirm the homosexual inclinations of these characters. Peter G. Christensen locates a tendency in academic approaches to Sebastian and Charles's relationship of 'denouncing it, deeroticizing it, or infantilizing it' and one particular example is provided by David Bittner's question: '[I]f Waugh wanted to present Sebastian as a homosexual character, why doesn't he drawn [sic] him in the full lineaments of the role as he does Anthony Blanche, "the aesthete par excellence?"'<sup>12</sup> Such a reading ignores that the romantic friendship in *Brideshead* is an alternative to the Wildean stereotype. Waugh's emphasis on the homosexual connotations of their relationship is signaled by intertextual references embedded throughout the narrative. Charles owns a copy of A.E. Housman's *A Shropshire Lad* (1896), a homoerotic text that Annan describes 'as more influential than Dorian Gray', while the name Sebastian recalls a Saint who, as Martin B. Lockerd notes, 'was established as the most prominent figure in fin de siècle queer hagiography, excepting the Virgin Mary'.<sup>13</sup> Through specific allusions then, Waugh implies the homoerotic quality to their friendship which is bolstered and sustained by a specific context.

The novel presents the physical intimacies and romantic gestures that characterize their relationship - Sebastian buying Charles flowers, their walking arm-in-arm through campus and sunbathing nude together – as tolerated within the homosocial context of elitist education. Lockerd notes that *Brideshead* 'presents queer desire—and homosexual experimentation in particular—as part of an imperfect but potentially enriching element in a process of spiritual maturation' but it is worth acknowledging that this enriching experience is available primarily because of a context that allows it

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<sup>11</sup> Halperin, *How to do the History of Homosexuality*, p. 118.

<sup>12</sup> Peter G. Christensen, 'Homosexuality in *Brideshead* Revisited: "Something quite remote from anything the [builder] intended"', in *"A Handful of Mischief": New Essays on Evelyn Waugh*, eds. Donat Gallagher, Ann Pasternak Slater and John Howard Wilson (Lanham: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2011), pp. 137-159 (p. 138); David Bittner, 'Sebastian and Charles – More than Friends?', *Evelyn Waugh Newsletter and Studies*, 24:2 (Autumn 1990), 1-2 (p.1).

<sup>13</sup> Martin B. Lockerd, 'Decadent Arcadias, Wild(e) Conversions, and Queer Celibacies in *Brideshead* Revisited', *Modern Fiction Studies*, 64:2 (Summer 2018), 239-263 (p.251).

to blossom.<sup>14</sup> Charles's description of his pastoral escape with Sebastian combines an idyllic scene of luxury and languor with an aesthetic intensity underlined by their physical and emotional intimacy:

On a sheep-cropped knoll under a clump of elms we ate the strawberries and drank all the wine – as Sebastian promised, they were delicious together – and we lit fat, Turkish cigarettes and lay on our backs, Sebastian's eyes on the leaves above him, mine on his profile, while the blue-grey smoke rose, untroubled by any wind, to the blue-green shadows of foliage, and the sweet scent of the tobacco merged with the sweet summer scents around us and the fumes of the sweet, golden wine seemed to lift us a finger's breadth above the turf and hold us suspended. (p.26)

In his diaries, Waugh describes the 'motto of privilege' as 'Liberty. Leisure. Privacy' and these elements are all present in Charles's idealized depiction which combines conspicuous consumption with pastoral imagery to produce an elevating aesthetic experience. Contained within it is Charles's lingering gaze on Sebastian, reiterating Waugh's association of same-sex desire with this specific social and cultural context.

Waugh idealises their relationship as part of Charles's nostalgia but he suggests that such relationships are, and must be, short-lived because of the transient context which produces them. The ability of the friends to indulge in forms of same-sex desires that would usually court social opprobrium and scandal is a consequence of their youth, privilege and the Oxford milieu. They are identified by two prostitutes as 'only fairies', but Sebastian's retort ('That was our extreme youth') highlights that the perceptibility of same-sex desire accumulating around them can be dismissed with a reference to youthful folly (p. 112). Cara, mistress to Sebastian's father, acknowledges Charles and Sebastian's 'romantic friendship' but clarifies that they 'are very good if they do not last too long' (p. 98). Her remark highlights that such relationships were tolerated on the condition that they were temporary and, more importantly, toed the line between homosociality and homoeroticism. Tison Pugh notes that '[a]lthough the romantic friendship could assume a decidedly homoerotic cast and might involve acts of same-sex sexuality [...] [if] a young man matured into a relationship with a woman, the romantic friendship of his youth could be seen as a healthy step in the progress towards adulthood'.<sup>15</sup> Charles completes this transition successfully, but Waugh lingers on the ongoing significance of Sebastian in

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<sup>14</sup> Lockerd, 'Decadent Arcadias, Wild(e) Conversions, and Queer Celibacies in *Brideshead Revisited*', p. 240.

<sup>15</sup> Tison Pugh, 'Romantic Friendship, Homosexuality, and Evelyn Waugh's *Brideshead Revisited*', *English Language Notes*, 38:4 (2001), 64–72 (pp. 66-7).

Charles's life and the extent to which his friend informs his future heterosexual relationships. He lists 'missing Sebastian' as a reason for marrying his wife and, more significantly, Julia, Sebastian's sister, eventually becomes Charles's lover (p. 245). Waugh implies that Julia is a heterosexual substitute for his desire for Sebastian by their physical similarity. During their first encounter, Charles notes that '[h]er voice was Sebastian's and his her way of speaking' (p. 73). Later in the text, Charles and Julia discuss Sebastian; when she asks: 'You loved him, didn't you?', he responds: 'Oh yes. He was the forerunner' (p. 245). The novel suggests that, in order for Charles to progress, he must transfer his homoerotic desires to an acceptable heterosexual alternative, but the narrative nonetheless lingers on the significance of Sebastian's role in this trajectory. Waugh's depiction of the continuing importance of Charles's romantic friendship into his adult life suggests that, even if such relationship cannot persist, their formative value is acknowledged in fond memories.

If Charles and Sebastian's romantic friendship suggests the spiritual and emotional benefits of same-sex desire, then Anthony Blanche reiterates the artistic value of a homosexual style associated with aestheticism and art. Blanche's characterization owes much to the dandy stereotype, a figure with a long, and class-specific, history, but one which had become particularly associated with Oscar Wilde and thus had accrued homosexual connotations. In *The Dandy: Brummell to Beerbohm* (1960), Ellen Moers traces the dandy from the Regency onwards, suggesting that the figure emerged from a stereotype of aristocratic decadence and an emphasis on refinement which 'comprised shadings of sensitivity, delicacy, exclusivism and effeminacy'.<sup>16</sup> Moers outlines the figure's evolution across the nineteenth century, moving from its English origins to being embraced and developed significantly in France through figures like Count D'Orsay, Jules Barbey d'Aureville and Charles Baudelaire. She then acknowledges the significance that Wilde played in disseminating a version of dandyism which was particularly associated with aestheticism: 'When Wilde proclaimed that "we can forgive a man for making a useful thing as long as he does not admire it...All art is quite useless", he demonstrated that his way to dandyism lay along the aesthetic path'.<sup>17</sup> The aesthete-

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<sup>16</sup> Moers, *The Dandy: From Brummell to Beerbohm*, p. 20.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 301.

dandy, as exemplified through Wilde, was also exposed as a homosexual at the turn of the century, fusing these elements into a dominant stereotype.

Waugh's characterization of Blanche evokes this figure through parallels with Wilde's persona, an association with artistic subcultures and the continental influences of the dandy figure. His designation as an "aesthete" par excellence' invokes Wilde, and the scandalous connotations of the terms are reinscribed by Charles's assertion that it is 'a byword for iniquity' (p. 34). Anthony's indebtedness to Wilde is also reinforced by his love of aphorisms - 'it's so banal saying you have not read the book of the moment, if you haven't (p. 49) - and his delight in subverting expectations: 'his vices flourished less in the pursuit of pleasure than in the wish to shock' (p. 47). Waugh uses references to homosexual writers and creatives in order to imply Blanche's sexuality: 'he dined with Proust and Gide and was on closer terms with Cocteau and Diaghilev; Firbank sent him his novels with fervent inscriptions' (p. 47). It is significant that most of the men mentioned here are not English as Blanche's nationality is a key element of his characterisation. Annan argues that 'the cult [of homosexuality] was European' and 'flourished in Proust's Paris, Freud's Vienna and in the Berlin of Sacher-Masoch', an association embedded in the text through an emphasis on Blanche's foreignness.<sup>18</sup> Charles describes him as 'wholly exotic' and Blanche pointedly warns him to 'remember I am not English' (p. 34, 258). For Charles, Blanche provides an exuberant, and enriching, presence that is nonetheless distanced from the English Oxford milieu: 'in the midst of his polished exhibitions I was often reminded of an urchin I had once seen in Naples, capering derisively, with obscene, unambiguous gestures, before a party of English tourists' (p. 47). Despite its association with a European culture distanced from the ethos of the English public school, Charles nonetheless retrospectively acknowledges Blanche as a valued element in a social context that is now threatened by post-war change.

Waugh suggests that this elite educational context provides a figure like Blanche with a means to express himself with relative freedom. Blanche tells Charles an anecdote in which he can both acknowledge his sexuality and use its scandalous connotations to unnerve more conservative undergraduates into awkward silence. When a group

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<sup>18</sup> Annan, *Our Age*, p. 135.

of students appear at his window to accuse him of 'unnatural vices', Blanche replies 'I may be inverted but I am not insatiable. Come back when you are alone' (p.50). Blanche's deployment of the psychosexual term 'invert' shocks his attackers and, when he offers them the chance to watch him bathe in the fountain, they look a 'little foolish' and beat a hasty retreat (p. 50). This scene demonstrates Blanche's ability to claim a homosexual identity, flaunt his wit and cultivate awe, if not quite respect. It is not that Waugh suggests that homosexuality is unequivocally and openly accepted at Oxford, but rather that the general culture of aesthetic appreciation, homosocial intimacies and the prevalence of the Wildean dandy stereotype produces a context in which figures such as Blanche can thrive – even if only temporarily.

Blanche's artistic appreciation and understanding serve a particularly useful purpose for Charles in his own artistic endeavours. When Blanche re-emerges into Charles's life, he provides advice regarding Charles's pictures and correctly identifies when he has lost his artistic vision. The aesthetic appreciation associated with homosexual men thus provides evidence of their value to an elite social order, but their acceptance in that world is precarious and conditional. Blanche eventually transgresses the boundaries of propriety within Oxford but, through Charles's evident regret for his absence, Waugh suggests that he served a purpose within the milieu that is felt more keenly in retrospect. When Blanche is sent down for an undisclosed scandal, Charles likens him to a theatrical manager abandoning his company. This metaphor implies that Blanche's function was to invigorate Charles and his contemporaries into embodying an ancestral lineage befitting, and justifying, their present-day privilege: 'For a few happy hours of rehearsal, for a few ecstatic minutes of performance, they had played splendid parts, their own great ancestors, the famous paintings they were thought to resemble [...] now it was over and in the bleak light of day they must go back to their homes; to the husband who came to London too often, to the lover who lost at cards, and to the child who grew up too fast' (p. 104). His departure thus signals a decisive shift which is articulated in language of a claustrophobic finality: 'He had taken something away with him [...] he had locked a door and hung the key on his chain; and all his friends, among whom he had always been a stranger, needed him now' (p.104). The dandy-aesthete figure, if a foreign influence, is nonetheless implicitly presented as a valuable element of elitist culture because of his association with art, culture and the

reimagining of a privileged past. During their reunions, Charles comments on Anthony's apparent agelessness: '[h]e had not changed from when I last saw him; not, indeed, from when I first saw him' (p. 256). He becomes symbolic of Charles's irrecoverable past, representing both the lost idyll of Oxford and of same-sex desire more broadly.

Blanche's sporadic reappearances in the text suggest, however, that he retains an ongoing significance to the novel's valuation of the elitist social and cultural context with which Charles associates him. Earlier in the text, Blanche describes Charles as an 'artist' but in doing so articulates a fundamental distinction between them: 'And, you, dear Charles, if you will understand me, are *not* exquisite. I am; Sebastian, in a kind of way, is exquisite, but the artist is an eternal type, solid, purposeful, observant' (pp.52-3). His designation of himself and Sebastian as 'exquisite' in a way that Charles is not hints at their embodiment of a specific aristocratic value that he does not possess, but Blanche does suggest that Charles, as an artist, can instead be 'purposeful' and 'observant'. The artist's role is to capture the 'exquisite' culture that men like Blanche and Sebastian represent, which Charles does in the novel by painting aristocratic houses as they are destroyed in the material world.<sup>19</sup> This committing of an endangered culture to art, or indeed by suggesting it can now only be accessed through artistic representation, mirrors Waugh's approach to his novel; his depiction of a vanishing milieu is his way of preserving its values.

*Brideshead Revisited* filters a nostalgia for traditional class hierarchies through the valuation of elite cultures, reflecting the anxieties of its historical moment, but it also engages with homosexuality as part of this heritage. The romantic friendship of Charles and Sebastian can only exist in this privileged idyll of Oxford, relying on the specific factors of age, class and education that provide its context. Charles then progresses from this relationship into a heterosexual adulthood, but he remains sentimentally attached to the past. Anthony Blanche offers a more recognisable representation of homosexuality, evoking a dandy-aesthete persona within a European literary context, but he is likewise removed from Oxford and returns to the

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<sup>19</sup> 'When the water-holes were dry people sought to drink at the mirage. After my first exhibition I was called to all parts of the country to make portraits of houses that were soon to be deserted or debased; indeed, my arrival seemed often to be only a few paces ahead of the auctioneer's, a presage of doom' (p. 216).

foreign climates from whence he came. The value of Sebastian Flyte and Anthony Blanche is evident in their ability to provoke an aesthetic, emotional and spiritual reaction in Charles, but the novel implicitly suggests that they can only be recovered through memory and that they have no role in looming post-war egalitarianism and the dreaded 'age of Hooper'.

Waugh had, however, been rash in deciding that the Second World War heralded the dissolution of traditional class hierarchies; in a 1959 preface to *Brideshead*, he noted with some satisfaction that 'the English aristocracy has maintained its identity to a degree that then seemed impossible' and that the 'advance of Hooper has been held up on several points' (Preface, 8). Sinfield's observation that 'the leisure-class idea of 'good' culture maintained its dominance, though the class did not' succinctly encapsulates the sense in which rapid political and legislative developments led to significant changes in British society, but the ideologies of elitism represented within *Brideshead* proved far more resilient.<sup>20</sup> While certain ideas about class and culture embedded within the novel remained impervious to the egalitarian impulses of the welfare state, its depiction of homosexuality as tacitly accepted within specific settings would become particularly anachronistic as homosexuality became increasingly visible as a social issue. Annan describes the historic opposition in Oxford between the athletic 'hearties' and the effeminate 'aesthetes' and notes that 'by the fifties the hearties were in a position to fling the aesthetes not into the fountain but into prison'.<sup>21</sup> This changed social context, in which there is both awareness of rapid social change and resistance to it, is evident in Rodney Garland's *The Heart in Exile*.

#### The Novel Approach: Citizenship, Class Difference and Social Change in *The Heart in Exile*

Whereas Waugh looks backwards to explore same-sex desire, *The Heart in Exile* depicts homosexuality as part of its contemporary moment in order to examine several issues pertinent to social changes of the post-war era. The novel is both a product of, and invested in exploring, a changed historical context; the rising arrests for, and media reporting of, homosexuality combined with nascent sociological discourses to present it as a significant, and urgent, political issue. The novel's focus

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<sup>20</sup> Sinfield, p. 57.

<sup>21</sup> Annan, *Our Age*, p. 171.

on a broad and diverse homosexual subculture in 1950s London is part of its repudiation of the elitism that characterized novels like *Brideshead*, but class remains a continual source of tension and anxiety within the narrative, both for narrator Dr Tony Page and the identities, desires and relationships that he encounters. Garland also evinces a self-conscious awareness of the importance of the novel form itself to depictions of homosexuality, albeit in a markedly different manner to Waugh. *Brideshead* suggested that the cultural value of an elite social order could be preserved through the novel form, but Garland views the novel as a means to disseminate a humanizing, non-threatening and affirmative portrayal of homosexuality. The generic styles that the novel invokes, primarily the detective narrative and the domestic romance, are popular and mainstream, but also linked to ideas of definitive resolution and a restoration of order. Ultimately, however, the novel's fixation on the complex relationship between class and homosexuality in post-war British society belies the acceptance of any such easy resolution.

*The Heart in Exile* is the product of a wider context in which a growing awareness of homosexuality prompted a greater focus on its threat as a social problem. Matt Houlbrook charts the sudden spike in metropolitan arrests for homosexual offences following the end of the war, 'remaining throughout the 1950s twice as high as the interwar level', and explicitly links it to 'the Met's return to peacetime operations'.<sup>22</sup> The exposure from such incidents led to a growing moral panic in national newspapers; Douglas Warth's 'Evil Men' articles criticised the 'natural British tendency to pass over anything unpleasant in scornful silence' as 'providing cover for an unnatural vice which is getting a dangerous grip on this country'.<sup>23</sup> Responses like Warth's article presented homosexuals as a threat to the broader social fabric of post-war Britain and Chris Waters charts a contemporaneous 'shift from what many increasingly believed to be a narrow interest in the psychological anatomy of the individual to a much broader interest in the social dynamics of the group and in the larger social world the homosexual inhabited'.<sup>24</sup> This approach encouraged further discussion of the topic and, although it created greater scrutiny for queer men, it also

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<sup>22</sup> Houlbrook, *Queer London*, p. 34.

<sup>23</sup> Warth, 'Evil Men', 25 May 1952.

<sup>24</sup> Waters, 'The Homosexual as a Social Being in Britain, 1945-1968', p. 685.

provided a discursive space for homosexuality that had not existed before and an opportunity to counter the most alarmist representations.

The novel allows Garland to both critique post-war society for its oppression of same-sex desire while depicting a protagonist who can counteract the most negative stereotypes associated with the label. Through Tony, Garland provides an example of a respectable, responsible and otherwise conventional citizen to repudiate associations with criminality and degeneracy. If *Brideshead Revisited* suggests that certain homosexual men provide a cultural value to the social order, then *The Heart in Exile* responds to its historic moment by focusing instead on moral value, evoked through the rhetoric of citizenship, and which remains linked to specific class values. This stressing of morality as a marker of social acceptability was evident in sexological texts from the era; Edward Glover argued that ‘some of our finest intellects have been manifestly homosexual in tendency [and] manifest homosexuals may exhibit an outstanding degree of ethical and moral responsibility’.<sup>25</sup> This assessment, designed to assuage anxiety about the social disruption of homosexuality, relied on specific qualities of discretion, respectability and responsibility.

*The Heart in Exile* was among several novels that emerged in the early 1950s as a response to the vilification of homosexual men and which offered alternative representations which stressed their fundamental decency. Angus Wilson’s *Hemlock and After* (1952) features homosexual writer Bernard Sands, whose desire to establish a state-sponsored writer’s retreat is undermined by the hypocritical machinations of others.<sup>26</sup> The villain of the story is Mrs Curry, a procuress for pedophiles and a far greater threat to society than Bernard. In Mary Renault’s *The Charioteer* (1953), protagonist Laurie Odell wrestles with his sexuality from boarding school onwards and demonstrates bravery as a soldier during the War. Upon accepting his homosexuality, he conducts his same-sex relationships with discretion and a consideration of morality.<sup>27</sup> These novels played a key role in challenging the dominant assumption that homosexual men undermined and threatened society; as Kate Houlden argues ‘[a]lthough few in number, [they] had the ‘respectable

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<sup>25</sup> Edward Glover, ‘Introduction’, in *Society and the Homosexual*, pp.11-16 (p. 13).

<sup>26</sup> Angus Wilson, *Hemlock and After* (London: Penguin, 1992).

<sup>27</sup> Mary Renault, *The Charioteer* (London: Virago, 2013).

homosexual' at their core'.<sup>28</sup> Tony, in *The Heart in Exile*, explicitly rejects an association between his sexuality and immorality: '[L]ike eighty per cent. or so of all inverts, I didn't consider myself an immoral person. I always felt that the invert was one of the least immoral people in a world which was more a-moral than immoral, perhaps because his own guilt feeling often forced him towards scrupulousness in all his dealings'.<sup>29</sup> Bernard, Laurie and Tony are all 'respectable' homosexuals, but they are also all middle-class and their emphasis on discretion can be interpreted as part of their vested interest in existing class hierarchies. The close link between the delineations of 'morality' and an implicit emphasis on social conformity is also evident in Westwood's text, in which he describes homosexuals who are 'decent, intelligent [and] as anxious to toe the social line as anyone'.<sup>30</sup> The moral defence of homosexual men was contingent, then, upon adherence to specific conventional values primarily produced through an emphasis on respectability that, as we shall see, was formed by class-specific ideas of citizenship.

Citizenship was a prominent and prevalent discourse in post-war Britain that had a particular resonance for certain homosexual men. The rhetoric surrounding the topic emerged primarily from the negotiation between individual and state produced by the welfare system of educational, medical and social reforms. T. H. Marshall, in *Citizenship and Social Class* (1948), alluded to this connection when he defined citizenship as a contract in which the citizen's rights were secured through duties and responsibilities and the concept was often invoked in post-war Britain to encourage community participation and adherence to (assumed) shared values.<sup>31</sup> The Festival of Britain, for example, encouraged nationwide events to coincide with its South Bank Exhibition and described them as 'spontaneous expressions of

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<sup>28</sup> Kate Houlden, 'Andrew Salkey, the British Home, and the Intimacies In-Between', *Interventions*, 15:1 (2013), 95-109 (p. 99).

<sup>29</sup> Rodney Garland, *The Heart in Exile* (London: Valancourt Books, 2014), p. 79. All further references are to this edition and are provided parenthetically in the body of the text.

<sup>30</sup> Westwood, *Society and the Homosexual*, p. 20.

<sup>31</sup> 'If citizenship is invoked in the defence of rights, the corresponding duties of citizenship cannot be ignored. These do not require a man to sacrifice his individual liberty or to submit without question to every demand made by government. But they do require that his acts should be inspired by a lively sense of responsibility towards the welfare of the community'. T. H. Marshall, *Citizenship and Social Class* (London: Pluto Press, 1992), p. 41.

citizenship'.<sup>32</sup> This concept was not politically neutral but shaped by particular class values. Looking back from the 1980s, Annan conceded that 'perhaps it is not going too far to say that a man and his family came to be regarded as citizens by the degree to which they were able to conform to the code of the governing class and to the part of the country they belonged' and more recent criticism has located a similar class inflection in such discourses.<sup>33</sup> Hornsey argues that the contrasting figures of the socially responsible architect, planning for an improved post-war society, and the unruly, self-serving spiv offered dominant modes of engagement with, or resistance to, post-war ideals of citizenship.<sup>34</sup> As such a distinction suggests, the ideal citizen was far more likely to be a socially responsible, middle-class figure.

Homosexuality had the potential to considerably undermine this conception, as it transformed otherwise 'respectable' men into criminals and negated their positive valuation as citizens. The defection of spies Guy Burgess and Donald Maclean to the Soviet Union in 1952 provided a highly publicized example of men whose sexuality was perceived to have compromised their positions as loyal citizens of the nation state.<sup>35</sup> Nicholas de Jongh argues that '[t]he defection of Burgess and Maclean corroborated what had been asserted about the security risk posed by homosexuals', and it was the location of this 'security risk' within the heart of the British establishment – among financially privileged, privately educated men with socially responsible occupations – which fueled the scandal.<sup>36</sup> Warth articulated this anxiety in his second 'Evil Men' article: 'Public school masters will admit privately that the vice is rife among adolescents who are being trained to take leading places in the community'.<sup>37</sup> Instead of treating homosexuality as a threat to the prevailing

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<sup>32</sup> Alan Sinfield, 'The Government, the People and the Festival', in *Labour's Promised Land? Culture and Society in Labour Britain 1945-51*, ed. Jim Fyrth (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1995), pp. 181-196 (p. 191).

<sup>33</sup> Annan, *Our Age*, pp.27-8.

<sup>34</sup> 'Young, working-class, and always on the make, the spiv was the obverse of the reconstruction citizen [...] Affronting the bourgeois virtues of restraint and sobriety, he spent money on his clothes and hairstyle, constructing his body as urban spectacle that defied the functional sensibilities of good civic-mindedness, while ignoring all programs of visual education - he exalted frivolity and fashion over any purposive social investment in progress and stability'. Hornsey, *The Spiv and the Architect*, pp. 20-21.

<sup>35</sup> In a possible reference to Burgess and McLean, Tony notes that fear of exposure made his ex-lover Julian, a successful solicitor, use 'some code name, as if he were a spy' (p. 37).

<sup>36</sup> Nicholas de Jongh, *Not in Front of the Audience: Homosexuality on Stage* (London: Routledge, 1992), p.51.

<sup>37</sup> Warth, 'Evil Men', 25 May 1952.

expectations of citizenship and middle-class values, *The Heart in Exile* suggests that it need not preclude an individual from active, and beneficial, participation in the post-war state.

The novel depicts a cross-section of homosexual men already occupying established and respected positions within mainstream society, such as a solicitor, a detective and a member of parliament, in order to suggest that their sexuality is not an impediment to valuable and responsible post-war citizenship. Noel, the detective, informs Tony that the police do not want to arrest high-profile men and tend instead to focus on sex workers 'or people who are blatant about it and advertise the thing' (p. 86). The distinction between those who are discreetly respectable and those who flaunt their illicit sexuality acknowledges this contemporary anxiety while demonstrating, through the presence of men like Noel and Tony, that there are 'good' homosexual citizens. Tony describes London's queer community as 'the underground', indicating its potential to 'undermine' conventional society, but it primarily reflects, rather than subverts, normative hierarchies. Tony's insistence that homosexuals are not drawn together by any united political or ideological cause suggests a desire to assuage societal hostility regarding the national loyalty of homosexual men. He discusses the use of the term 'Homintern' to describe homosexual subculture, a pun on the 'Comintern' network of alleged communist sympathisers, but is quick to distance homosexuals from the associated ideas of anti-state sentiments that such a pun might invoke: 'inverts are not a conspiratorial society, perhaps because like criminals they have only an identity of aim, but no identity of belief' (p. 42). Tony instead argues that many homosexual men might be accepted by a society to which they, in many other ways, conformed.

Garland's representation of citizenship as a route to social acceptance for homosexual men is, however, dependent upon an ability to adhere to specific values which are drawn from, and carefully policed by, middle-class men like Tony. The repulsion that he feels towards the men that he refers to as 'pansies' is because, in their effeminate flamboyancy, they undermine Tony's desire to present homosexuals as societally conventional. He observes that they 'either couldn't conform or didn't want to' and links this behaviour to 'social background' because 'they had never had any training in discipline and had little to lose' (p. 42). Houlbrook observes in *Queer London* that many of the flamboyant 'queans' of the West End were working-class,

and Tony invokes a class snobbery when he refers disparagingly to their 'social background'.<sup>38</sup> The 'pansies' are conspicuously effeminate, undermining the conventional respectability which men like Tony base their social acceptability upon, but he also criticizes their contribution to society more broadly: 'They are not much good at their jobs, because they are too temperamental, devoid of discipline, unable to work long hours, unable to concentrate' (p. 46). As a protagonist, then, Tony functions as an exemplary homosexual through his adherence to middle-class ideals of citizenship.

The novel self-reflexively suggests that one of the most useful means by which men like Tony can argue for their morality, their responsibility and their right to happiness is through cultural representation. A conversation between Tony and his housekeeper Terry highlights the importance of fiction in representing homosexuality in positively valued terms. Terry asks Tony why 'all plays and novels dealing with queers have an inevitably tragic end' (p. 142). Tony responds that they reflect a societal need to punish the transgressive homosexual, '[w]hich explains the tear-jerker title, the frequent Biblical quotations, the lugubrious tone, the underlining of the tragic element' (p. 143). Terry states, 'If ever I could write a book on the subject, I'd try to tell the truth. I'd write about the majority for whom it isn't really tragic' (p. 142). He uses a telling metaphor: 'Do you know, sometimes you find a bottle floating on the sea. It's come a long way and someone finds it and there's a message in the bottle. A piece of paper. Not an S.O.S.; nothing really important; just a couple of lines. As a rule, it isn't even signed, but it cheers you up...' (pp.142-3). Through Terry, Garland alludes to the ambitions of the novel itself; indeed, the reference to the lack of a signature mirrors the fact that the Rodney Garland name was a pseudonym, while the central metaphor of a consoling message to an isolated figure suggests *The Heart in Exile's* perception of its purpose as a novel.

Garland thus uses the novel form to offer an affirmative portrayal of a homosexual protagonist and relies upon the conventions of specific genres in order to exploit the appeal, entertainment and, most importantly, the sense of order associated with

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<sup>38</sup> 'For if the Dilly Boy was central to the interpretive schema through which all contemporaries understood male sexual practices, the men who were labelled queans were overwhelmingly working-class. Most of those arrested in the West End wearing cosmetics were employed in working-class occupations, particularly the service sector'. Houlbrook, *Queer London*, p. 140.

them. Both the detective novel and the domestic romance evoke a trajectory from uncertainty to clarity, often concluding with a reinvestment in a prescribed social order (whether through the attribution of blame for a crime and the subsequent punishment, or a reinscription of the conventional ideals manifest in the monogamous couple). The novel's indebtedness to the detective genre is reflected in Tony's own comments on the topic. He claims to have always 'been attracted by the romantic figure of the private detective' and states that 'Conan Doyle and Edgar Wallace had exercised as powerful an impression on my childhood as Proust, Gide or Dostoevsky on my young manhood' (p. 127). Garland constructs an association between Tony's homosexuality and his inclinations for European literary culture, but he also highlights a distinctly British canon as an equally formative element of Tony's characterization. The references to the popular, but distinctly less highbrow, yarns of Doyle and Wallace subverts the association between homosexuality and international cultural elitism, instead placing Tony's narrative within a literary heritage that has more egalitarian appeal. Garland's invocation of the domestic romance genre is produced through the eventual coupling of Tony and Terry. The cultural ubiquity of romance narrative – Lynne Pearce describes it 'as "a story" that everyone knows'<sup>39</sup> – and its location in a contemporary, domestic setting, depicts a burgeoning homosexual relationship through a popular literary genre in order to position it firmly within mainstream, and accessible, cultural responses. The importance of the Tony and Terry romance to the overall narrative is signaled by the fact that it forms the culmination of the novel – rather than the resolution of Julian's suicide, which is dealt with earlier – and was likewise reflected in the publishing and promotion of the book; a 1961 re-edition featured an illustration of the two men on the front cover. Tony's valuation of these mainstream, popular and mass-market texts is a metafictional comment on Garland's focus on providing an entertaining and accessible depiction of homosexuality within familiar and established genres.

The narrative structure of the detective story provides a rationale for Tony's exploration of post-war society and the numerous identities, desires and subcultures that he encounters. Garland suggests that, as a psychiatrist, Tony is already

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<sup>39</sup> Lynne Pearce, 'Popular Romance and its Readers', *Companion to Romance from Classical to Contemporary*, ed. Corinne Saunders (Malden: Blackwell, 2004), pp.521-537 (p. 251).

performing a role which requires analysis and deduction; he tells a patient to 'look on me as a policeman' (p. 5) and, when he discovers that his ex-lover Julian LeClerc has committed suicide, he suggests that he can discover the reasons for it 'as well as a detective' (p. 15). By establishing these comparisons early on, the narrative draws parallels between the detective and the psychiatrist as both are invested in the identifying of problems in order to bring about a return to order. Tony's dual role in the novel allows him to encounter and classify forms of queer desire across various subcultures, locations and social classes in a manner that befits his profession. Tony's 'classifying' of these groupings involves both meanings of the word because his taxonomical labelling is often entwined with social class. He employs a wide range of terms for queer men that are often ill-defined but nearly always related to class identity. The word 'rough', for example, refers to lower-class men who are paid for sex while the medical term 'invert' is applied predominantly, although not exclusively, to middle- and upper-class men. The words 'homosexual' and 'queer' are also used frequently and interchangeably, while Tony refers to himself as 'bisexual'. As well as suggesting a broader societal uncertainty regarding the etymology of queer identities, Tony's 'class-ification' of the queer men he encounters provides a continual reminder of the ongoing significance of class to same-sex desire.

Although Tony is ostensibly interviewing a cross-section of men to understand more about Julian's death, his conversations repeatedly coalesce around cross-class desire and its relationship to post-war social change. The character of Bobby Sillock, for example, explains his desire for working-class men by evoking a cultural difference: 'We don't want anybody who shares our standards, I mean educated, middle class and so on. In fact, we want the very opposite. We want the primitive, the uneducated, the tough' (p. 50). Bobby's version of cross-class desire is rooted in the social and educational disparities that shape the class system and he pointedly informs Tony that cross-class liaisons 'don't last because we don't share the same culture' (p. 50). Bobby establishes 'culture' as a marker of class difference and thereby implies that homosexuals are demarcated and defined by the 'culture' associated with their class position. Other characters acknowledge the role that social change has played in their desires for lower-class men. John Tidpool MP suggests that the erotic potentials of difference are threatened and undermined by post-war egalitarianism. Tidpool asks Tony to contrast the sexual availability of

working-class men before the war, when '[t]hey were yours for the asking', with the present, in which such liaisons are scarce (p.75). He locates this change in the improved material condition of the working classes, suggesting that the financial incentives for engaging in affairs with wealthier men have disappeared: 'It isn't entirely that people like us have less money now, but the working class no longer respects us as they did before the war. Not to speak of the fact that there's now full employment' (p. 75). Tidpool acknowledges the effect of post-war social change on the organization of homosexual culture, but in a manner which reinforces the centrality of the middle-class man as homosexual and conceptualizes the working-class partner as financially motivated and lacking the same sexual orientation. Through the defensive stances of both Sillock and Tidpool, Garland presents homosexual men who are willing to acknowledge the impact of class in their homosexual desires but are nonetheless stubbornly resisting the implications of these social changes by clinging to simplistic ideas of class identity and cultural standards.

The novel presents numerous middle-class men who are exclusively attracted to the working classes, but Garland suggests that such relationships are becoming increasingly difficult to maintain in a shifting social context. Indeed, the mystery of Julian's own death is built around his predilection for lower-class lovers. Tony explores his liaisons with both sympathy and critique, acknowledging the pressures of such relationships while suggesting that an overt investment in class difference is unsustainable. Sinfield posits that wealthier homosexuals who pursued relationships with lower-class men were the focus of a particular, class-inflected, suspicion that they would function as 'Trojan horses [...] inviting in the working class that was believed to be about to overwhelm civilized standards'.<sup>40</sup> Julian demonstrates a similar embarrassment about his desire for these lower-class men; in his longer relationships, he moves in with Ron to avoid being spotted in an affluent area with him and Tony surmises that, had Julian ever been seen out with a lower-class partner, he could pretend the man 'was an errand-boy, a servant, a former batman' (p. 54). Julian's narrative allows Garland to represent lower-class men in same-sex relationships, demonstrating a marked contrast to the focus in a text like *Brideshead Revisited*, but it also suggests that such men are not viewed as equals by their

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<sup>40</sup> Sinfield, *Literature, Politics and Culture in Postwar Britain*, p. 80.

wealthy partners and instead objectified for the erotic potential of their class difference.

In the story of Tyrell Dighton, a patient of Tony's that he eventually discovers was one of Julian's ex-lovers, Garland explores how post-war egalitarianism might undermine the class difference which forms such an important part of the homosexual culture that he depicts. Dighton is working-class but admits wanting to take advantage of social change: 'I'd never get anywhere if I kept to my place. In any case, I thought, what was my place? [...] The workers were doing better now and the middle class weren't doing as well as they used to' (p.109).<sup>41</sup> Dighton's class aspirations were closely tied to the relationship he pursued with the wealthier Julian: 'I'd wanted to rise out of the class I was born into, and now I had a first-rate opportunity' (pp.109-110). Dighton believes that a cross-class relationship might allow him to ascend to a new social position in a more egalitarian societal context, but his desire to pursue a middle-class lifestyle falters when he complicates the class difference that Julian found so attractive in the first place. Tony discovers that Julian abruptly ended their relationship when Dighton began to mimic his mannerisms. In doing so, 'Dighton had embarrassed him with his ambition to climb out of the class whose ways and mystique were an immense attraction to Julian' (p.127). Matt Cook argues that, in post-war Britain, class difference could 'seem out of kilter with postwar austerity, a new social democrat pulse and reorientation of queer identifications'.<sup>42</sup> Dighton, spurred by post-war social change, likewise expects that social mobility will be a consequence of his cross-class relationship, but instead finds that the condition of staying with Julian is to retain his lower-class status and identity. In Dighton's narrative then, Garland presents the social mobility produced by post-war change as clashing uncomfortably with the ongoing significance of class difference in homosexual culture.

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<sup>41</sup> Dighton's lower-class status is signalled in the texts through a number of strategies. He occupies a working-class occupation (a printer) and is addressed by his surname, a gesture which, as a character within the novel notes later on, was a common mode of address from upper to lower classes. Dighton's class status is also indicated partly by his Yorkshire accent, which includes alternate spellings within the dialogue such as 'soodenly' or 'fopah' (faux pas). While regional accents need not always signal social class, their usage here serves to distance him from the speech patterns of the middle-class Tony.

<sup>42</sup> Matt Cook, 'Warm Home in a Cold Climate: Rex Batten and the Queer Domestic', in *Queer 1950s: Rethinking Sexuality in the Postwar Years*, ed. Heike Bauer and Matt Cook (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), pp. 115-130 (p.121).

By focusing on a range of working-class men involved in homosexual relationships, *The Heart in Exile* acknowledges the presence of same-sex desire across the social spectrum, but it likewise, through Tony's narrative perspective, highlights the means by which their identities and desires were demarcated from the middle-class men with whom they were romantically or sexually involved. Tony's attitude to such men is often informed by an implicit classism in which their lack of emotional complexity and sophistication means that they need not develop neuroses or identity crises about same-sex desire. Tony is told by a senior colleague that Dighton might be more susceptible to a 'cure' because '[b]eing a far less complicated person than [Tony] and doing a far less complicated job, he can only gain by being cured' (p. 164). Tony describes Ginger, another of Julian's ex-partners who has since married, as representative of a freer, although implicitly regressive, sexual culture that he links with his class identity.<sup>43</sup> Ginger suggests that his inability to articulate his desires in more precise and complex terms is a consequence of his class, telling Tony that he 'couldn't put it the way you would' because he is 'only a working bloke' (p. 133). Tony informs him that Julian was 'a very different man to you inside', establishing a distinction between the middle- and lower-class partner in terms of sexual orientation (p. 133). Tony likewise urges Ron, Julian's final same-sex partner before his death, to return to heterosexual relationships by invoking a nature/nurture dichotomy: 'I was born like that. You weren't' (p. 226). The lower-class men who express same-sex desire in the novel have a freedom that Tony almost envies; they have far less to lose than their middle-class counterparts. When he discovers that Julian's suicide was primarily motivated by his father's shame and threats to expose him, he suggests that the situation would have been easier had he been lower-class: 'If Julian had been born into the working class or into the petite bourgeoisie, the problem would have been easier. There are several thousand working-class invert[s] all over the place; [t]heir integration in society was perfect; although it may have been known they were queer, they were not regarded as other than normal' (p. 218). The sexuality of lower-class men is presented in the text as far more flexible than

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<sup>43</sup> 'Perhaps the proportion of people who wouldn't think twice before following a natural impulse was higher among the working class than elsewhere, but I wasn't certain. It may have been that they didn't take sex or an affair with a man as seriously as they did with a woman. But in a way they did. Possibly Ginger represented that primitive type of man which, like our ancestors, made no rigid distinction between the two sexes, but followed his instincts of lust and affection' (p. 134).

that of men like Tony, precisely because of a lack of awareness of both medical discourses pertaining to sexology and because they have less to fear from transgressing legal and social edicts. While the novel thus depicts a range of examples of lower-class men engaging in same-sex desire, the condition and experience of that desire is demarcated considerably from the identities and experiences cultivated by middle-class men. According to Tony, the greater flexibility of their sexual identity often precludes them from any claim to a recognisable homosexuality at all.

By suggesting that class identity shapes the expression of same-sex desire, the novel presents it as the predominant organizing principle of post-war homosexual culture. For Tony, it implicitly informs whether men are considered 'homosexual' at all, depending on the extent to which they adhere to class stereotypes pertaining to masculinity. For example, he notes that 'there are several thousand working-class inverts all over the place, waiters, cooks, manservants, male nurses, hairdressers, shop assistants', but this list excludes heavy industry in favour of more traditionally 'feminine' occupations or those which were often associated with homosexual men (p. 218). In another passage, he states that '[i]nverts are everywhere' but 'that their proportion is not so great among bricklayers, road-menders or dockers and blacksmiths' (p. 80). Tony's views highlight the significance of masculinity, profession and education in defining sexual identity both as part of, and extensions of, class identity. Matt Houlbrook and Helen Smith have identified same-sex desires and practices within lower-class professions as existing outside the models of 'inversion' which were primarily used for and by the middle- and upper-classes, and Tony's inability to view same-sex activity among masculine lower-class men as 'inversion' provides a fictional representation of this process.<sup>44</sup>

Garland also focuses on Tony's prejudice against those who attempt to adopt a shared homosexual culture which he still identifies with specific social backgrounds. He pathologises the tendency of '[t]he invert, or rather a type of invert' to possess 'a feminine elasticity which can turn him into more than a successful social climber' and notes that it enables the invert to 'adopt the culture of a higher group in all senses, including the moral' (p. 116). Tony views this 'culture' as the province of men from

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<sup>44</sup> Houlbrook, *Queer London*; Smith, *Masculinity, Class and Same-Sex Desire in Industrial England, 1895-1957*.

particular classes, and these prejudices are exposed in the text when he attends a party by homosexual playwright Allan Everard. His observation that that 'despite two revolutions within thirty years, class stood out sharp as if its frontiers were cut by razors' highlights its ongoing significance both to homosexual social groupings and his own perspective (p.171). At the party, Tony surveys lower middle-class men who aspire to a more upper-class identity. His critical summary reveals much about his own attitudes:

They betrayed themselves in their gait, their posture, in the way they held their glasses. They were none of them well off, and they were putting on an act, pretending that the house, the room, the surroundings were their natural habitat. [...] One could pick out the boys from the lesser residential suburbs who were trying desperately to run away from it all. They stood there, talking, listening with a frozen smile, in their own good suit. They had gathered a smattering of culture, pretentious and second-hand. (p. 172).

Tony's sneering judgement assumes the artifice of these men in straying from a 'natural habitat' and his dismissal of 'a smattering of culture' implies a piecemeal superficiality to their knowledge. He later predicts, however, that future generations will be less inclined to use education and 'culture' in hierarchical terms. He suggests that the 'younger, post-war generation of inverts [...] know that tolerable biceps and a good pair of shoulders are better selling points today than an acquaintance with books by Sartre and Maugham or cracks by Gingold or Coward' (p. 172). While Tony looks ahead to this future where the physical body is prioritized above cultural knowledge, his narration demonstrates that signifiers of class and cultural difference continue to inform his own post-war sensibility. For Tony, there remains a class hierarchy closely entwined with cultural standards and those that use the perceived social flexibility of their sexuality to transgress it are fraudulent and insincere. Tony is guarding an elitist idea of culture with a particular vitriol which Garland subtly exposes, providing but one example of the sense that Tony is not an entirely objective presence, but rather as implicated in the complex social structures he observes as the other characters.

Garland's implicit critique in Tony's quest to explain the mystery of cross-class attraction to his peers is manifest in the increasingly complex and contradictory answers that he provides. Tony's position as a psychiatrist means that the other characters assume he possesses expertise and insight on sexual matters, but his inability to formulate a coherent response suggests the medical establishment

cannot provide the answers which it promises to deliver. When Tidpool asks Tony for reasons why middle-class men are so attracted to the lower classes, the explanations offered span the physiological (the muscles developed from manual labour), the sociological (because of the 'simplicity' of the working man) and the psychoanalytical (the working classes are more likely to engage in homosexuality because they have fewer anal fears) (p. 73). He eventually admits defeat: 'But here again we come back to the old magic, the mystery' (p. 219). Indeed, Garland undermines the authority associated with the medical establishment when Tony notes that the psychiatrist is 'as much a human being as anyone else; as any of his patients for that matter: weak, vacillating, irrational and helpless when it came to his own private life' (p. 168). Both the psychiatrist and the detective are usually defined by their perceived objectivity in being able to solve the problem that they are presented with, but Tony instead acknowledges his own fallibility. He solves the mystery of Julian's suicide, but there is much that continues to elude him. Homosexuality is a kind of societal mystery which does not lend itself to definite resolution; he argues that Julian 'found love for a man a beautiful and exciting mystery; a kind of magic that, like most people in a similar position, he had never tried to explain' (p. 217). In comparison, Tony's own attempts at resolution have failed: 'I myself had often tried to explain it, with the help of other qualified mystery-solvers and magic-analysers, but I had never got anywhere' (p. 217). Tony cannot 'solve' the broader problems posed by homosexuality and its association with class hierarchies and, indeed, the narrative suggests that his attempting to do so is inhibiting his happiness.

Tony's happiness instead lies in his embracing of a relationship with Terry, but the narrative trajectory of a conventional literary romance involves foreclosing the more troubling social critiques raised earlier in the novel. Tony, as Neil Bartlett notes, does not belong to any of the homosexual cultures that he explores.<sup>45</sup> Terry is also apart from the 'underground': 'He had few friends, all of them normal, and he seldom saw them. His life was work: cooking, mending, sewing, the patients, the theatre and physical exercise' (p. 31). Their romance is thus based on a discreet, domestic companionship and removed from the broader queer scene into which Tony

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<sup>45</sup> Neil Bartlett, 'Introduction', *The Heart in Exile* (Richmond: Valancourt Books, 2014), pp.5-8 (p. 8).

otherwise situates homosexual relationships. The novel concludes with a romantic emphasis that allows many of the questions that the text has raised relating to homosexuality and class to be subsumed into a broader and blander emphasis on 'love'. When Terry discusses the tragic tone of most books about homosexuality, his argument is that a greater stress should be placed on the value of romance: 'It's the only thing in life, isn't it? I mean love. That's the message' (p. 143). Alice Ferrebe argues that Terry's 'modern, mid-Atlantic lifestyle, and a gay identity between tough and toff [...] prefigures an important 'type' in later discourses of gay liberation, and it allows Page to anticipate a new and loving life outside the strictures of both the traditional class system and the 'scene'.<sup>46</sup> While this romantic narrative ostensibly provides a means of presenting a same-sex relationship based on mutual affection and companionship, its representation is predicated on a divorce from the broader queer community and, most significantly, the obfuscation of class difference.

*The Heart in Exile* features numerous moments in which the hierarchy between Tony and Terry is both highlighted and eroticized; Tony admits: 'I confess that the attraction was much stronger when I saw [Terry] doing the sort of work I would never have dreamed of asking him to' (p. 137). He finds situations that suggest dominance and hierarchy sexually gratifying, framing Terry as subservient and combining the sexual innuendo implicit in his posture with his occupation: '[Terry] insisted on scrubbing the kitchen floor, kneeling on the rubber mat, bending over the mop in his singlet. One saw the servant's humility in the attitude. But one also saw the broad shoulders, the arched back with the freckled skin under the rebellious hair, and he would look up as I entered and give me a beautiful smile of his brown dog eyes and white teeth' (p. 137). Tony reads Terry's 'servant humility' alongside his physical attractiveness, suggesting a slippage in desire between the two. He also recognizes the social authority he holds over Terry as enforcing their intimacy: 'unlike a woman, Terry could not have sued me for breach of promise [...] Nor was he the sort of person to tell anyone about me, even his closest friends, however badly I treated him' (p. 138). Tony's desire for Terry cannot be extricated from the power differentials between them which are rooted in class difference.

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<sup>46</sup> Alice Ferrebe, *Literature of the 1950s: Good, Brave Causes* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2012), p. 118

*The Heart in Exile* takes a novel approach to depictions of homosexuality in more ways than one; as well as offering a narrative that was both original and modern, it also repeatedly argues for the importance of fiction as a means by which homosexual men could be represented as moral, responsible, and capable of experiencing romantic love. Tony describes the novel as an art form 'whose most important ingredient, had always been a fictitious miracle [...] the miracle means no less than freedom and the novel by implication is a revolutionary manifesto' (p. 103). The detective novel provides an accessible and popular form within which to situate Tony's exploration of a broader homosexual scene, while the domestic romance genre offers a happy ending at the text's conclusion, but both narrative strands reinforce the centrality of class within the homosexual culture that it delineates. *The Heart in Exile* evinces a self-conscious desire to move away from connotations of elitism within representations of homosexuality, both through its generic influences and its own narrative, but same-sex desire remains organized around class difference. Produced in a particularly hostile social context for homosexual men, the novel instead focuses on the importance of respectability and romantic love, regardless of how much both elements are intertwined with particular class perspectives or hierarchies.

#### Angry Movements: Tracing a Cultural Backlash

While Waugh and Garland could build upon an established connection between same-sex desire, class and culture to examine their relevance in wartime Britain and its aftermath, emergent literary movements in the 1950s would use a similar association to articulate a resistance to perceived literary dominance by a cultural elite. This decade saw the emergence of two literary groupings, primarily defined by journalists and publicists rather than the authors themselves: the 'Movement' and the 'Angry Young Men'. The vague delineations of these groupings, combined with significant overlap in the authors associated with them, makes any coherent classification of their shared qualities almost impossible. This conceptual confusion does not, however, indicate that their contribution to the broader literary culture of post-war Britain is negligible. Rather, this section will argue that the novels collected under both the 'Movement' and 'Angry Young Men' exploited the association between homosexuality and artistic culture to depict a dominant cultural establishment as effete and to position themselves as a masculine, heterosexual

alternative. The extent to which these representations invoked class as part of their rebellion against the dominant literary establishment varied considerably from text to text but, as we shall see, these movements were frequently homogenized in critical accounts in a manner that merged separate texts, with entirely different attitudes towards class, as part of a coherent cultural response.

The emergence of the 'Movement' was initially ascribed to an ongoing literary debate about the relative merits of realism versus modernism, but the novel most associated with the label quickly shifted the focus towards a specifically masculine repudiation of an effete literary establishment. The 'Movement' was christened in a *Spectator* article in 1954 and the shared values of those collected under the title (including Kingsley Amis, John Wain and Thom Gunn) primarily coalesced around a dissatisfaction with the pretensions and abstractions of modernism. 'In the Movement', since credited to J.D. Scott, suggested that established writers of the 1930s were 'great names, but as Taste moves on in its clumsy, inexorable way the approved names of each generation must necessarily grow dim and fade'.<sup>47</sup> The emergence of the 'Movement' was not simply about generational change but was rather a challenge to dominant literary culture; Scott describes it as 'bored by the despair of the Forties' and 'extremely impatient of poetic sensibility'.<sup>48</sup> The 'Movement' was defined as a generational schism within literary culture, offering an alternative to an establishment defined by pretension, introspection and floridity. As Scott outlines however, Kingsley Amis was one of the most prominent new authors associated with this label. His work – particularly *Lucky Jim* (1954) – became the figurehead for a vaguely defined literary grouping which built upon distaste for literary sophistication. D.J. Taylor argues that *Lucky Jim* is 'crammed with anti-highbrowisms' and 'digs against a powerful literary establishment which was presumed to have set itself up as an elitist cultural arbiter' but this more generalized dissatisfaction is expressed by focusing on the predominance of an effeminate strand in artistic culture.<sup>49</sup>

*Lucky Jim* links an artistic elite with effeminacy and homosexuality in order to ridicule them. Amis contrasts his protagonist, Jim Dixon, a heavy-drinking, fun-loving womanizer, with antagonist Professor Welch and his family, primarily through a

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<sup>47</sup>J.D. Scott, 'In the Movement', *The Spectator*, 193:6588 (1 October 1954), p.399.

<sup>48</sup> Scott, 'In the Movement', p. 400.

<sup>49</sup> Taylor, *After the War*, p. 71.

mocking of their cultural pretensions. He presents the esoteric hobbies of the family, such as madrigal singing and reciting medieval poetry, as evidence of, as Alistair Davies and Peter Saunders note, 'a 'physical, sexual and moral effeminacy'.<sup>50</sup> Of the Welch's two sons, Jim describes one as the 'effeminate writing Michel' almost every time he is mentioned, entwining his literary ambitions with an implied homosexuality. Bertrand, the artist, is a comically pretentious character, sycophantic to the prevailing social and cultural order, and he experiences the emasculating process of losing his girlfriend, Christine, to Jim. Amis's unflattering portrayal of Bertrand is a consequence of his smug complacency in a cultural order that Dixon refuses to respect; the verbal attack which Jim launches on him makes this defiance explicit: 'People aren't going to skip out of your path indefinitely. You think that just because you're tall and can put paint on canvas you're a sort of demigod. It wouldn't be so bad if you really were. But you're not: you're a twister and a snob and a bully and a fool'.<sup>51</sup> This critique of an effete cultural elite is heightened, and reiterated, in the text's conclusion. As Jim leaves the University with Christine as his girlfriend, he quite literally gets the last laugh; guffawing at both the Professor and Bertrand who are 'standing rigid with popping eyes, as both [...] had a look of being Gide and Lytton Strachey'.<sup>52</sup> Amis's invocation of two figures associated with modernist artistic culture also invokes their shared homosexuality as a means of emasculating them further. The contrast between Jim's irreverence and the Welch family's earnest attitude toward artistic culture, combined with his investment in a masculine stereotype of heterosexual debauchery pitted against their effeminacy and impotence, exploited the existing association between homosexuality and artistic culture in order to highlight and ridicule it. There is very little in the way of class politics in *Lucky Jim* – as critics have noted, Jim has no problem flattering the wealthiest character, Gore-Urquhart, into giving him a job – because the emphasis is primarily on mocking the perceived effeminacy of a cultural elite rather than an attack on class hierarchies more broadly.<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> Alistair Davies and Peter Saunders, 'Literature, Politics and Society', in *Society and Literature 1945-1970*, ed. Alan Sinfield (New York: Holmes & Meier, 1983), pp. 13-50 (p. 26).

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, 217.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, 265.

<sup>53</sup> Taylor describes Amis as 'ambivalent' about 'inherited privilege' and notes that, in *Lucky Jim*, 'Dixon admires Gore-Urquhart, his eventual benefactor, from the start and is delighted to accept his offer of a job'. Taylor, *After the War*, p. 81.

The developments of 1950s literary culture would increasingly link Amis's work with a movement which produced class-conscious representations of contemporary Britain. It is here that the 'Movement', which had barely been defined to begin with, begins to overlap confusingly with the 'Angry Young Men'. The term had been coined by a publicist for the play *Look Back in Anger* (1956) to describe its intense and prickly writer, John Osborne, but it quickly became a short-hand for a broader movement across literature and theatre.<sup>54</sup> Dale Salwak describes the label as a 'myth' which 'could not be reshaped by facts' and there is very little critical consensus on the texts which form this precarious canon or, indeed, which narrative or thematic principles unite them.<sup>55</sup> Kenneth Allsop's observation, back in 1958, that 'although [the label's] validity in a collective sense may be dubious, although whatever meaning it originally had has been smudged over by promiscuous use, it does signify' is a pertinent reminder that the incoherency of the movement does not negate its cultural significance.<sup>56</sup> Amis and his novel became associated with the term thanks to press and critical attention; Kenneth Allsop argues that the comic tone of *Lucky Jim* was darkened under the shadow of Osborne's more aggressive, and class-focused, Jimmy Porter, to the point that it 'became a routine piece of slander upon luckless Jim to be described [...] as an emblem figure of all that is discovered by older observers as malevolent, sombre and menacing in Young England'.<sup>57</sup> Amis was frequently discussed as a member of the 'Angry Young Men'; including in the literary anthology *Protest*, Allsop's own *The Angry Decade: A Survey of the Cultural Revolt of the 1950s* (1958), published as the phenomenon was just getting underway, and through the popular press – such as the January 1958 issue of *Good Housekeeping*, which featured 'A Short Directory to Angry Young Men' and which was 'topped with a fresco of thumbnail pictures of Osborne, [Colin] Wilson, Amis, Bill Hopkins, Stuart Holroyd and [John] Wain'.<sup>58</sup> The placing of Amis within this movement thus

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<sup>54</sup> 'A phrase famously tossed off by the Royal Court's press officer, George Fearon, to describe the supposedly aggressive Osborne - 'Oh, he's just an angry young man,' he told the showbiz hacks - quickly entered the language and became an established fact'. Michael Billington, *State of the Nation: British Theatre since 1945* (London: Faber and Faber, 2007), p. 98.

<sup>55</sup> Dale Salwak, 'The "Angry" Decade and After', *A Companion to the British and Irish Novel, 1945-2000*, ed. Brian W. Schaffer (Oxford: Blackwell, 2005), pp.21-31 (p. 27).

<sup>56</sup> Kenneth Allsop, *The Angry Decade: A Survey of the Cultural Revolt of the Nineteen-Fifties*, Rev. ed (London: Peter Owen Ltd, 1969), p. 16.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, 52.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, 23.

associated his repudiation of an effeminate literary culture with emerging works that were more overtly lower-class in setting and characterisations.

Through their narrative focus on young, lower-class men, many of the Angry texts came to be seen as a form of class rebellion against a staid literary establishment that either could not, or would not, depict working-class culture authentically. Alan Sillitoe, author of 'Angry' classic *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning* (1958), argued that a middle-class reader could 'take out a book and see in it either a mirror of himself, or someone he knows: he is fully represented in contemporary writing, while the man who works at the lathe is not.'<sup>59</sup> As Sillitoe's gendered language suggests here, his own sense of a class intervention in dominant literary culture is produced through specific masculine experiences. Sillitoe also suggests that authors should offer a reflective accuracy in their class representations and, by invoking an occupation that his own protagonist shares, implicitly positions himself as undertaking such a role. This idea that 'Angry' writers were not just narratively focused on working-class experiences, but rather were capturing post-war experiences with a sociological validity, would prove a pervasive element of their reception. As Susan Brook notes, 'the ruggedly heterosexual and rebellious masculinity found in these texts was read as the authentic experience of the working class or lower-middle class, and as a form of class resistance'.<sup>60</sup> The 'Angry' texts also used homophobia to reiterate the masculinity of their lower-class protagonists. John Braine's *Room at the Top* (1957) sees Joe Lampton, a social climber of lower-class background, enter a 'pansy pub' and encounter a man who bears all the stereotypical features of a 'quean' including dyed hair, scent, feminine address ('dear'), and frequent giggling.<sup>61</sup> Joe articulates his fundamental sense of difference from the man and assumes a similar response in his reader: '[P]ansies only use pubs for picking up boy friends. They don't booze themselves, anymore than you or I would if surrounded by bedworthy women who might be had for the price of a few drinks'.<sup>62</sup> The 'you or I' of Joe's address forges a heteronormative consensus

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<sup>59</sup> Alan Sillitoe, 'Both Sides of the Street', in *The Writer's Dilemma*, ed. Stephen Spender (London: Oxford University Press, 1961), pp. 68-75 (p. 74).

<sup>60</sup> Susan Brook, 'Engendering Rebellion: The Angry Young Man, Class and Masculinity,' in *Posting the Male: Masculinities in Post-War and Contemporary British Literature*, eds. Daniel Lea and Berthold Schoene (New York: Rodopi, 2003), pp. 19-34 (p. 23).

<sup>61</sup> John Braine, *Room at the Top* (London: Arrow Books, 2002), p. 222.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, 223.

between narrator and reader, distancing both from any association with homosexuality. The depiction of working-class experience in the most predominant 'Angry' narratives, then, were those that prioritized a specific gendered and sexual perspective.

The critical culture that emerged around these 'Angry' texts reinforced this sense that their rebellion lay in a masculine (and implicitly heterosexual) response to an effeminate literary establishment in terms that invoked class difference. Leslie Fiedler, writing in 1958, argued that younger British writers were railing 'against a blend of homosexual sensibility, upper-class aloofness, liberal politics, and avant-garde literary devices'.<sup>63</sup> Geoffrey Gorer's article in *Protest*, 'The Perils of Hypergamy', reiterated the masculinity of 'Angry' writing by contrasting it with a feminised middle-class culture. Gorer begins with an examination of 'hypergamy' as present in several key 'Angry' texts, defining it as when 'the hero, of working-class origin, is married to, or involved in a public liaison with a middle to upper-middle-class woman and doesn't really enjoy it at all, in the long run'.<sup>64</sup> He develops this literary analysis into a sociological one, suggesting it is reflecting the manner in which lower-class men are experiencing social mobility at an accelerated rate thanks to post-war change. Gorer articulates a distinction between a masculine lower-class culture, implicitly linked to the 'Angry' texts that he has been discussing, and an effeminate middle-class: 'It is very much easier for a working-class man to imperil his status as a male than it is for one of the upper middle-class. A light tenor voice, a la-di-da (B.B.C. standard English) accent, an extended vocabulary, restraint in the use of expletives, all carry the stigma of being cissy or pansy'.<sup>65</sup> The overlap between gender, class and sexuality in the critical response to the 'Angry' movement assisted in creating a cultural context whereby the perceived emergence of authentic and contemporary lower-class writing was received as a masculine rebellion against a literary establishment defined as both elitist and effete. Such a conceptualization, broadly popular and still influential, inevitably limited working-class representation to the prioritizing of male, masculine and heterosexual perspectives. Even outside their

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<sup>63</sup> Leslie A. Fiedler, 'The Un-Angry Young Men: America's Post-War Generation', *Encounter* (January 1958), 3-12 (p. 9).

<sup>64</sup> Geoffrey Gorer, 'The Perils of Hypergamy', *Protest*, eds. Gene Feldman and Max Gartenberg (London: Quartet Books, 1959) pp.329-333 (p. 332).

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, 332.

fictions, some of these authors reinforced the sense that homosexuality was antithetical to working-class culture and experiences; Kingsley Amis mocked socialists interested in legalisation of homosexuality and argued it would be absurd to present the idea to working-class men.<sup>66</sup>

These representative texts of the 'Movement' and the 'Angry Young Men' demonstrate that an established association between homosexuality, artistic culture and specific class experiences could be exploited by those who wished to undermine a cultural hegemony. Where Amis's *Lucky Jim* ridicules an effete and impotent artistic family to valorize the perspective of its protagonist, later 'Angry' texts emphasized the conventional/traditional masculinity of their central characters to dramatize a socially authentic rebellion against a dominant literary and cultural establishment. Their influence in consolidating dominant ideas about the scope of working-class representation has been pervasive. This very specific canon has contributed to the assumption that class is most perceptibly engaged in literature when it is explored through white, male, and heterosexual protagonists. Texts which examine class from other gendered, racialised, and sexual perspectives are not perceived as sufficiently representative and are instead viewed as dealing primarily with alternative facets of identity. The next section examines two novels which demonstrate that there were authors engaging with working-class experiences through alternative perspectives, undermining and subverting the stereotypes regarding homosexuality and working-class culture that had been established by a disparate 'Movement' of 'Angry Young Men'.

Crossing National, Sexual and Class Borders in *Escape to an Autumn Pavement*  
Andrew Salkey's *Escape to an Autumn Pavement* (1960) fits uncomfortably into both the 'Angry' canon and the contemporary corpus of novels focusing on homosexuality, precisely because it highlights that both occluded the significance of race in their narratives. The novel's focus on querying boundaries, limits and binaries is an intervention within post-war literary culture and its general approach to issues of class, sexuality and race. The text begins with a brief list of identity markers divided from one another with the misleading finality of the full stop: 'The name's Sobert.

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<sup>66</sup> Kingsley Amis, 'Socialism and the Intellectuals', *Protest*, pp.264-279 (p.276).

Johnnie Sobert. Jamaican. R.C. Middle class. Or so I've been made to think'.<sup>67</sup> The final line, with its abrupt interrogative approach, foreshadows the subsequent narrative as Johnnie's race, nationality, class, and sexuality intersect with one another during his experiences in post-war Britain and undermine the stability of his identity. Johnnie, as the title suggests, flees one set of circumstances for another, but the various borders – of nationhood, class, race and sexuality – that he must traverse delay the final destination indefinitely.

The various ambivalences coalescing around Johnnie's life are indicative of the liminal space that both protagonist and author occupied in British post-war literary culture. Johnnie's narrative focuses on class resentment, cultural elitism and masculinity (all tropes present in the most famous 'Angry' texts of the period), but its implicit argument that each of these elements intersect with race and nation undermines the dominant trends of the 'Angry' canon, particularly their tendency to present working-class experiences as uniformly white within the literary nationalism that underlined the movement more broadly.<sup>68</sup> Johnnie leaves his middle-class life in Jamaica because he finds it conservative and stifling but, upon arriving in post-war London, feels equally alienated and despondent. He is caught between an African heritage and a colonial present but feels disconnected from Africa and unwelcomed by the supposed 'motherland'. Connected to Johnnie's experience of racial and national difference is his explorations of same-sex desire, which likewise had been explored overwhelmingly in literature from the perspective of white protagonists. Johnnie's narrative examines race, nation, class and sexuality in a manner that can highlight how dominant literary culture often ignored the formation of intersectional identities through prescribed and limited forms of representation. Alison Donnell argues that *Escape to an Autumn Pavement* 'does not take the shape of an avowal of an increasingly knowable homosexuality' but instead 'highlights the uncategorizable, queer nature of erotic desires and behaviors in ways captured by neither the terminology of the Wolfenden Report' nor predominant representations of Caribbean migration to Britain.<sup>69</sup> It is ironic that Salkey's text contains a particularly

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<sup>67</sup> Andrew Salkey, *Escape to an Autumn Pavement* (Leeds: Peepal Tree, 2009), p. 15. All other references are to this edition and are provided parenthetically in the body of the text.

<sup>68</sup> 'English writing, for good or ill, is reverting to some of its more indigenous traditions'. John Holloway, 'Tank in the Stalls: Notes on the "School of "Anger"', *Protest*, pp. 321-28 (p. 327).

<sup>69</sup> Donnell, *Creolized Sexualities*, p. 82.

angry young man, whose vivid and detailed first-person perspective is full of a vitriolic disdain for the world around him, but the novel is not considered part of the movement due to its alternative focus on race and sexuality.

Salkey is not, however, interested in positioning his text within any existent canon, but rather on exploring a narrative that undermines the tendency of literary culture more generally to compartmentalize social experiences into specific movements and subcultures. His intertextual acknowledgement of this broader literary context is hinted at in a humorous exchange at the beginning of the novel, when Johnnie is asked by his unpleasant landlady: 'Why are you so angry, Mr Sobert?' (p. 15). The significance of this term, particularly at the time of the novel's publication, is enforced by repetition: 'You are angry, aren't you?' (p. 15). Mrs. Blount presents 'anger' as the emotional manifestation of a particular class resentment, but tells Johnnie that he cannot claim it, unlike lower-class men who have 'some sort of childlike right to be angry and resentful', whether they be black workers on the underground or white porters in Covent Garden. Beginning the novel in this manner thus allows Salkey to gesture towards the overarching literary influence of 'Angry' writing, acknowledge its limited forms of class politics and, through Johnnie's own arch responses to Mrs Blount's probing questions, to suggest that his narrative will offer a more complex engagement with post-war social experience than the 'Angry' label can contain.

The representations of race to be found in the most prominent 'Angry' texts often reinforced an emphasis on white characters and communities in contemporary social reality. In Alan Sillitoe's *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning*, for example, Arthur's family welcome Sam, a West-African man, into their home with a combination of affection and amusement, which Matthew Whittle argues is 'to challenge the view of black African migrants as unwelcome in predominantly white working-class communities'.<sup>70</sup> As Stephen Ross has noted, however, the implication that the encounter is a complete novelty for the family ignores the presence of a growing black community in Nottingham throughout the 1950s and offers a racially homogenous representation of working-class culture.<sup>71</sup> Salkey's novel provides a

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<sup>70</sup> Matthew Whittle, 'Hosts and Hostages: Mass Immigration and the Power of Hospitality in Post-War British and Caribbean Literature', *Comparative Critical Studies*, 11 (2017), 77-92, (p. 84).

<sup>71</sup> 'Sillitoe erases an entire population from the city. He simply could not *not* have known about the changes taking place in Nottingham and across the UK, but he specifically creates

stark contrast to such fleeting depictions, instead engaging with the racialising context of post-war Britain which included the widely reported Caribbean arrivals on the HMT Windrush in 1948, the Notting Hill race riots of 1958 and extensive social and institutional discrimination. Salkey's focus on race as a signifier of difference is based not on any biological essentialism, but rather as something continually produced within and through society, politics and culture, echoing Paul Gilroy's assertion that 'race' 'has to be socially and politically constructed and elaborate ideological work is done to secure and maintain the different forms of 'racialization' which have characterized capitalist development'.<sup>72</sup> The reminders of Johnnie's racial difference throughout the text continually produce it, but Salkey also delineates its intersection with other elements of his identity.

The racism that Johnnie experiences is closely tied to an exclusionary idea of national identity; Gilroy argues that 'racism and nationalism should not be artificially separated' because they are 'densely interwoven in modern British history' and *Escape* dramatises this interconnectedness.<sup>73</sup> As neither European nor African, Johnnie cannot identify entirely with either: 'Can't you see that I don't belong anywhere? What happened to me between African bondage and British hypocrisy?' (p. 52). While Johnnie's national identity remains ambiguous because of his country's colonial past, British characters define their national identity in terms that employ racial difference to delineate its borders. Johnnie is, as a result of the British Nationality Act of 1948, a British citizen, but the novel examines how the frontiers of nationhood are framed by racism and xenophobia. During an argument with his bartender colleague, Bidy, Johnnie corrects her that arrivals from Jamaica are British citizens and not 'foreigners'. She becomes irate and angrily retorts: 'In a minute you'll ask me whether the American is a foreigner or not. And I'll say, No! N-O! [...] He's the part of us that's made good. The youngest in the family sort of thing'. (p.33) Bidy's recourse to terms of familial affiliation implies kinship between what

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a novel almost totally devoid of black people. What's more, he does it in the name of an authentic mode of reportage, supposedly telling it like it is'. Stephen Ross, *Youth Culture and the Post-War British Novel* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2019), p. 40 [Emphasis Ross].

<sup>72</sup> Paul Gilroy, *There Ain't No Black in the Union Jack: The Cultural Politics of Race and Nation* (London: Routledge, 1987), p. 35.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*, xxiii.

she regards as predominantly white nations, constructing 'Britishness' as a trait which traverses national, but not racialised, boundaries.

The racism that Johnnie experiences is not only produced through an ignorant nationalism but also emerges from supposedly liberal figures who consider themselves adherents of a progressive cultural movement. Salkey draws attention to the cultural interests of Johnnie's neighbour Gerald Trado in order to highlight that the supposed liberality associated with left-leaning, post-war literary culture (particularly in relation to 'Angry' writing) does not prevent its followers from showcasing racial prejudices. Johnnie describes Trado's bedsit in terms that highlight his investment in contemporary literary culture: 'Ubiquitous Penguins, little reviews, Thomas Manns, Evelyn Waughs, and precious back numbers of *Horizon*' (p. 23). Significantly, Trado is also a subscriber to the liberal *Observer* newspaper and '[q]uotes Ken Tynan the way a Jamaican peasant quotes the Bible' (p.23). This reference to an influential theatre critic closely associated with championing *Look Back in Anger* and the subsequent 'theatrical revolution' is particularly significant because it highlights that Trado's absorption in literary discourses specifically focused on class-conscious drama and social change does not pre-empt his racist hostility towards Johnnie. Salkey's point here is not that 'Angry' writing and its supporters were inherently bigoted but rather that these supposedly progressive cultural movements could foster racist and nationalist rhetoric if culture was simply a matter of 'keeping up with the dead literary Joneses' (p. 23). The self-evident beauty of artistic culture prevalent in *Brideshead Revisited* is here interrogated for the distinctly ugly uses that it might be put to.

Indeed, Trado believes that his knowledge of artistic culture establishes superiority over Johnnie, despite the fact that, as the text demonstrates, Johnnie is considerably more knowledgeable on the topic. Both Trado and Johnnie are lodgers in the same boarding house, but the novel chooses to focus on the ways in which any shared class identity is complicated by Trado's misguided attempts to use literary culture to achieve and maintain this distinction. Nadia Ellis argues that 'Trado does not feel that he can afford to bond with Johnnie, insecure as his own class status is' and literary culture provides a means by which he can articulate this difference.<sup>74</sup> The narrative

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<sup>74</sup> Nadia Ellis, 'Between Windrush and Wolfenden: Class Crossings and Queer Desire in Andrew Salkey's Postwar London' in *Beyond Windrush: Rethinking Postwar Anglophone*

voice makes it abundantly clear that Johnnie is also familiar with literary culture; he alludes to poems by Samuel Taylor Coleridge and William Ernest Henley. Salkey likewise uses epigraphs from T. S. Eliot, David Jones and Virgil to begin the sections of his text. These references serve as a reminder of both Johnnie and Salkey's claim to a literary culture from which they are assumed to be 'outsiders' and likewise ridicules Trado's own pretensions. In *Escape to an Autumn Pavement*, artistic culture, even when defined as modern and progressive, can be evoked to produce inter-class distinctions and reinforce the prejudices of explicitly racist characters.

Salkey examines Johnnie's emergent same-sex desires in the narrative from within this racial, cultural and class context because he argues that it is shaped and informed by these other factors. This narrative focus on same-sex desire sets the novel apart from canonical examples of Black-British writing during the era which stress the heterosexual masculinity of its protagonists; Sam Selvon's *The Lonely Londoners* (1956), for example, features a scene in which Moses jokingly flirts with a white man whom he calls a 'pansy' while 'all the time he want to dead with laugh'.<sup>75</sup> Nadia Ellis argues that the continued association of homosexuality with white and privileged men, combined with the presumed heterosexuality of black migrants, left 'the black queer figure shadowy, unformed, at just the moment when the white 'homosexual', as a clearly defined subject, was coming into view'.<sup>76</sup> The publication history of Salkey's novel highlights a similar tendency to ignore the specificities of Johnnie's narrative; David Ellis states that the original edition by Hutchinson featured a sleeve note which claimed '[i]t is stimulating to find a West Indian hero wrestling with a problem of his own sexuality instead of being buried exclusively in the problems of his colour and exile'.<sup>77</sup> The inability of the first publishers to consider that Johnnie's experience of his sexuality is mediated by race and nationality, rather than superseding these concerns, suggests the strictly demarcated literary culture of the era, in which Salkey's intersectional approach would inevitably struggle to find

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*Caribbean Literature*, eds. J. Dillon Brown and Leah Reade Rosenberg (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2015), pp. 60-75 (p.67).

<sup>75</sup> Sam Selvon, *The Lonely Londoners* (London: Penguin, 2006), p. 99.

<sup>76</sup> Nadia Ellis, 'Black Migrants, White Queers and the Archive of Inclusion in Postwar London', *Interventions*, 17:6 (2015), 893-915 (p. 896).

<sup>77</sup> David Ellis, "'Playing Fiona and being happy with Dick": Andrew Salkey's *Escape to an Autumn Pavement* and *The Adventures of Catullus Kelly*', *Journal of Postcolonial Studies*, 49:2 (2013), 222-233 (p. 224).

acknowledgement. The critical response mirrors that of the characters within the text, who are likewise unable to perceive Johnnie's sexuality in relation to his national, racial and class identities.

Unlike *The Heart in Exile*, *Escape* does not portray the eventual acceptance of a homosexual identity through the pursual of a domestic same-sex relationship, but rather examines Johnnie's difficulty in identifying with this paradigm. Instead, the novel questions whether an identity constructed primarily within a specific class and racial context could apply to men from entirely different backgrounds. At the beginning of the text, Johnnie is uncertain as to fellow lodger Dick's sexuality and Thomas Glave has linked his uncertainty as to whether Dick is 'that, way, really?' to the taboo of homosexuality for Caribbean men (p.20).<sup>78</sup> When Dick tells Johnnie he believes him to be homosexual, Johnnie rejects the label while acknowledging an element of truth to it: "Well, for one thing, you're on the wrong track about my being homosexual.' That sounded feeble and positively stupid; yet it was a try' (p. 185). Johnnie's perception that homosexuality would not be compatible with other facets of his identity is indicated in his decision to ask Larry, another Jamaican man, whether the situation with Dick is causing any perceptible changes in his behaviour. Larry guesses that the problem is related to anxieties about 'the way a man should function' and Johnnie asks for reassurance about bodily and behavioural changes: 'the way I treat people; the way I think; the way I look at things' (p. 179). Johnnie assumes that same-sex desire will manifest itself as a series of acts and attitudes that will be alien to him, perhaps because he has had so little exposure to homosexual representation that is not white and middle-class.

Matt Cook uses *Escape* as a literary example of '1950s reformist discourse which stressed domestic accord as a way of legitimising homosexuality', arguing that 'the relationship between Jamaican immigrant, Johnny, and Englishman, Dick, is articulated and normalised through their co-residence and domesticity'; on the contrary, the novel actually problematizes and critiques this arrangement because of Johnnie's discomfort.<sup>79</sup> Nadia Ellis describes their moving in together as 'a form of

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<sup>78</sup> 'All of this is bravely rendered by Salkey in an era when the word 'homosexuality' was barely mentionable, and the homosexuality of a Caribbean person literally unthinkable'. Thomas Glave, 'Introduction', in *Escape to an Autumn Pavement* (Leeds: Peepal Tree Press, 2009), pp. 5-10 (p. 9).

<sup>79</sup> Cook, 'Warm Home in a Cold Climate: Rex Batten and the Queer Domestic', p.121.

middle-class companionate queer cohabitation most eligible in the wake of the Wolfenden debates, which enshrined a “respectable” form of bourgeois male homosexuality’.<sup>80</sup> This was the idealised romantic trajectory for many homosexual novels of the period, although plenty also depicted the struggle of (usually lower-class) men to adjust to these arrangements. For Johnnie, it represents the acceptance of an identity that he does not feel comfortable with and that he cannot articulate to other characters. As well as his relationship with Dick, Johnnie also conducts an affair with Trado’s wife, Fiona, which, although often depicted in far less favourable terms, is nonetheless a reminder that Johnnie’s sexual orientation in the story remains ambiguous. Salkey suggests that, when homosexuality is defined predominantly through a specific middle-class idea of respectability (which is a paradigm that Johnnie has been trying to escape in the first place), it can only alienate those who fall out of its limited purview. Dramatising Johnnie’s unhappiness with, and eventual abandonment of, the domestic arrangement is a rejection of this dynamic and further emphasizes his position as an outsider to contemporary forms of homosexual representation.

Salkey critiques a dependence on prescriptive identities at the text’s conclusion when Dick and Fiona encourage Johnnie to choose between them, with the implicit assumption that this individual choice will assign him a fixed sexual orientation. Johnnie highlights his own passivity in this process when he sarcastically asks Fiona: ‘Am I to be homosexual or not? Am I to be bisexual or not? You’re the one being asked to use the casting vote. It’s like that, d’you see, because Dick’s voted that I am and I naturally have voted that I am not’ (p. 192). Fiona and Dick both impose their own understandings of sexuality onto Johnnie, with little consideration of how his own experiences might have shaped his sexual identity. He resists this attempt at categorisation, suggesting that it is indicative of a broader societal tendency to construct taxonomies and hierarchies: ‘They made me know, in no uncertain manner, that truly ‘whole people’, whatever that means, were tagged, always have been, pigeonholed, easily classified, easily lumped in a bundled mass, conveniently distributed to a waiting mob of diagnosticians, analysts, observers, recorders’. (p. 195) Contemporary critics inadvertently affirmed the ubiquity of this

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<sup>80</sup> Ellis, ‘Between Windrush and Wolfenden: Class Crossings and Queer Desire in Andrew Salkey’s Postwar London’, p. 60.

attitude; Alison Donnell notes that ‘J. D. Scott of *The Sunday Times* asked, “In short, is Johnnie homosexual?” and Peter Green of *The Daily Telegraph* and *Morning Post* made the more revealing interrogation: “Is he abnormal or not?”’.<sup>81</sup> As these responses suggest, Johnnie’s refusal to commit to a specific sexual identity was a source of consternation outside the novel, as well as within it, as Salkey deliberately eschews the adoption of a specific orientation to be found in many contemporaneous texts about same-sex desire.

The novel concludes with Johnnie rejecting both Fiona and Dick as he cannot reconcile his feelings with their prescriptive labels for his desires. This indeterminacy suggests that Johnnie’s ‘escape’ remains an ongoing process rather than a linear trajectory. Dick believes that Johnnie’s acceptance of his sexuality will bring him ‘a kind of freedom’ and will stop his tendency to ‘keep running away’, but Johnnie chooses to remain in the liminal spaces of class, race, nation and sexuality which are ambiguous and confusing, but less constricting (p. 194). Johnnie defers the moment of ultimate decision because ‘[t]hat and only that was worth waiting for: the truth about myself, and the courage and ability to recognize it when it came’ (p. 212). He eschews the binary decision offered by Fiona and Dick, but he cannot consider an alternative. The moment of Johnnie’s self-realization is postponed into an indefinite future. His continual escape offers freedom but a lack of space, in society or in cultural representation, to claim as his own. Salkey’s text can dramatise the escape, but not the destination.

Much like *Brideshead* and *The Heart in Exile*, cultural representation in *Escape to an Autumn Pavement* is the means by which a particular perspective can be acknowledged and disseminated. Donnell argues that ‘it is in the interstitial and internalized spaces of his voicings that Johnnie finds the freedom to escape’, and it is by articulating his unique position through cultural expression that Salkey can challenge the dominant tendencies of both emergent ‘Angry’ narratives and novels about homosexuality for focusing on a narrow range of social experiences. By creating a space in which all of issues pertaining to race, nation, class and sexuality can narratively and thematically entwine, Salkey’s text demonstrates both the possibility of an escape from these rigid categories alongside the difficulties of

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<sup>81</sup> Donnell, *Creolized Sexualities*, p. 96.

imagining an alternative. Both Johnnie's narrative, and the general lack of attention paid to its intersectionality, reiterates its marginalisation in the face of more dominant means of representing both class and same-sex desire.

### Trailblazers: Subcultures and Sexual Identity in *The Leather Boys*

Although post-war novels about homosexuality often featured lower-class characters, they were frequently presented as engaging in same-sex acts conditionally, for financial gain or because of a cross-class relationship with a wealthy and/or educated partner. Gillian Freeman's *The Leather Boys* (1961) depicts a same-sex relationship emerging from within a teenage, working-class subculture and, in doing so, offers a significant alternative to many of the novelistic depictions of homosexuality that had preceded it. *The Leather Boys* is narrated from the perspective of its lower-class protagonists, Dick and Reggie, and charts the development of a romantic and emotional relationship rather than a transitory liaison. Publisher Anthony Blond asked Freeman to write a 'Romeo and Romeo novel with working-class gay protagonists', suggesting a desire for narratives that acknowledged homosexual representation beyond a narrow range of social experiences.<sup>82</sup> This development is partly a consequence of the 'Angry' movement, which made working-class settings and characters both fashionable and profitable. As the 'Romeo and Romeo' element of Blond's brief suggests, however, Dick and Reggie's relationship is ultimately doomed. The novel suggests that this is partly because they cannot envision a version of a homosexual relationship that is not tainted by effeminacy or removal from their immediate social context. *The Leather Boys* teases the possibility of a new path for homosexual representation, but due to their class position and the limited options in the subcultures around them, Dick and Reggie hit a dead end.

Blond's desire for a 'Romeo and Romeo' story also highlights the significance of youth to the novel, which Freeman depicts as a generational attitude. Dick 'has no time for the past' and believes that '[a]nything before his own middle-teens [is] old-fashioned' (p. 104). His investment in his youth and his attitude towards the 'older', acknowledges the growing significance of the teenager as a social and cultural phenomenon in post-war Britain. Harry Hopkins, in *The New Look: A Social History*

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<sup>82</sup> Gillian Freeman, *The Leather Boys* (Richmond: Valancourt Books, 2014), front matter. All further references are to this edition and are provided parenthetically in the body of the text.

of *the Forties and Fifties* (1964) argues that, in the 1950s, '[n]ever had "Youth" - with the capital "Y" - been so earnestly discussed, so frequently surveyed, so extensively seen and heard'.<sup>83</sup> The emergence of the teenager as a widely-recognised phenomenon is humorously alluded to in the text itself, when Dot's interview with the newspaper is published as '*My Teen-age Husband was Murdered*' (p.121). Jon Savage notes that the teenager and the homosexual in post-war Britain were 'regarded as not only undesirable but criminal' and that they became most culturally visible 'when they surfaced as the victims of the latest moral panic'.<sup>84</sup> The merging of these two tendentious figures in post-war Britain, in the form of the teenage homosexual, creates a shared association of rebellion and modernity to contrast with a staid social order.

The biker culture within the novel reflects the power of the teenage label to reorganize social structures and class hierarchies, creating its own separate sense of identity from the working-class milieu to which its members belong. The novel does not specifically refer to the gang as 'rockers', but they adhere to Richard S. Grayson's definition of that particular subculture: '[they] rode motorbikes, wore leather clothes (always darkcoloured), had longer hair (often in a 'quiff style) which was usually greased'.<sup>85</sup> The rockers were also a predominantly lower-class subculture; Stanley Cohen describes them as a 'form of adolescent deviance among working-class youth' and notes that, in a sociological study sample, 'the typical Rocker was an unskilled manual worker'.<sup>86</sup> Youth subcultures like the Rockers were often rebelling against the working-class culture that had produced them; Dick Hebdige argues that they were 'still rooted in a generalized experience of class, but it was expressed in ways which were different from, and in some cases openly antithetical to, the traditional forms'.<sup>87</sup> *The Leather Boys* dramatises this process, whereby the 'rockers' are both a product of working-class culture and represent a

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<sup>83</sup> Hopkins, *The New Look*, p. 31.

<sup>84</sup> Jon Savage, 'Tainted Love: The Influence of Male Homosexuality and Sexual Divergence on Pop Music and Culture Since the War', *Consumption, Identity and Style: Marketing, Meanings and the Packaging of Pleasure*, ed. Alan Tomlinson (London: Routledge, 1990), pp. 103-115 (p. 105).

<sup>85</sup> Richard S. Grayson, 'Mods, Rockers and Juvenile Delinquency in 1964: The Government Response', *Contemporary British History*, 12:1 (1998), 19-47 (p. 24).

<sup>86</sup> Stanley Cohen, *Folk Devils and Moral Panics: The Creation of the Mods and Rockers* (London: Routledge, 2011), p. 12; p. 31.

<sup>87</sup> Dick Hebdige, *Subculture: The Meaning of Style* (London: Routledge, 1988), p. 74.

generational schism within it, through Dick's relationship with his extended family. Dick's parents are apathetic, self-absorbed and emotionally distant, notably treating old and young alike; their hectoring of Dick is matched by the way they treat his elderly grandmother, pushing her towards a home because it will save them the time and money of taking care of her. Indeed, Dick articulates a respect and warmth for his grandparents that is entirely absent from his attitude towards the remainder of the family. When contrasting his Gran's house unfavourably with his parents, Dick's comment sums up his attitude more broadly: 'He preferred the Victorian crumbling to the contemporary gloss' (p. 26). This antagonistic relationship with his parents suggests a rejection of their adult version of working-class culture: 'His parents were like strangers. Today he had seen his mother objectively. He was quite separate from them and their way of living. He didn't really like them, certainly didn't love them' (p. 54). Dick's class identity is formed by his participation in the youth subculture more so than his ties of kinship to working-class parents, establishing the alternative potentials embodied by youth that the novel explores throughout.

If earlier representations of homosexuality often relied on an awareness and understanding of literary culture to convey coded references, then *The Leather Boys* instead signals an alternative form of culture, that of youth subculture, as the means by which its protagonists acknowledge and pursue their same-sex desires. Dick's outfits described at the beginning of the text closely match those of the emerging 'Mod' subculture which, as Savage argues, deliberately cultivated a sexual ambiguity: 'Most Mods weren't gay [...] but to any person unfamiliar with their ideas about pleasure and self, they certainly looked it'.<sup>88</sup> Dick's investment in his own clothing is less about attracting a girlfriend and more about cultivating his own image and the gaze of other young men: 'One didn't only have clean shoes and a brushed suit because one wanted girls to admire one. His appearance mattered to himself. The time he spent on it was entirely for his own satisfaction. Well, perhaps not entirely. Some was for the other boys, in peacock competition' (p. 26). The biker subculture, while ostensibly replicating a stereotypical masculinity, also produces a slippage between homosociality and homoeroticism. Participation in the biker gang provides the stimulus for Dick and Reggie's attraction to one another and the

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<sup>88</sup> Savage, 'Tainted Love: The Influence of Male Homosexuality and Sexual Divergence on Pop Music and Culture Since the War', p. 108.

motorbike itself allows for the covert expression of their desires. Riding together enables a physical intimacy between them that would otherwise be impossible in public: 'Dick put his arms round Reggie's waist and held him tightly as they accelerated fiercely away' (p. 17). The novel not only subverts dominant literary tropes pertaining to homosexuality by placing them in a different social and class context but makes that context essential to the emergence of the same-sex desire that it delineates.

The novel's presentation of working-class men engaging in homosexual activity was, as we have seen, not unique, but the fact that but that it centres their narrative perspective and focuses on a romantic partnership was. The brief mention of 'the leather johnnies' functions as an implicit contrast with the central relationship in the text. They are described as men who dress in the biker kit, despite owning cars, and pursue young, working-class men for sexual liaisons: 'They called them 'kinky', and 'the leather johnnies', but some of them went off with them. They said it was good for an easy quid or two' (p. 12). The interaction is fleeting, financially motivated and does not suggest a more fixed sexuality on the part of the bikers. It is noticeable, therefore, that the narrator notes that 'Reggie had never tried it himself' (p. 12). Dick and Reggie offer an alternative form of representation which presents working-class men as romantically and emotionally invested in one another, as well as sexually attracted.

The freedom of the youth subculture in allowing Dick and Reggie space to carve out alternative and queer desires becomes restrictive when they attempt to pursue a romantic partnership, and it is here that Freeman suggests that issues relating to class and masculinity define, and limit, their ability to pursue such a path. Following their first sexual encounter, Dick acknowledges that men 'did do things with other men when they were randy, everyone knew that' (p. 71). He perceives same-sex desire as individual acts and divorced from commitment to a broader orientation, as indicated by his observation that participation in such acts 'didn't mean [the men] felt anything special though' (p. 71). The novel traces Dick's growing desire for Reggie in more conventionally romantic terms that suggest he is exclusively sexually attracted to him. He opines that he 'would never want to kiss a girl now' and suggests that their relationship has fundamentally altered: 'Every time I touch him now it's different (p. 72). Reggie's narrative perspective makes the case even more explicitly: 'He

knew blokes often had sex together if there were no girls around, in the army and things. It didn't mean anything. But this did' (p. 74). He also compares his feelings for Dick to those at the beginning of the relationship with his now-estranged wife: 'His feelings for Dick now were like those he had had when he first met Dot. He was excited and anxious, on the point of loving' (p. 74). The romantic trajectory of Dick and Reggie's relationship mirrors that of many other novels about homosexuality from the 1950s, including Garland's *The Heart in Exile*, James Courage's *A Way of Love* (1959) or Martyn Goff's *The Youngest Director* (1961), but the key difference is Freeman's is produced entirely within a lower-class context. Indeed, it is their position within this class context that complicates their ability to pursue a longer relationship that the other novels explore.

The uncertainty of the boys in expressing their same-sex desire, and their inability to identify with dominant forms of homosexual representation, is presented as a result of its assumed incompatibility with their gendered and class identities. Freeman pointedly highlights that the characters lack the necessary language with which to express their desires: '[Dick] wanted to analyse his feelings and Reggie's, to talk about themselves and their relationship. But he didn't know the word 'analyse' and he couldn't explain his longing' (p. 75). The narrative voice demonstrates an understanding of psychoanalytical terminology, and likewise assumes a similar knowledge in the reader, from which Dick and Reggie are excluded. Whereas Tony, in *The Heart in Exile*, suggested to lower-class queer men that their lack of precise identities was a source of freedom, here Freeman presents it as a form of exclusion. Dick states that 'he had never thought of his relationship with Reggie as being homosexual, he hadn't labelled it or questioned it' and the novel charts the tension between his desire for a more permanent relationship with Reggie and the reluctant acceptance of a homosexual identity with which he feels little affinity (p.109).

The characters' struggle to align their desires with dominant conceptions of homosexuality lies partly in their belief that to do so would require a rejection of masculinity. Although homosexuality is depicted within the novel as emerging organically from within working-class culture, the heterosexual masculinity associated with that culture shapes the boys' attitude to their own desires. This response suggests the influence of 'Angry Young Men' texts on *The Leather Boys*. While neither Freeman nor her text is associated with the 'Angry' canon, the text

demonstrates a similar investment in masculinity as a key element in the identity of lower-class men. After their first sexual encounter, both men seek reassurance from the other that neither is perceived as a 'girl' and Dick nervously jokes about transgressing normative gender roles: 'I mean we don't want to put on lipstick or anything like that, do we?' (p. 76). This repudiation of effeminacy is underlined with greater emphasis later in the text when Dick visits a shipyard and meets a group of flirtatious and flamboyant men: '[T]hree of them wore suits and satin ties and the other was in jeans and an open-necked shirt, his fingers covered with cheap rings [...] Dick could see he had powder on his face and a metal bracelet on his wrist.' (p.108) They give 'a chorus of giggles and shrieks' upon hearing Dick's name, refer to him as 'dear' and joke about sexual assaults aboard ships (p. 108). Dick feels no sense of class solidarity with these other men despite the fact that, historically, 'queans' were predominantly working-class. Any affinity that Dick might feel with them as fellow homosexuals is also negated because they do not meet sufficient standards of masculinity. Dick and Reggie's relationship emerges from a working-class context, but it also remains invested in a notion of masculinity which produces a continual ambivalence about the queer desire that it represents. Part of Dick's repulsion from the men is because they are older, he references their 'greying hairs' and 'middle-aged powdered faces', but it is also because they are flamboyantly feminine (pp.108-109). Dick and Reggie's relationship, embedded in their youthful subculture and an investment in each other's masculinity, is pitted at odds with these older, feminine queans.

The youth subculture within the text is a space of both freedom and danger, with its potential for social subversion ultimately contained within a conventional narrative outlining the dangers of unchecked violence. Initially, it provides Dick and Reggie with an alternative trajectory, both literally and symbolically: 'That was the joy of a bike, nothing really held you up. At traffic lights you were the first away, in traffic jams you threaded your way to the top of the queue and then left it behind you' (p. 58) In comparison, established quotidian routines are much duller: 'They passed paper boys and milkroundsmen, moving at snail's pace on their bicycles and floats, or so it seemed to them as they raced along the streets' (p. 58). This sense of liberation is, however, curtailed by Reggie's death at the hands of the biker gang. The potential of the alternative trajectory embodied in the working-class subculture is forestalled and

the novel concludes with Reggie having to make his way alone into an uncertain future.

The novel depicts the romantic between Dick and Reggie, but it cannot depict its fruition into a lasting relationship. The cliché of the depressing gay novel, culminating in a protagonist's death, had been discussed and refuted in *The Heart in Exile*, but here it is re-enacted because there is no path for Reggie and Dick – the biker subculture path can only take them so far. At the text's conclusion, Dick cannot even tell anyone of the significance of Reggie's death: 'At no point in the last weeks had anybody questioned his association with Reggie, and there had been times when he had wanted to blurt out, cry out, we loved each other. But he couldn't. There was no one, no one, no one he could tell' (p. 134). The novel tells the story of Reggie and Dick, but it is not one that either of the characters can tell themselves and it thus functions as both a representation of same-sex desire among working-class men and a narrative example of its suppression. Casual fun between working-class teenagers, or fun with the 'leather johnnies' is one thing, but a romantic partnership is a journey too far for *The Leather Boys*. By presenting the tragic end to their relationship as a consequence of the limited templates for homosexuality available to them as masculine, working-class men, *The Leather Boys* reinforces a particular class emphasis on homosexual representation even as it appears to undermine it.

### Conclusion

The novels selected for analysis in this chapter illuminate its central argumentative conceit that an established relationship between homosexuality, class identity and varying definitions of culture continued into the post-war era, but it was reshaped considerably by social change. In *Brideshead Revisited*, Waugh defends class elitism by suggesting that it is entwined with cultural value and, within his idealized depiction of interwar Oxford, depicts forms of same-sex desire that are contingent on the specific privileged context. *The Heart in Exile*, on the other hand, places its depiction of homosexuality in contemporary Britain and, by invoking popular novelistic genres, crafts an accessible and entertaining narrative to argue for the decency of homosexual men and their right to happiness. The novel depicts homosexual culture in a transitional period, still shaped by cross-class desire and elitist ideas of culture, but looking forward to a future in which a shared homosexual culture supersedes class distinctions. The novel's investment in the idealized middle-

class figure of Tony, and the eroticized class difference that shapes his romantic narrative with Terry, however, suggests an awareness on Garland's part that class cannot be so easily dismissed.

Literary movements of the 1950s and the critical consensus that emerged around them exploited the association between homosexuality, class and culture in order to articulate a backlash against the perceived dominance of artistic culture by a conservative and effete literary establishment. Amis's *Lucky Jim* examined this connection for laughs, but the construction of the 'Angry' label a few years later served to align this anti-effeminacy to a class-based form of rebellion that only validated specific perspectives as working-class narratives. Andrew Salkey's *Escape to an Autumn Pavement* is a response to this tendency within post-war literary culture to offer narrowly defined representations of race, class and same-sex desire. Salkey's protagonist, Johnnie Sobert, attempts to explore his intersectional identity in both a society, and a literary culture, that refuses to acknowledge it. *The Leather Boys* presents same-sex desire as emerging from within the context of a youth subculture but Dick and Reggie struggle to align their identities as working-class, masculine young men with homosexual stereotypes in a manner that suggests an underlying incompatibility. Both *Escape* and *The Leather Boys* implicitly critique mainstream depictions of homosexuality for their class biases, but the inability of their protagonists to pursue expressions of same-sex desire outside of these strictures reinscribes their dominance by failing to offer a coherent alternative.

Despite their considerable differences in setting and style, there are commonalities across these texts which point to recurrent preoccupations. An uneasy relationship with effeminacy is one of the most consistent and persistent themes. In *Brideshead Revisited*, an adult Charles admires Anthony Blanche while nonetheless recalling an antipathy when they first met as undergraduates.<sup>89</sup> In *Escape to an Autumn Pavement*, Johnnie is concerned that same-sex desire will imperil his masculinity and both the middle-class Tony Page and the working-class Dick are disgusted by the queans they encounter in their narratives. One reason for this might be that effeminacy knows no particular class bounds – there are wealthy effeminate men like Blanche, middle-class ones like *Lucky Jim's* unseen Michel and working-class ones

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<sup>89</sup> 'I had been seeing rather more of Anthony Blanche than my liking for him warranted'. Waugh, *Brideshead Revisited*, pp.46-7.

like the dockyard sailors. In a cultural context so invested in delineating homosexual in terms of specific class terms, the effeminate queen undermines the attempts of most of these texts to present same-sex identity as associated with specific class experiences.

## **Homosexuality in the Spotlight: Aesthetics, Audiences and Anger in Post-War Theatre**

### Introduction

Following the controversy generated by Mordaunt Shairp's play *The Green Bay Tree* (1932), an Examiner from the Lord Chamberlain's Office, the official body of theatrical censorship, was sent to review a production. The elements in the play which warranted the intervention of the Examiner, and his own response, highlight several fundamental links between theatrical culture and homosexuality which are pertinent for an examination of its significance in post-war Britain. He argued that there was 'no suggestion of physical homosexuality' to be found in the play and instead proposed that the 'few critics who took the opposite view were, I think, influenced by a desire to appear knowing or by the very unfortunate fact that homosexuality is in the air very much at present or at least in the theatrical air'.<sup>1</sup> The perception that the play was engaging with homosexuality in some form was prompted by its narrative, in which Dulcimer, an older, effete aesthete, jealously prevents his adopted son from marrying a woman who is suspicious about the intensity of their relationship. Dulcimer's characterisation owes much to Oscar Wilde, whose infamy cast a long shadow in twentieth-century representations of homosexuality. The Examiner is satisfied with the fact that there is no 'physical homosexuality' to warrant censure, apparently happy to ignore the extent to which same-sex desire might be communicated in more coded forms, particularly in relation to the Wildean stereotype. Rather than place the blame on the play itself, the Examiner instead suggests that the response is a by-product of the queerness that pervades the institution. It does not matter what the play is actually representing because there is already an established association between the theatre and homosexuality. The various strands of this individual review – the enduring significance of Wilde, tension between coding and representation and the association of the theatrical space with same-sex desire – provide something of a precursor for issues that became critical and consequential in post-war Britain, in which the idea that the theatre itself, as an institution and a dramatic form, was

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<sup>1</sup> John Johnston, *The Lord Chamberlain's Blue Pencil* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1990), p.173.

inextricably associated with homosexuality would define and shape dramaturgical developments.

This association has a long and complex history, formed as the tangled result of several social, cultural and historical threads. It is partly rooted in the historical geography of the West End, both a physical and symbolic capital for commercial theatre and an area whose houses and coffee shops were 'known as places for same-sex encounters [...] since the late nineteenth century at least'.<sup>2</sup> Wilde's trial disseminated this connection to a broad and scandalised audience; Oliver S. Buckton argues that '[a]t the moment when Wilde's career as a playwright comes to an end, therefore, his new identity as a sexual criminal begins', but there was a considerable overlap between these two phases that informed stereotypes regarding same-sex desire.<sup>3</sup> As Alan Sinfield notes, '[t]he Wilde trials had established queerness not just generally, but at the heart of the theatre'.<sup>4</sup> This association continued into the twentieth century; Noel Langley's novel *There's a Porpoise Close Behind Us* (1936) suggests that the theatre is overrun by predatory homosexual men, with one character describing same-sex desire as a 'a sort of dry rot' in commercial theatre and stating: 'I've had jobs whipped away from under my nose by funny little creatures belonging to the leading man or the management more times than I like to remember'.<sup>5</sup> Often associated with Wilde in some way, the potential homosexual connotations of the theatre provided a stereotype which was to be exploited with particular intensity in the post-war era.

The presence of homosexual men within the industry was perceptible to some, although often hard to define in a social climate unable or unwilling to discuss homosexuality, and thus relied on coded language and knowing allusions which could be communicated to a likeminded and receptive audience. Binkie Beaumont, an influential and successful West End producer, was profiled in a 1952 issue of *Harper's Bazaar* and, although his sexuality could not be referenced openly, it was legible to those attuned to the clues provided: 'His trick of holding his cigarette

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<sup>2</sup> Sinfield, *Out on Stage*, p. 6.

<sup>3</sup> Oliver S. Buckton, 'Oscar Goes to Hollywood: Wilde, Sexuality, and the Gaze of Contemporary Cinema', in *Oscar Wilde and Modern Culture: The Making of a Legend*, ed. Joseph Bristow (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2008), pp. 278-303 (p. 281).

<sup>4</sup> Sinfield, *Out on Stage*, p. 29.

<sup>5</sup> Langley, *There's a Porpoise Close Behind Us*, p. 98.

between the two middle fingers, while wearing a monogrammed signet ring on the little one, is his only homage to dandyism. His voice has much in common with John Perry, his associate and confidant at Tennent's, and of Cecil Beaton'.<sup>6</sup> The references to the signet ring on the little finger (Joe Orton told a journalist in 1965 that '[q]ueers been doing that for years'), alongside the references to the flamboyant Beaton, align Beaumont with both an aesthetic and coterie that have homosexual connotations.<sup>7</sup> The article's approach to discussing Beaumont mirrors that of the theatre itself, in which homosexuality could only be implied, rather than stated, but this emphasis on evasion and discretion would come under attack in the changing social context of post-war Britain.

This established association between homosexuality and the theatre was fostered and developed in a climate in which homosexuality was taken much more seriously in public, whether as a crime, a medical condition or a social problem. In 1946 and 1951, the Lord Chamberlain asked a cross-section of establishment figures for their views regarding liberalising depictions of homosexuality. His repeated investigations into the topic suggest that it was seen to require a new approach in light of post-war social change, while the recommendations against liberalization point to a resistance against acknowledging it openly.<sup>8</sup> A number of sexological texts about homosexuality fueled this growing preoccupation and often reiterated a connection to the theatrical space. Sinfield notes that Gordon Westwood's research, published in England in 1960, 'did not find homosexuals disproportionately in theatrical and artistic occupations', but did 'find that the interests of homosexuals were often 'cultural', and 'ability to gossip knowledgeably about the theatre' might be 'a very important asset'.<sup>9</sup> Dan Rebellato provides a similar example in his discussion of psychiatrist Donald West's *Homosexuality* (1955), which argues that 'conversational virtuosity, a frothy wit, and an ability to gossip knowledgeably about the theatre are assets second only to the possession of a trim figure and pretty face' in homosexual subcultures.<sup>10</sup> The links between homosexuality and theatre

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<sup>6</sup> Author Unknown, 'An Inner View of Binkie Beaumont', *Harper's Bazaar*, 85: 2890 (Sep 1952), 220, 300-301 (p. 300).

<sup>7</sup> John Lahr, *Prick Up Your Ears: The Biography of Joe Orton* (London: Bloomsbury, 2002), p. 157.

<sup>8</sup> Johnston, *The Lord Chamberlain's Blue Pencil*, p. 171.

<sup>9</sup> Sinfield, *Out on Stage*, p. 10.

<sup>10</sup> Rebellato, *1956 and All That*, p. 160.

thus became increasingly acknowledged in the 1950s, and this relationship impacted emerging and competing ideas of theatrical reform. Advocates of such reform often weaponised this association as part of their critique of mainstream drama. Writer and commentator J. B. Priestley, in his survey of contemporary drama, *Theatre Outlook* (1947), argued for a 'theatre that attracts to itself plenty of virile men and deeply feminine women and is something better than an exhibition of sexual oddities and perversions'.<sup>11</sup> Priestley's linking of the presence of homosexual creators and artists with the poor state of contemporary theatre was to become a defining element of certain post-war dramaturgical developments. For Priestley and many others at the, often self-defined, vanguard of contemporary theatrical reform, this association with homosexuality undermined the more serious potential represented by their own dramaturgical style. It could also be seen to conflict with the aesthetic through which this thematic definition of modern drama and modern Britain would become associated.

As this brief exploration of some indicative post-war dramas will demonstrate, the British stage in the immediate decades after the war became a prominent space through which the complex and often contradictory relationship between homosexual culture and stereotype, class politics, and ideas of social and artistic modernity were presented. Many of the developments and innovations of post-war theatre were responding to the perceived complacency and conservatism of commercial theatre and – sometimes directly, sometimes indirectly -- its association with homosexuality. Rebellato describes homosexuality as 'a powerful range of structural effects which resonate through the whole "revolution" in British theatre', delineating an approach that views homosexuality not only in terms of individual representations on stage, but rather as a preoccupation embedded in the very structure of post-war theatre and informing its developments.<sup>12</sup> This chapter argues for the significance of class within these broader debates, proposing that the relationship between homosexuality and the theatre throughout the post-war era was often both expressed, and challenged, by invoking specific forms of class representation. This chapter examines five very different plays from the period, all of which negotiate in some way with the

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<sup>11</sup> J. B. Priestley, *Theatre Outlook* (London: Nicholson & Watson, 1947), p. 53.

<sup>12</sup> Rebellato, *1956 and All That*, p. 224.

relationship between class, sexuality, and ideas about contemporary Britain and theatrical culture.

From Wilde Child to Master of Mainstream: Theatricality and Performance in *Present Laughter*

*The Green Bay Tree*, and the controversy that it provoked, point to the ongoing influence of the Wildean stereotype as a means to imply homosexuality in terms that were sufficiently vague to circumvent more explicit forms of censorship. The central argument of Sinfield's *The Wilde Century* is that Wilde's persona was frequently invoked by subsequent generations of homosexual men to indicate queerness while also camouflaging itself as part of an eccentric upper-class identity: 'The ambiguity established precisely the model through which the twentieth-century queer simultaneously was and was not visible: in one aspect, any gentleman might be queer, in another, class hierarchy was only proper and the queer was an anomalous intrusion'.<sup>13</sup> This class-specific stereotype provided many men with a means to discreetly signal their homosexuality, and it was adopted and developed by the most infamous dandy of twentieth-century theatre: Noël Coward. Despite his lower-class origins, Coward cultivated a persona that invoked comparison with Wilde's dandy, employing wit, coded references and innuendo in his plays. Unlike Wilde, Coward also performed the lead in most of his productions. The consequently ambiguous distinction between character, persona, and artist could result in an additional level of suggestiveness to both his stage appearances and to his status as a celebrity.

Coward's plays and performances playfully elude any direct representation of homosexuality, engaging instead with models of style, aesthetic, and character associated with the Wildean stereotype. The louche, delicate Nicky, in Coward's first success, *The Vortex* (1924), was reminiscent of the Victorian aesthete figure and doubtless informed Hannen Swaffer's assertion that *The Vortex* was 'the most decadent play of our time'.<sup>14</sup> As his career flourished, Coward continued to invoke both a queer past and examine same-sex desire in his contemporary moment. He wrote the song 'We All Wear a Green Carnation' for his operetta *Bitter Sweet* (1929), clearly alluding to Wilde, and also discreetly indicated the presence of same-sex

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<sup>13</sup> Sinfield, *The Wilde Century*, p. 123.

<sup>14</sup> Charles Castle, *Noël* (London: W. H. Allen, 1972), p. 65.

desire in his performed works, such as *Design for Living* (1932), while writing about it more explicitly in unpublished works such as *Semi-Monde* (1926).

Notwithstanding the occasional seriousness of his works, Coward cultivated and maintained a consistently louche, Wildean persona. As Philip Hoare argues, 'for the first time since Oscar Wilde, a writer's appearance seemed as important as what he wrote'.<sup>15</sup> Coward's investment in his own appearance, his charming and witty manner, and his clipped diction gestured towards a Wildean model that suggested homosexuality but that was partly camouflaged through the ambiguity provided by the stereotype. Coward's adoption of this role also implied a similar investment in its class connotations as wealthy, privileged, and leisured. This perception was reinforced in Coward's plays, which tended to be set amongst the leisured class. Harold Pinter argues that Coward's 'class of people who never seem to need to earn any money...wasn't intended to be an accurate representation of a given class...[it] was an abstraction, a world which became his own'.<sup>16</sup> Nonetheless, the effect was to associate the implicit representation of homosexuality with a context of privilege. Ultimately, this narrow social focus became a defining element of Coward's dramaturgy and a key preoccupation of those post-war critics who dismissed his theatre as outdated and irrelevant.

Although Coward's queerness could be implied by his writing and his persona, it was at the point at which these two elements met - his performances - that Coward could most playfully allude to homosexuality, using the audience's knowledge of his persona to imply meanings beyond the text and to exploit the perceived frivolity of the theatre to avoid commitment to any overt or direct admissions. Such a confluence of persona and performer relied upon what Rebellato has termed the power of the 'star' in the theatre of the 1930s and 1940s, noting that famous figures 'wielded their own set of signs, their "persona", which could be read *alongside* the performance they gave'.<sup>17</sup> This investment in conscious performativity became 'a site for the enjoyment of artifice, of pleurably playing off actor against character'.<sup>18</sup> Coward continually reminded the audience of the persona behind the performances;

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<sup>15</sup> Philip Hoare, *Noël Coward: A Biography* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), p. 140.

<sup>16</sup> Hoare, *Noël Coward: A Biography*, p. 458.

<sup>17</sup> Rebellato, *1956 and All That*, p. 79. [Emphasis Rebellato].

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 79.

he would take numerous curtain calls, for example, and often give a speech to the audience to reinforce his celebrity presence. He also adopted a performance style which deliberately eschewed the psychological introspections of Method acting, which he 'thought was pretentious' and retained elements of his persona even in other roles; Judy Campbell recalls that Coward wore perfume to portray married father Frank Gibbons in *This Happy Breed* and describes it as 'a gesture against that thing of having to become your role'.<sup>19</sup> Coward's performances, particularly in his own plays, were thus often inextricable from his own persona – allowing for elements pertaining to his public self to become entwined in his characters.

Christopher Innes has argued that Coward's 'comedies were not only vehicles for creating his public persona', but 'express the ambiguity of the performing self',<sup>20</sup> and *Present Laughter* (1942) is self-consciously invested in this ambiguity, particularly in relation to the performance of sexuality and desire within an understood template. *Present Laughter* demonstrates Coward's confident use of witty theatricality to signal a discreet and coded queerness. It also functions as something of an apex for this style. Written in 1939, first performed in 1942 and revived in 1947 to great acclaim, the play underlined Coward's popularity in the immediate post-war era and his comfortable establishment in mainstream theatre. Ultimately, however, the evasions, double entendres and general sense of frivolity that Coward employs would soon contrast with an emergent dramatic emphasis on direct expression and a very different social focus and setting.

In *Present Laughter*, Coward played the principal role of Garry Essendine, an actor and writer famed for his comic wit, with a close circle of theatrical friends and a penchant for dressing gowns.<sup>21</sup> By performing in a role he had written, and which was so obviously based on his persona, Coward was encouraging a slippage between character and actor. Garry is portrayed as an inveterate seducer of women, but Coward's performance, combined with innuendo in the dialogue, invests the character with a more ambiguous sexual orientation. Garry's admission that he's

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<sup>19</sup> Hoare, *Noël Coward: A Biography*, pp. 334-5.

<sup>20</sup> Christopher Innes, *Modern British Drama: The Twentieth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), p. 263.

<sup>21</sup> Hoare's biography suggests that many of the principal characters are based on real figures in Coward's life, including secretary Lorn Lorraine and long-time friend Joyce Carey providing inspiration for Monica Reed and Liz Essendine respectively.

promised a job to a 'marvellous' sailor with 'vast strapping shoulders and tiny, tiny hips like a wasp', might have accrued additional significance when performed.<sup>22</sup> As Frances Gray argues, when Coward's characters 'talk nonsense, it does not function as a disguise for desire but a strategy for performing it'.<sup>23</sup> Performance thus becomes a crucial element in queering Garry's character, demonstrating the significance of non-scripted elements when censorship prevented narrative representation.

Coward's implicit presentation of Garry's homosexual desires is also inextricable from the assumed habits and setting of the class that the characters inhabit. Garry's queer theatricality is partly reiterated through contrast with other characters, most significantly Fred, his valet, and it is worth noting the significance of lower-class characters to Coward's performances. His conservative attitude towards the class system, despite his own social mobility, has been well-documented; Hoare argues that '[a]lthough Coward had managed that remarkable leap, he was not about to encourage further social acrobatics'.<sup>24</sup> His working-class characters were usually servants, gradually evolving from functional message deliverers and drink dispatchers in early plays to more articulate and critical, although still minor characters in later comedies. In *Present Laughter*, Fred is Garry's valet and functions primarily as a sarcastic foil to the chaos around him, but the distinction between Fred's masculinity and Garry's flamboyant theatricality is partly reinforced by their class difference. Sinfield has outlined what he calls a 'stalking-horse' pattern in Coward's work, 'whereby a manifest queer exonerates a more central character, even while, for those with ears to hear, drawing attention to the likelihood of homosexuality'.<sup>25</sup> It is worth considering Fred, however, as a character who makes Garry look more, rather than less, queer. In his scant appearances, Fred plays a 'straight man' in more ways than one to Garry, his character signalling a masculine

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<sup>22</sup> Noël Coward, 'Present Laughter' in *Noël Coward: Plays Four* (London: Methuen, 1983), pp. 133-247 (p. 224). All further references are to this edition and are provided parenthetically in the body of the text.

<sup>23</sup> Frances Gray, 'Always Acting: Noël Coward and the Performing Self', in *A Companion to Modern British and Irish Drama 1880-2005*, ed. Mary Luckhurst (Blackwell: Oxford, 2006), pp. 225-235 (p. 234).

<sup>24</sup> Hoare, *Noël Coward: A Biography*, p. 302.

<sup>25</sup> Sinfield, *The Wilde Century*, p. 137.

heterosexuality against Garry's sexual ambiguity.<sup>26</sup> His minor status both stages the relative unimportance of his class and reinforces an association of homosexuality exclusively with the privileged class that is the focus of the play.

Notwithstanding the implicit class politics, the tone of the play is comic. The audience is continually reminded that we should not take Garry (and, by extension, Coward) 'seriously'. Both character and persona are, ultimately, constructs. When Garry's latest romantic conquest Daphne Stillington is asked whether she has known him for long, her answer indicates the complexity of the question: 'Well, no, not exactly – I mean of course I've known him for ages. I think he's wonderful but we actually only met last night for the first time at Maureen Jarratt's party' (p. 138). This sense in which Garry can be simultaneously known (as a public figure) and unknown (as an individual) parallels Coward's own persona; Peter Quennell asked, 'Off stage, when did Noël act, and when was his private behaviour truly spontaneous?'.<sup>27</sup> Garry performs frequently throughout the play, acting out exaggerated and insincere romantic farewells or engaging in histrionic and short-lived temper tantrums. When one of his rants concludes with an insistence that he is '[f]undamentally honest', his spurned lover Joanna responds by laughing and shouting, 'Curtain!' (p. 193). Her use of theatrical terminology to mock his behaviour emphasizes his ongoing performativity and reinforces its artifice. This reiteration of Garry's theatricality, and our inability to know when he is being 'serious', arguably parallels Coward's own means of using performance as a mean to avoid a definitive interpretation of his actions. Coward is confident enough to draw attention to Garry's theatricality as a source of duplicity, but with the knowledge that these playful nods to his own evasiveness can be disclaimed as frivolity.

Coward's style relied on the artificiality and ephemerality associated with the commercial theatre; the fact that it was seldom taken seriously as an artform meant that it could provide a greater freedom from scrutiny and censure. An interview with Beaumont, who was responsible for producing several Coward plays, alludes to such presuppositions: 'Like most bachelors, he enjoys impermanence and loves hobbies; two qualities which the theatre, a hobby in which there can be no permanence,

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<sup>26</sup> Most of Fred's dialogue that is not related to Garry is about his courting of Doris, a woman that it is implied he is taking sexual advantage of without any intention of marrying.

<sup>27</sup> Hoare, p. 396.

satisfactorily combines'.<sup>28</sup> This telling comment melds two separate ideas: the idea of the theatre as a transient space, in which the temporal contingencies placed on both performances and productions escape final, and permanent, definition and, implicitly, its flippant designation as a 'hobby'. In *Present Laughter*, Coward's manoeuvring between innocent and illicit through both dialogue and performance reaches a self-aware zenith when, upon hearing that the doorbell has rung, Garry remarks that '[w]ith any luck it's the Lord Chamberlain' (p. 237). The reference to the official institution of theatrical censorship signals to the audience how much of the content on stage is straying towards dangerous territory, but, as Coward was only too aware, there was no danger of censure if the frivolity of the theatrical space was exploited correctly. The Lord Chamberlain's report on *Present Laughter* demonstrates the efficiency of Coward's style; the reader wrote that the 'artificiality [of the characters] accounts in a large measure for their inoffensiveness'.<sup>29</sup> It was precisely the contrived settings and exaggerated characters that provided Coward with a means to be more subversive than the Lord Chamberlain would credit, but it also required his ongoing association with a theatrical style defined by triviality.

Coward self-consciously acknowledges the perceived frivolity of commercial theatre by mocking the artistic pretensions of serious drama through the conflict between Garry and Roland Maule. Roland is an aspiring playwright who seeks Garry's advice, insults his writing and eventually becomes infatuated with him, but their relationship takes on a broader symbolic significance within the play. Garry's comfortable ensconcement within the commercial, rather than intellectual, theatre is humorously invoked by comic references to his unsuitability for Ibsen's *Peer Gynt* and his pragmatic approach to playwriting, while Roland values a literary theatre with scant regard for audiences. He has written a 'mad play half in verse' (p. 159), aligning him with a genre which, as Irene Morra notes, had a particular cultural position and assumed opposition to commercial theatre: 'In the first half of the century, the term "poetic drama" could often signify a theatre whose profound treatment of dramatic subject and character contested the superficial, commercial interests of the mainstream stage'.<sup>30</sup> This friction underlies the relationship between the two men;

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<sup>28</sup> *Harper's Bazaar*, 'An Inner View of Binkie Beaumont', p. 301.

<sup>29</sup> Hoare, *Noël Coward*, p. 296.

<sup>30</sup> Irene Morra, *Verse Drama in England, 1900-2015: Art, Modernity and the National Stage* (London and New York: Bloomsbury, 2016), p. 3.

Roland criticises Garry for failing to be sufficiently 'serious' in his writing: 'All you do with your talent is to wear dressing-gowns and make witty remarks when you might be really helping people, making them think! Making them feel!' (p. 172) Once Garry gives him a monumental dressing-down in his dressing-gown, thus demonstrating he is capable of emotional intensity and depth, Roland switches from critic to fanatic with an undertone of homosexual desire. Although his sudden devotion to Garry is articulated vaguely – '[I]t's rather difficult to explain really [...w]hat I feel about you', this indeterminacy creates the potential for queer readings (p. 41). Roland's response to Garry involves emotional declarations that mirror romantic infatuation ('I am absolutely devoted to your face in every mood', p. 100), and it is significant that Garry feels compelled to hide Roland from his other visitors in the same manner that he does his female romantic conquests. Roland is thus in many ways a more overtly 'queer' character than Garry. Roland's queer-coded characterization allows Coward to mock the world of 'serious' theatre by indicating its own homosexual connotations. This comic dynamic does, however, underwrite the general queerness of the theatre, both commercial and intellectual, that was to be used against homosexual writers, and Coward in particular, in the 1950s.

Coward's playful mocking of the theatre as a queer space, even to the extent of making a representative of the intellectual theatre look more theatrically effete than Garry, reiterates his refusal to commit to the idea of 'serious' drama and this defiance is borne out in the play's conclusion. Garry and his estranged wife Liz reconcile and leave the oblivious Daphne and Roland in the hiding spaces where Garry has concealed them (and promised to return). His abrogation of responsibility, and the lack of resolution to several characters' narratives, highlights the flippancy of both Garry and the play. The complications that would arise from Daphne or Roland 'coming out' are endlessly deferred and escapism is prioritised over revelation. This tone is representative of *Present Laughter's* approach to same-sex desire, which favours elusive coding over the risks of direct depiction. This connection had partly relied on discretion, but in a post-war context, the erstwhile freedom of the theatrical dandy role would instead become a trap and a stereotype.

Instead, Coward's style would be increasingly viewed as a silly, ineffectual alternative to the need for direct expression and, as homosexuality became a prominent topic of discussion, his ambiguity began to resemble duplicity. During the Second World War,

Coward was made a cultural ambassador to America. The comedic actress and singer Joyce Grenfell, privately commenting on the development, observed: 'it is definitely a pity....that the man who represents this country at a time like this should be so famous as a "queer"'.<sup>31</sup> Coward's success relied on several factors – including the popularity of his class-specific narratives, the coded nature of his subversive humour and his performance of sexually ambiguous dandy figures. These elements would come under increasing attack in the shifting dramaturgical landscape of post-war theatre, ensuring that Coward remained a central figure – a West End staple even as the critical tide turned against him – for subsequent decades.

### Facing the Audience: Rattigan and Edna take a seat at *Separate Tables*

*Present Laughter* playfully exploits both the sexual ambiguity of Coward's own persona and the frivolity associated with the commercial theatre. Terence Rattigan's *Separate Tables* (1954), in contrast, engages with homosexuality as both a significant and serious issue in post-war Britain, primarily through the coded narrative of a Major accused of (heterosexual) misdemeanours. Rattigan's play evinces a clear distaste for conspicuous theatricality, instead focusing on the sober discussion of sexual 'abnormality' as a social issue. This serious engagement with contemporary values distances Rattigan significantly in tone and focus from Coward, with whom he was (and often still is) constantly associated.<sup>32</sup> This association may be due in part to the fact that the two dramatists were the most successful commercial playwrights on the post-war and wartime stage. Notwithstanding their very different approaches to theme and subject, both playwrights were also very informed by a class-specific idea of subject and audience that shaped the way in which they represented homosexuality on stage.

David Pattie argues that '[f]or Rattigan's characters, as for Rattigan himself, there is always an audience, ready to scrutinise and judge even the smallest, most personal actions', and this symbiotic relationship between dramatist and audience informed both Rattigan's dramaturgy and his approach to staging socially contentious topics in

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<sup>31</sup> Hoare, *Noël Coward: A Biography*, p. 313.

<sup>32</sup> 'Inevitably, because he enjoyed wartime success on Shaftesbury Avenue, was associated with the Tennent regime and lived a discreetly homosexual existence, Terence Rattigan is often linked with Noël Coward'. Billington, *State of the Nation*, p. 38.

*Separate Tables*.<sup>33</sup> Rattigan's critical downfall is often ascribed to his admission of a paternalistic attitude towards his audience, but the article which sparked the controversy has been frequently misread.<sup>34</sup> In the 1953 introduction to his second volume of published plays, Rattigan argued for the importance of the relationship between playwright and audience because 'a play can neither be great, nor a masterpiece, nor a work of genius, nor talented, nor untalented, nor indeed anything at all, unless it has an audience to see it'.<sup>35</sup> In order to illustrate this point, Rattigan invented a representative theatregoer called Aunt Edna who was 'a hopeless lowbrow' and had specific standards of structure, narrative and characterisation in mind when choosing her plays.<sup>36</sup> He was arguing that the playwright should treat the 'Aunt Ednas' of the theatregoing public neither as enemies to scorn nor patrons to flatter, but rather engage with their expectations while simultaneously challenging and developing them.<sup>37</sup> Rattigan's article was widely ridiculed, but his willingness to negotiate with generic and formal expectations of theatre from an audience's perspective allowed him to challenge both societal and theatrical conventions in a manner that went largely unacknowledged during his lifetime.

While Rattigan's ideas about the importance of the audience are neither as paternalistic nor as patronising as initially assumed, they are implicitly restricted to a very specific social stratum. He describes Edna as 'a nice, respectable middle-class, middle-aged, maiden lady' and, although acknowledging that a variation of her character resides in the cheaper gallery seats, nonetheless reiterates that they are not the same as their 'stall-occupying relative'.<sup>38</sup> Rattigan's definition of his audience is thus primarily focused on a theatregoing public that is female, middle-aged and

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<sup>33</sup> David Pattie, 'Terence Rattigan: Private Lives and Public Lives', *Modern British Playwrights: The 1950s*, ed. David Pattie (London: Methuen Drama, 2012), pp.119-145 (p. 126).

<sup>34</sup> 'Written in a slightly ironic, tongue-in-cheek mode, Rattigan's reactionary preface rebounded disastrously. It did a deep disservice to his talent and became a convenient weapon of attack for critics who saw him as no more than a supine servant of popular taste'. Billington, *State of the Nation*, pp. 67-8.

<sup>35</sup> Terence Rattigan, 'Preface', *The Collected Plays of Terence Rattigan, Volume Two* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1977), pp. vii-xxi (p. xi).

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, xii.

<sup>37</sup> Rebellato proposes that Rattigan viewed playwrights as 'engaged in a kind of *pas de deux* with Edna, with whom he or she must maintain a certain distance, working with and pushing against the limits of her tolerance and understanding'. Rebellato, *1956 and All That*, p. 108 [*italics original*].

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, xii.

middle-class. *Separate Tables* presents an appeal for tolerance and decency in relation to a coded homosexual narrative. In its social setting and dramaturgy, it implicitly reinforces Rattigan's assumptions about the values and social identity of his audience. In so doing, it highlights both the value and the limitations of Rattigan's approach; both the on-stage collection of characters and those watching the play must listen to an argument for an understanding of the sexual outsider in a communal setting which challenges their own prejudices. The social milieu of the play, and of Rattigan's target 'Aunt Edna' audience, however, suggests that its discussion of a coded homosexuality is primarily structured around the expectations of an imagined middle-class figure and her idea of theatre.

Rattigan's focus on examining social issues through the public sphere of theatre is indicated by the play's setting in the Beauregard Hotel. Although Rebellato describes it as a private space hostile to outside forces, the hotel undermines such a neat distinction.<sup>39</sup> The residents share the communal lounge and dining room and their private bedrooms are ultimately owned and regulated by the management. The main characters represent a limited cross-section of society that implicitly mirrors the identity of Rattigan's presumed theatregoer, and each act of *Separate Tables* is an examination of their responses to specific social problems. The audience watching the play are also individuals brought together in a shared communal activity and, as Rattigan was only too aware, were likely to be from similar backgrounds to the characters that he was depicting. The Beauregard Hotel constructs a collective group on stage that can both mirror, and challenge, the one located just off-stage, both of which are forced to confront the relationship between private desires and public scrutiny.

The play is structured in two acts that can seem at first almost to be self-contained plays. As Innes notes, however, this doubling is a 'standard structural form throughout' Rattigan's career, 'designed to make audiences continually re-evaluate their attitudes'.<sup>40</sup> The first act, 'Table by the Window', establishes themes and ideas

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<sup>39</sup> 'It is an extension of a technique that Rattigan used in *The Deep Blue Sea*, to transform the conventional complacency of the West End "room" into something darker, suggesting a refuge erected fearfully against the outside'. Dan Rebellato, 'Introduction', in *Separate Tables* (London: Nick Hern Books, 2014), pp. ix-xxxviii (p. xxiv). All further references are to this edition and provided parenthetically in the body of the text.

<sup>40</sup> Innes, *Modern British Drama*, pp. 82-3.

that are developed in the second. It dramatizes a tension between private desire and public acknowledgement as most of the residents engage in varying practices of deception in order to maintain a public façade; Charles is lying to his father about his relationship with Jean, Miss Cooper is conducting a secret affair with John, and Mr. Foster is deluding himself that his ex-pupil will ever visit him at the hotel. By the time that the play examines sexual deviance in the second act, 'Table Number Seven', the audience is aware that none of these characters is unquestionably or simply 'honest'. As a result, Major Pollock is made less unique or 'Other' in terms of his duplicitous behaviour.

The narrative focus on the Major's (heterosexual) assaults functions as a code for examining post-war responses to homosexuality, a reticence necessitated by theatrical censorship that would have prohibited direct, and sympathetic, discussion of the topic. The extent to which contemporary audiences decoded the scenario as an exploration of prevalent attitudes towards homosexuality is, within such a heterogenous concept as 'the audience', impossible to define, but Rattigan was unequivocal regarding his intentions. He claimed that '[a]n English audience knew my problem and accepted the fact that I had to skirt around it' and believed that '[t]hey fully realised that the Major's peccadilloes (in the cinema) were in fact only symbolical of another problem of which, at that time (just after several prominent cases), they were most sensitively conscious'.<sup>41</sup> Geoffrey Wansell suggests that this was Rattigan confusing his own likeminded inner circle with the theatregoing public and, indeed, the perception that the subject of homosexuality was being deliberately avoided rather than carefully staged, was a predominant critical response. Kenneth Tynan's review of the play constructed a dialogue between two representative figures, the 'Young Perfectionist' who attempts to explain the play to a reluctant 'Aunt Edna'. Tynan suggests that Rattigan employed this coded representation in order to mollify the prejudices of an insular mainstream audience. The Young Perfectionist represents an audience desirous of more overt social commentary, lamenting that 'the major's crime was not something more cathartic than mere cinema flirtation' but concedes that 'the play is as good a handling of sexual abnormality as English playgoers will tolerate'. Tynan suggests that Rattigan has deliberately limited his representation to appease Aunt Edna who enthusiastically proclaims: 'Clearly, there

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<sup>41</sup> Quoted in Geoffrey Wansell, *Terence Rattigan* (London: Fourth Estate, 1995), p. 258.

is something here for both of us'.<sup>42</sup> The Young Perfectionist's response – 'But not quite for either of us' – concludes the review by suggesting that Rattigan's attempt to keep both audiences (separately) happy is a failure. Nicholas de Jongh criticises claims by Rattigan, and his biographers, that coding was necessary for producing *Separate Tables* on the mainstream stage, describing them as 'disingenuous' and arguing instead that the playwright was 'terrified that his mother might finally realise that her forty-three-year-old unmarried son was homosexual'.<sup>43</sup> Tynan and de Jongh's responses highlight that the play was, and still is, perceived as a homosexual narrative transmuted by audience expectations into a heterosexual context. This blinkered interpretation ignores that Rattigan's approach to 'Aunt Edna' was to subtly challenge, rather than reinforce, conservative tendencies in mainstream drama. Indeed, by appealing for a general tolerance for the Major, the play implicitly argues for a sympathy for sexual difference that might be applied specifically to homosexuality.

In order to make its case seriously, *Separate Tables* eschews the association between theatrical artifice and sexual non-conformity often found on stage and instead prioritises 'honest' discussion. The Major has been lying about his social background, his career and, most importantly, his sexual inclinations. The eventual discussion of his indiscretions is depicted as painful for him and the other guests, but it also allows him to cease a continual social performance in a manner which validates the benefit of a direct approach towards sexual difference. In contrast, the most theatrical performer in *Separate Tables* is also its most obvious antagonist. Mrs. Railton-Bell regularly makes dramatic pronouncements, using meaningful silences and the careful dissemination of information in order to most effectively communicate with other characters; after hearing her overly dramatic disclosure of the Major's court case, Charles comments 'what a performance!' (p. 66). In *Separate Tables*, theatricality is not, as it is in *Present Laughter*, the means of signalling a coded homosexual persona, but rather an obstacle to the measured and honest discussion of the topic.

In the 'symposium on sexual deviation' at the Beauregard Hotel which follows the Major's arrest, Rattigan traces the trajectory by which private desires become a

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<sup>42</sup> Tynan, *A View from the English Stage 1944-1965* (London: Methuen, 1984), p. 147.

<sup>43</sup> De Jongh, *Not in Front of the Audience*, p. 58.

matter of public discourse.<sup>44</sup> Indeed, when Jean and Charles bicker about the Major, Mrs. Railton-Bell pointedly retorts: 'This is not a private argument between the two of you' (p. 87). The narrative follows the dissemination of knowledge about sexual deviance from individual reception to collective discussion; it begins with the newspaper (a frequent source of homosexual scandals in the post-war era) of Mrs. Railton-Bell, which she forces Lady Matheson to read, before the remainder of the hotel guests are verbally informed. The debate which then occurs dominates the rest of the scene, with all principal characters discussing the Major's morality and criminality. The characters begin by depicting almost unanimous disgust with the Major, before most gradually separate their individual affection for him from their moral objection to his crimes. In the final scene, he is welcomed back into the dining-room, his private desires exposed and judged, but his presence is nonetheless tacitly and discreetly accepted.

It is not only the characters on stage who are responding to the Major's crimes, but also the theatre audience. Rebellato is among the critics to have noted the potential influence of the arrest of John Gielgud, a close friend of Rattigan, on the Major Pollock storyline.<sup>45</sup> Gielgud was reluctant to return to the theatre after his arrest for homosexual offences but, following the support of co-star Sibyl Thorndike and a standing ovation from the crowd, his career recovered. The significance afforded to the audience in Rattigan's construction of his plays, combined with their influence in the Gielgud case, suggests that *Separate Tables* is an attempt to use the theatrical space to construct a dialogue between the sexual deviant and his audience(s). The importance of public opinion in enabling change is indicated through the metaphorical device of 'views' as both ways of seeing and the formulation of judgements. The stage instructions frequently dictate that characters should, or should not, make eye contact.<sup>46</sup> While such glances might suggest a

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<sup>44</sup> Tynan, *A View of the English Stage*, p. 146.

<sup>45</sup> 'About to make his first stage entrance after the arrest, he was reportedly paralysed with fear in the wings, until his co-star, Sibyl Thorndike, came and pulled him out onto the stage, whereupon he was greeted with a standing ovation. The story of Major Pollock's arrest and of the support he finally wins from the residents was certainly inspired by the hounding and vindication of Rattigan's old friend. Naming Pollock's closest friend "Sibyl" is almost certainly a discreet tribute to Thorndike's loyalty'. Rebellato, 'Introduction', *Separate Tables*, p. xxv.

<sup>46</sup> For example: 'Sibyl is staring at the Major, but he does not meet her eyes. He is looking down at his table, as is everyone else, aware of his presence, save Sibyl and Mrs. Railton-Bell, who is glaring furiously in turn at him and the others' (p. 109).

passive mode of communication, Rattigan instead stages the subtle violence of the gaze. Sibyl Railton-Bell breaks her glasses and cuts her hand in response to hearing about the Major's crimes, a visual enactment of the dangers implicit in the seemingly innocuous act of looking and later, is pointedly asked for her 'views' on the matter (p. 91). *Separate Tables* was produced in a social context in which views on homosexuality were often informed by anxieties relating to visual signifiers: Douglas Warth's 'Evil Men' articles warned: 'Few of them look obviously effeminate – that is why people so often remain in ignorance of their danger'.<sup>47</sup> The play dramatises the process of looking not merely as spectacle but as an increasingly potent means of identifying sexual deviance in a hostile social context. The 'views' of characters can be dangerous for the sexual deviant because the way that they choose to perceive the problem can dictate how they are punished and to what extent. In other words, his audience is essential to the entire process of discovery and aftermath.

This re-acceptance of Major Pollock is achieved when the Major gains the tacit approval of his fellow middle-class residents. By investing such importance in the response of conventional society, *Separate Tables* limits the tolerance to the specific social class of both the Beauregard Hotel and the audience of a West End play. The final scene depicts the residents including the Major in the etiquette of dining-room conversation, staging his re-admittance into this social milieu. The responses of the working-class maids, who according to Tynan's review had comical cockney accents in the original production, are barely noticeable, implicitly suggesting that they were never really a part of the audience with which Rattigan wished to engage.<sup>48</sup> *Separate Tables* demonstrates that post-war theatre, while operating within a climate of social hostility and theatrical censorship, could nonetheless examine issues pertaining to homosexuality through alternative narratives of sexual deviancy. Nonetheless, the emphasis that the play places on the importance of collective social response is also heavily intersected by class, as it prioritises the opinions of a specific social demographic – both on and off-stage.

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<sup>47</sup> Douglas Warth, 'Evil Men', *Sunday Pictorial*, 25th May 1952.

<sup>48</sup> 'Y.P: I agree that the principal characters, especially the journalist and the major, are original and disturbing creations. But there's also a tactful omniscient hoteliere, beautifully played by Beryl Measor. And what do you say to a comic Cockney Maid?'. Tynan, *A View of the English Stage*, p. 146.

### Taking a Closer Look Back at *Anger*, Critical Constructions and Osborne's Heterosexual Theatre

Upon first seeing John Osborne's *Look Back in Anger* (1956), Rattigan is purported to have offered the alternative title: 'Look Ma, how unlike Terence Rattigan I'm being!', but he was likely unaware of the full extent of his significance in the play's construction and production.<sup>49</sup> Firstly, as numerous critics have noted, there is a similarity between the *Table by the Window* section of *Separate Tables* and Osborne's play.<sup>50</sup> *Table By the Window* depicts John Malcolm, a lower-class man, and former Labour MP, whose aggression masks a desire for direct communication that his conventional, middle-class ex-wife, Anne Shankland, is unable to provide. This dramatic contrast between an intense lower-class man and his emotionally evasive middle-class partner bears an uncanny likeness to the dynamic between Osborne's Jimmy Porter and his wife, Alison. It was not only in narrative terms that Rattigan might have shaped Osborne's play; he was also unknowingly influencing the ethos of the stage company that produced it. In his memoirs, Osborne recounts visiting the English Stage Company's producer George Devine:

I let slip that I had more or less admired *The Browning Version*. Realizing my error, I hedged that I had no high opinion of *Separate Tables*. Before I had time to compound my blunder on *The Deep Blue Sea*, he cut me short about the patent inadequacies of homosexual plays masquerading as plays about straight men and women.<sup>51</sup>

For Devine, the merits of Rattigan's plays are compromised by his homosexuality; he cannot produce authentic representations because he is instead duplicitously depicting same-sex desire through heterosexual narratives. Osborne later suggests that Devine's dismissal of Rattigan's talents is but one example of his broader attitude towards homosexuality in the theatre; Osborne recounts that Devine

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<sup>49</sup> John Barber, the *Daily Express*. Quoted in John Russell Taylor, *John Osborne, Look Back in Anger: A Casebook* (Basingstoke: Macmillan Education, 1987), p. 46.

<sup>50</sup> 'It is more likely that Osborne was trying not to write *Separate Tables* (1954), the first part of which his play vaguely resembles', Rebellato, *1956 and All That*, pp.4-5; '[F]ar from being Coward's natural ally, Rattigan was closer in spirit to John Osborne, of whom he was a natural precursor', Billington, *State of the Nation*, p. 60; '[I]t is worth noting here how ironic it was that *Look Back in Anger* should have relegated Rattigan to critical darkness, since its dramatic situation is almost identical to the first half of *Separate Tables* (which opened twenty months before and was still running)', Innes, *Modern British Drama: The Twentieth Century*, p. 77.

<sup>51</sup> John Osborne, *Looking Back: Never Explain, Never Apologise* (London: Faber and Faber, 1999), p. 286.

believed 'in a simple-hearted way, that the blight of buggery, which then dominated the theatre in all its frivolity, could be kept down decently by a direct appeal to seriousness and good intentions from his own crack corps of heterosexual writers, directors and actors'.<sup>52</sup> This idea of homosexuals dominating the theatrical establishment is linked to a dramaturgical 'frivolity', suggesting that it is only through the 'seriousness' of heterosexual writers that a more contemporary and authentic drama can emerge. Such an attitude towards the theatrical establishment is implied in *Look Back in Anger* and was enthusiastically perpetuated by the critical mythology which emerged around it. A closer examination of Osborne's play, however, demonstrates a more complex and contradictory relationship with homosexuality than most critics have acknowledged, producing an ongoing negotiation with, rather than a simplistic repudiation of, its theatrical associations.

Devine's equating of homosexuality with a privileged, establishment identity that was characterized by both a dominant cultural position and by an unwillingness to engage with an apparently more authentic contemporary social reality was also shared by the critic Kenneth Tynan. Several years before Osborne's play premiered, Tynan was making jibes about the homosexuality of several stalwarts of the theatrical world; in 'A Tribute to Mr Coward' (1953), Tynan stated that 'like Gielgud and Rattigan, like the late Ivor Novello, [Coward] is a congenital bachelor'.<sup>53</sup> After snidely alluding to the shared sexuality of these figureheads, Tynan then describes Coward as an 'outspoken advocate' for conformity and hints that he is past his prime.<sup>54</sup> Tynan's reference to a homosexual culture in the theatre is thus implicitly linked to a conservative and archaic form of drama. When *Look Back in Anger* emerged, Tynan was, unsurprisingly, one of its more fervent supporters, perceiving in its attitude towards homosexuality an opportunity to attack the coterie that he saw as both dominating and stifling mainstream theatre. His initial review of Osborne's play even made a point of praising Jimmy's joke about a 'pansy' friend despite the fact that the term itself is not used in the play.<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> Ibid., 287.

<sup>53</sup> Tynan, *A View of the English Stage*, p. 135.

<sup>54</sup> 'His wit in print is variable - he has not written a really funny play since *Present Laughter* in 1942'. Ibid., 136.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid., 178.

Osborne's public musings on homosexuality in the theatre, on the other hand, demonstrate an ambivalence that is also evident in *Look Back in Anger*. In 1959, Osborne responded to a *Daily Express* article which described homosexuality as an 'unpleasant free-masonry' in British theatre with a rebuttal.<sup>56</sup> He defended the artistic values associated with homosexuality, claiming that 'art, philosophy and literature would have suffered most of all' without it.<sup>57</sup> Despite an apparent sympathy, he also suggested that his intervention in dominant dramaturgy had been to attack 'a 'homosexual art' which was 'conservative, narrow, parochial, self-congratulatory, narcissistic'.<sup>58</sup> These comments suggests that Osborne discriminates between a sympathy for homosexual men and a distaste for a supposed homosexual aesthetic within mainstream theatre. The combination of admiration and suspicion, of acknowledging the value of homosexual creativity while demarcating it from heterosexuality, is manifest in Osborne's contradictory approach to the topic in his own play. While he is interested in staging some awareness of the 'issue' of homosexuality in contemporary social terms and perhaps even somewhat sympathetically, he is also torn by an implicit imperative to attack a dominant establishment aesthetic that is linked to ideas of homosexual frivolity, emotional repression and specific class perspectives.

Osborne's most telling comment in the article is his assertion that '[a] man or woman's sexual preferences are his own concern until he tries to force or impose them on others', which indicates his interest in acknowledging sexual difference while reiterating the rigidity of distinct categories.<sup>59</sup> The sexual politics of *Look Back in Anger* are informed by Osborne's focus on delineating homosexuality and heterosexuality on the mainstream, stage. This preoccupation is a consequence of both the play's historical and theatrical context. Since the emergence of homosexuality as a distinct identity in the late nineteenth century, its equivalent term had been gradually defined; Halperin argues that 'the very notion of homosexuality implies that same-sex sexual feeling and expression, in all their many forms, constitute a single thing, called "homosexuality," which can be thought of as a single

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<sup>56</sup> De Jongh, *Not in Front of the Audience*, p. 108

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, 108.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, 108.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, 108.

integrated phenomenon, distinct and separate from “heterosexuality”<sup>60</sup>. In the 1950s, this distinction was expressed in both mainstream and academic texts. Wildeblood’s *Against the Law* discusses the similarities between ‘homosexuals and “normal” or heterosexual men’, Westwood’s *Society and the Homosexual* defines ‘heterosexual’ and ‘homosexual’ as opposite ends of a spectrum, while *The Wolfenden Report*, a pivotal document in British queer history, uses the two terms throughout.<sup>61</sup> The homosexual/heterosexual binary had a particular resonance in the theatre as it was often implied, whether in sexological texts, journalistic writings or even within plays themselves, that homosexuality proliferated in the theatrical space. *Look Back in Anger* thus uses the distinctness of the hetero/homo categories to reassert a heterosexual focus in mainstream theatre against its homosexual connotations.

Osborne’s investment in examining and delineating a homosexual/heterosexual binary has been noted by Michael Billington, who describes *Look Back in Anger* as a play in which ‘hetero and homo view each other with mutual suspicion’; it is more accurate to say, however, that Osborne’s attitude towards homosexuality is not marked by hostility, but by a desire to differentiate his play from the dominant theatrical aesthetic which he associates with it.<sup>62</sup> Jimmy jokingly sings that he is ‘tired of being hetero’, invoking the term as part of his identity, but the second line of his song, ‘So avoid that python coil/And pass me the celibate oil’ explicitly highlights that homosexuality is not the alternative to his predicament (p. 50). By referencing heterosexuality directly, but, pointedly, not homosexuality, Osborne indicates his interest in examining why exactly Jimmy is tired of being ‘hetero’ but without suggesting that the answer lies in suppressed homosexual desires. Instead, he suggests it is because of a dominant culture characterised by effeminacy and emotional insincerity.

In his attempt to reclaim the theatre as a heterosexual and masculine space, capable of a direct emotional responses rather than the coded or evasive depictions associated with homosexual authors, Osborne reworks some of Jimmy’s more effeminate qualities into evidence of his masculinity. Jimmy manifests several traits

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<sup>60</sup> Halperin, *How to Do the History of Homosexuality*, p. 131.

<sup>61</sup> Wildeblood, *Against the Law*, p. 10; Westwood, *Society and the Homosexual*, pp. 57-8; *The Wolfenden Report* (1957).

<sup>62</sup> Billington, *State of the Nation: British Theatre since 1945*, p. 100.

that might be viewed as evidence of a coded homosexuality – including cultivating intense homosocial bonds, displaying emotional sensitivity and a self-conscious theatricality – but the play instead highlights them as examples of Jimmy’s desire for genuine and authentic connection. The play engages with this idea during an exchange between Alison and Helena. Upon learning of Jimmy and Alison’s ‘bears and squirrels’ roleplay, Helena says: ‘I didn’t realise he was a bit fey, as well as everything else!’ (p. 46). Alison quickly rejects these potentially emasculating connotations: ‘Oh, there’s nothing fey about Jimmy. It’s just all we seem to have left’ (p. 46). A desire to resort to performance is depicted as the refuge of wounded masculinity rather than the site of effeminate frivolity.

The play also presents Jimmy’s sensitivity as masculine by suggesting that insensitivity is a feminine quality; when Jimmy bemoans Alison’s clumsiness as a trait shared by all women, he adds: ‘You’ve got to be fundamentally insensitive to be as noisy and as clumsy as that’ (p. 20). In contrast, Jimmy’s sensitivity is presented as masculine. His character outline states that ‘he may seem sensitive to the point of vulgarity’ and, within the dialogue, Jimmy explicitly argues for his sensitivity to be refigured as a masculine trait: ‘Was I really wrong to believe that there’s a – a kind of – burning virility of mind and spirit that looks for something as powerful as itself? [...] That voice that cries out doesn’t have to be a weakling’s, does it?’ (p. 2, 101). In *The Dandy: Brummell to Beerbohm*, Ellen Moers suggests that dandy is defined by ‘hypersensitivity’ and argues that his ‘nerves are set jangling more easily than those of ordinary men, his teeth are more commonly on edge, his skin prickles and his eyes widen upon less provocation’.<sup>63</sup> Bearing in mind the homosexual legacy of the dandy, it is significant that Tynan compared Osborne to a ‘dandy with a machine gun’.<sup>64</sup> Tynan’s marrying of the effeminate connotations of the label with an image of action and violence is indicative of the tendency of both the play itself, and the critical aura around it, to ensure that elements which might reinforce a link between homosexuality and the theatre were refigured to suggest a more masculine approach.

Osborne’s reclamation of potentially queer-coded theatrical elements as explicitly heterosexual is also evident in the depiction of Jimmy and Cliff’s relationship.

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<sup>63</sup> Moers, *The Dandy: Brummell to Beerbohm*, pp .20-21.

<sup>64</sup> Tynan, *Tynan on Theatre* (Penguin, Harmondsworth, 1964), p. 16.

Osborne stages a close physicality between Jimmy and Cliff – they often touch one another, occasionally wrestle and even dance together – that is matched by an emotional intensity. Unlike the vicious arguments that characterise his relationship with the female characters, Jimmy and Cliff tease one another playfully. Jimmy is also upset to learn that Cliff is considering leaving him, describing him as worth ‘half a dozen Helenas’ (Helena being, at this point, Jimmy’s girlfriend) and implying that the breaking of their homosocial bond is a necessary, but regrettable element, of heterosexual courtship.<sup>65</sup> Such is Jimmy’s desire for the company of other men that his absent friend, Hugh Tanner, spent Jimmy and Alison’s wedding night with them (p. 41). His obvious social preference for men over women indicates his general repudiation of femininity, and in its historical and theatrical context such a preference might easily be perceived as indicating same-sex desire. The play’s focus of this relationship, and moments such as Jimmy calling Cliff ‘a sexy little Welshman’, evoke same-sex desire only to repudiate it by a continual emphasis on Jimmy’s heterosexuality (p. 28). While his disdain for the women in his life is evident, it is also clear that he cannot be without them.

The play’s emphasis on Jimmy’s masculine heterosexuality is partly conveyed by his attitude towards dominant literary culture, and the implicit contrast of his own artistic approach. He claims: ‘One day, when I’m no longer spending my days running a sweet-stall, I may write a book about us all. [...] And it won’t be recollected in tranquillity either, picking daffodils with Auntie Wordsworth. It’ll be recollected in fire, and blood. My blood’ (p. 54). His positioning of the cultural establishment as feminine and banal, in contrast with his own physically violent form of expression, reiterates the play’s aligning of literary culture with an effeminate vacuity that discourages direct emotional response. Osborne includes jibes regarding literary culture throughout Jimmy’s many rants, but this aligning of insincere forms of expression with femininity is also explored through the character of Alison. Despite Osborne’s apparent distaste for elusive forms of representation, Alison is a coded figure who symbolises everything he claimed to dislike about the mainstream theatrical

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<sup>65</sup> Jimmy tells Cliff: ‘It’s a funny thing. You’ve been loyal, generous and a good friend. But I’m quite prepared to see you wander off, find a new home, and make out on your own. And all because of something I want from that girl downstairs, something I know in my heart she’s incapable of giving. And you’re worth half a dozen Helenas to me or to anyone. And if you were in my place, you’d do the same thing. Right?’ (p. 89).

establishment: its femininity, its emotional insincerity and its anachronistic sense of privilege.

Jimmy's masculinity is implicitly linked with an abrasive but authentic honesty, while Alison's middle-class femininity is defined by duplicity. The play repeatedly establishes Jimmy's honesty in contrast to Alison's evasions as manifestations of their gendered roles. In his character outline, Jimmy is described as exhibiting 'a disconcerting mix of sincerity and cheerful malice', which contrasts with the description of Alison as possessing an 'elusive personality' (pp. 1-2). Within the play, this distinction is enhanced through dialogue. Jimmy's frequent tirades are primarily an attempt to prompt what he perceives as a 'genuine' emotional response from Alison: 'I rage, and shout my head off, and everyone thinks "poor chap!" or "what an objectionable young man!" But that girl there can twist your arm off with her silence' (p. 60). Osborne's rejection of an effeminate theatrical aesthetic which is implicitly linked with homosexuality is partly depicted through the symbolic presence of Alison as a representative of emotional evasion and insincerity. This dynamic suggests that Osborne is not so much interested in attacking homosexuality to merely reinforce existing prejudice, but instead for its assumed ideological impact on mainstream theatre rather than its presence as a social fact.

Indeed, the more direct discussions of homosexuality to be found within the play are affirmative, but they do assist in reiterating Jimmy's heterosexuality in comparison. Jimmy repeatedly instigates discussions about Alison's friend, Webster, who, due to his persistent allusions, is eventually revealed to be homosexual. Jimmy introduces Webster into the conversation by enquiring whether he is likely to visit and, after being told that he is, replies: 'Well, I hope he doesn't. I don't think I could take Webster tonight' (pp. 11-12). His decision to discuss Webster, only to express reluctance to see him, encapsulates the play's careful negotiation of homosexual representation in which Webster is a recurrent topic of conversation but is kept off-stage. It also ensures that same-sex desire is discussed primarily for its relevance to Jimmy's own character. He returns almost compulsively to discussing homosexuality without imperilling his own heterosexuality because each reference, even when ostensibly complimentary, ultimately reinforces a contrast.

Jimmy's affection for Webster, for example, provides some positive valuation of same-sex desire while simultaneously reiterating the hetero/homo binary. He generally alternates between offensive humour (using 'scoutmaster' as a euphemism) and dominant stereotypes ('Sometimes I almost envy old Gide and the Greek Chorus boys') when discussing Webster, invoking established associations with both artistic culture and sexual scandal for humour (p. 34). These clichés are, however, tempered by Jimmy's more sympathetic and admiring attitude towards homosexual men. He describes Webster as possessing 'bite, edge, drive' and even compares him to his ex-lover Madeline in terms of being able to 'give [him] something' (p. 12). His open admiration for a homosexual character increases Jimmy's cachet as a controversial figure, but the fundamental difference between them is reinscribed when Jimmy says that he and Webster speak a '[d]ifferent dialect but the same language' (p. 12). Shortly after claiming that there are no 'good, brave causes left' Jimmy credits homosexual men as possessing 'a revolutionary fire about them, which is more than you can say for the rest of us' (p. 34). The act of praising homosexual men is accompanied by a linguistic distancing which reiterates the 'us' of the characters on-stage and thus the heterosexual focus of Osborne's play.

Webster provides both a contrast with Jimmy and aligns him with a similar subversive potential but the play's interest in homosexuality is conditional upon it not undermining or threatening Jimmy's heterosexuality in any way. Jimmy claims that he will not treat Webster as different or special because of his sexuality ('I refuse to treat him either as a clown or as a tragic hero [...] as if I give a damn which way he likes his meat served up' (p. 34), but also continually demarcates a sense of difference between them. He does not wish Webster to discuss his sexual identity on his own terms and describes him as 'a man with a strawberry mark – he keeps thrusting it in your face because he can't believe it doesn't interest or horrify you particularly' (p. 34). Jimmy perceives Webster's sexual identity as a provocation against himself, rather than as something Webster might be choosing to express without thought for Jimmy at all. His claim to have a 'strawberry mark of [his] own – only it's in a different place' suggests that he wishes to co-opt the socially subversive potential associated with homosexuality but not to be tainted by association through the more overt discussion of the topic and the articulation of political action by homosexual men (p. 34).

The play's engagement with the binaries of homosexual/heterosexual and feminine/masculine are partly overlaid with a vaguer class distinction which a critical response gradually formulated into a working-class/middle-class distinction. In the play, Jimmy's class identity is deliberately vague (he is both a University graduate and a sweet stall holder) and the other characters suggest that he romanticises the working classes. Cliff claims that Jimmy likes him because he's 'common' and though noting that both 'come from working people', he does acknowledge that 'some of [Jimmy's] mother's relatives are pretty posh' (p. 27). Jimmy desires to align himself with the working classes because he believes them relatively immune to middle-class falsity. This act of projection is noted by Alison, who perceptively observes that Jimmy's affection for Ma Tanner is 'because she's been poor almost all of her life, and she's frankly ignorant' (p. 45). Jimmy does not have a strong sense of class identity within the play but primarily defines himself against the middle-class characters through a sentimental attachment to the working classes.

The critical response to the play, however, took Jimmy's attitude as an accurate representation of a working-class identity and received Osborne in similar terms. Derek Granger, in his review for the *Financial Times*, described Jimmy as a 'resentful graduate of working-class origin', the *Daily Worker* termed him a 'young man, cynical, neurotic, of working-class stock' and the *Sunday Express* decided that he was a 'university chap of working-class background'.<sup>66</sup> Tynan, who had described Jimmy as 'classless' in his first review, decided a few years later that 'John Osborne spoke out in a vein of ebullient, free-wheeling rancour that betokened the arrival of something new in the theatre - a sophisticated, articulate lower-class'.<sup>67</sup> The idea of Jimmy as a working-class character, and Osborne as a lower-class writer, was a pervasive element of the play's critical reception, embedding a sense of working-class rebellion into the play's attack of a dominant, and implicitly homosexual, theatrical aesthetic that required challenging.

*Look Back in Anger* demonstrates that the 'new wave' of drama that Osborne's play was assumed to engender was formed as part of a backlash against the perceived dominance of a homosexual aesthetic in commercial theatre. Its preoccupation with defining a heterosexual theatre against the effeminacy and frivolity that it associates

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<sup>66</sup> John Russell Taylor, *John Osborne, Look Back in Anger: A Casebook*, p. 37 & p. 40.

<sup>67</sup> Tynan, *A View of the English Stage*, p. 271.

with mainstream drama is a product of a historical context in which homosexuality was the focus of much serious social discussion and a growing interest in defining its corollary term, heterosexuality. Robert Anderson's *Tea and Sympathy* (US:1953, UK: 1956) and Philip King's *Serious Charge* (1956) were both staged in London for the first time in the same year that *Look Back in Anger* premiered and all three focus on the ways in which the knowledge of homosexuality might refigure heterosexual identity and behaviour. The anxiety it engenders is clear in the narrative and dialogue of the play itself, as well as the entire aesthetic and approach that was underpinning Osborne's dramaturgy. His determination to assert an oppositional stance requires repudiating the insidious feminising influence of homosexuality while nonetheless enjoying some of the subversive cachet of presenting it as a social cause that Jimmy might controversially support. His validation of a masculine authenticity against feminine duplicity was developed, both through the central dynamic between Jimmy and Alison and the subsequent critical response, into a particular class response which positioned effeminacy and, implicitly, homosexuality, as a target for the emergent lower-class writers that emerged in the wake of Osborne and his angry young man.

#### The Real and the Modern: The Trouble with Teenagers in *A Taste of Honey*

A common theme that links all of the plays discussed in this chapter thus far is their association of homosexuality with older characters, styles or aesthetics. Coward, approaching fifty by the time that *Present Laughter* was revived, had built a career over decades, and Garry Essendine and his coterie are well into middle age. In *Separate Tables*, the issue of sexual difference is explored through the narrative of an older figure and solicits the views of a select social group who are mostly elderly. *Look Back in Anger* suggests that a dominant theatrical aesthetic is shaped by a homosexual establishment more interested in depicting outdated social experiences than engaging with post-war developments and positions itself as both a younger and heterosexual alternative. Shelagh Delaney's *A Taste of Honey* (1959) provides a marked contrast to such depictions by depicting a queer character in his teens and by embedding him in modern, contemporary Britain. According to T.C. Worsley's review in the play featured 'a tart, a black boy giving a white girl a baby, a queer [...] the whole contemporary lot, in short', evincing a perception that homosexuality was a particularly modern issue and a key element of the play's engagement with its

historical moment.<sup>68</sup> Geof embodies many of the stereotypes about homosexuality that had been established through the stage and beyond: he is effeminate, artistic and sensitive. He is also, notably, young, lower-class and Northern which, as we have seen, was a rare combination of traits for homosexual characters in mainstream drama. This sense of Geof's contemporaneity was established through various means, both within and beyond Delaney's text, involving its misleading association with 'Angry Young Men' dramas, its production as part of Joan Littlewood's Theatre Workshop and a changing theatrical culture which allowed for more direct depictions of homosexuality. These disparate elements shaped Geof's characterisation and his reception as a repudiation of the evasive forms of queer representation fostered by the likes of Coward and Rattigan, but the emphasis on the authenticity of the play implicitly validates his alienation within traditional working-class culture.

This critical context had been shaped by the reception of *Look Back in Anger*, which was perceived as engaging with contemporary social experiences in defiance of mainstream drama, and the subsequent association between the two plays reiterated *A Taste of Honey's* credentials as both modern and authentic. Journalists aligned Delaney with Osborne and the 'angry' movement despite their lack of similarities in form and content. Edward Goring, writing for the *Daily Mail*, invoked the term in order to link the two authors: 'Once, authors wrote good plays set in drawing-rooms. Now, under the Welfare State, they write bad plays set in garrets [...] If there is anything worse than an Angry Young Man, it's an Angry Young Woman'.<sup>69</sup> Osborne also angrily leapt to Delaney's defence following a hostile review in the *News Chronicle*, further suggesting an affinity between the two writers and their work.<sup>70</sup> There is no reason to assume that Delaney was influenced by Osborne and his play; its narrative, characters and staging demonstrate little in the way of overlap with *Look Back in Anger* and the programme for the West End transfer of *A Taste of Honey* sought to distance its author from the 'angry' label.<sup>71</sup> Delaney also presented

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<sup>68</sup> Quoted in Stephen Lacey, *British Realist Theatre: The New Wave in its Context 1956-1965* (London and New York: Routledge, 1995), p. 74.

<sup>69</sup> Quoted in David Kynaston, *Modernity Britain 1957-1962* (London: Bloomsbury, 2015), p. 148.

<sup>70</sup> Kynaston, *Modernity Britain 1957-1962*, p. 273.

<sup>71</sup> The programme for the Wyndham Theatres production of *A Taste in Honey* in 1959 describes Delaney as 'the antithesis of London's Angry Young Men', adding that she 'knows

herself as an outsider to mainstream theatre generally, informing *Playbill* in 1960: 'I don't feel part of the theatre. I don't like all the idle gossip in it'.<sup>72</sup> Such sentiments reinforced the idea of 'the theatre' as exclusive and hostile to Delaney's social demographic and the term 'idle gossip' invoked connotations of inertia and effeminacy which had already characterised Osborne's attack on it. The shared element that links both plays is that they were both reacting *against* mainstream theatre. In different ways, both also articulated part of that reaction in terms that invoked its associations with homosexuality to assert their originality.

Osborne and his play defined the mainstream theatrical establishment as bourgeois, old-fashioned and dominated by a barely concealed homosexual aesthetic. For Delaney, one of the problems with mainstream theatre and the homosexual artists with whom she associated that theatre was how it represented homosexual characters. It quickly became part of *A Taste of Honey's* publicity that Delaney's play was written as a reaction to *Variation on a Theme* (1958), despite the fact she did not mention Rattigan's play in her initial communication with Littlewood.<sup>73</sup> The vague nature of Delaney's critique of the play, which was often communicated as an irritation with its bourgeois focus but which is more likely to refer to its representation of homosexuality, meant that Rattigan could be presented as emblematic of playwrights who were outdated in their depiction of social class and inauthentic in their representation of sexuality.<sup>74</sup> The critical response to *Look Back in Anger*, bolstered by Osborne and expressed pointedly by Tynan, suggested that a theatrical aesthetic dominated by privileged homosexual men could not express post-war social experience accurately. The mythos surrounding Delaney's exasperation about Rattigan took this attitude a step further by suggesting that homosexual men were similarly incapable of representing their own sexual identities on-stage. This theatrical context, in which homosexual men were perceived as less capable of

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what to be angry about and what to laugh at!'. *A Taste of Honey Programme* (London: Wyndham Theatres, 1959).

<sup>72</sup> Quoted in Selina Todd, *Tastes of Honey: The Making of Shelagh Delaney and a Cultural Revolution* (London: Chatto & Windus, 2019), p. 80.

<sup>73</sup> 'Within four weeks of receiving it, Littlewood had mounted the play as part of her Theatre Workshop. And she made no attempt to soft-pedal the fact that it had been inspired by the failings of *Variation on a Theme*.' Wansell, *Terence Rattigan*, p. 297.

<sup>74</sup> 'Shelagh Delaney wrote *A Taste of Honey* to correct what she perceived as insensitivity in the way Rattigan portrayed homosexuality'. Innes, *Modern British Drama: The Twentieth Century*, p. 80.

depicting homosexuality than their heterosexual counterparts, has been attributed by Rebellato to psychosexual ideas seeping into public discourse: 'If the hatred of homosexuality and homosexuality itself are the result of too much and too little repression, only those who have undergone just enough repression - heterosexuals - can have sufficient soundness of mind to be rational about homosexuality'.<sup>75</sup> The likes of Tynan and Osborne did not, and could not, explicitly state that Coward and Rattigan were too emotionally repressed as homosexual men to write about the topic convincingly, but they instead focused on the supposed inhibitions of their class identities as the nucleus of the problem. An attack on the supposed values of middle-class society - reticence, gentility and pretension – functioned as a useful smokescreen for also criticising homosexual playwrights and their work.

The critical reception of Delaney's play reiterated the sense that the frankness of its characters and uninhibited depiction of a lower-class social milieu could be taken as an indicator of its social authenticity. Alan Brien described *Honey* as 'not so much dramaturgy as anthropology', while Lindsay Anderson, writing for *Encore*, went a step further by suggesting that the play superseded any subjective critical viewpoint and instead prompted a purely visceral response: 'In fact, so truthful is Miss Delaney, so buoyant in spirit, and so keenly alive to what is preposterous, vulgar and ruthless in human beings (as well as to what is generous, creative and warm), that she makes us forget about judging. We simply respond, as to the experience itself'.<sup>76</sup> Tynan similarly wrote that 'Miss Delaney brings real people on to her stage, joking and flaring and scuffling', while John Russell Taylor conceded that it had 'the disturbing ring of truth about it' and described Jo and Helen as 'completely believable, though their situation must surely be exceptional to the point of uniqueness, even if not completely impossible'.<sup>77</sup> Taylor's remark exposes a paradox in the play's designation as authentic despite both its deliberate anti-naturalist approach and Jo's melodramatic situation, with its checklist of post-war

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<sup>75</sup> Rebellato, *1956 and All That*, p. 198.

<sup>76</sup> Quoted in Joan Littlewood, *Joan's Book: Littlewood's Peculiar History As She Tells It* (London: Methuen, 1995), p. 519; Lindsay Anderson, 'A Taste of Honey' in *The Encore Reader: A Chronicle of New Drama*, eds. Charles Marowitz, Tom Milne, Owen Hale (London: Methuen & Co Ltd., 1965), pp. 78-80 (p. 79).

<sup>77</sup> Tynan, 'At the Theatre', *Observer*, 6 June 1958, p. 15. Quoted in Todd, *Tastes of Honey: The Making of Shelagh Delaney and a Cultural Revolution*, p. 92; John Russell Taylor, *Anger and After: A Guide to the New British Drama* (London: Methuen, 1978), p. 133.

social issues (racial tensions, teen pregnancy and homosexuality) following one another in contrived succession.

The social authenticity of the play was received in relation to its lower-class setting, its dialogue and, most significantly, the validating presence of Delaney's own biography. Stephen Lacey identifies the emergence of an interpretative framework for 'new wave' plays which 'constructed a particular relationship between author, text and the social experience being represented, seeing the plays as an unreconstructed "reflection" of social reality, which relied on the personal situation of the writers to guarantee the 'truth' of the text, its sociological validity'.<sup>78</sup> Delaney's age, gender and class certainly informed how her play was perceived. Littlewood and Theatre Workshop stressed her youth in their promotional material for the play and Frances Cuka (the first actress to play Jo) claimed that elements of the script were deliberately retained to highlight Delaney's inexperience.<sup>79</sup> Delaney's similarities to Jo were highlighted in television programmes such as *Shelagh Delaney's Salford* (1960), which linked the location of the play to her own life and in which she articulated similar frustrations to her central character. The use of a playwright's identity to guarantee the authenticity of a text – particularly regarding their ability to represent lower-class culture - often required exaggeration or outright fabrication. Brendan Behan, whose work had also been produced by Theatre Workshop and its formidable figurehead, remarked that 'Shelagh Delaney and I are creations of Joan Littlewood's imagination'.<sup>80</sup> The use of the playwright's identity to measure the accuracy and authenticity of their depiction of post-war Britain lent Delaney's characters a constructed sense of authority that the plays of Coward and Rattigan were perceived to lack.

Several elements of the dramaturgical approach of Littlewood and Theatre Workshop helped to shape the idea that the play was authentically reflective of contemporary lower-class experience. Theatre Workshop originated in socialist theatre during the 1930s and the group retained a cachet of catering to a working-class perspective

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<sup>78</sup> Lacey, *British Realist Theatre: The New Wave in its Context 1956-1965*, p. 77.

<sup>79</sup> 'Peter, the mother's boy-friend, came in for the most rewriting. Some outrageous speeches of his were kept in because Joan said it was a young girl's play and we mustn't wreck the flavour of it'. Quoted in Howard Goorney, *The Theatre Workshop Story* (London: Eyre Methuen, 1981), p. 109.

<sup>80</sup> Todd, *Tastes of Honey: The Making of Shelagh Delaney and a Cultural Revolution*, p. 80.

and audience. Theatre Workshop's sense of social authenticity was, however, not conferred by a formal emphasis on 'realism', with its attendant notions of reflecting social experiences, but instead on undermining the conventions and practices of stage naturalism. Littlewood altered plays significantly during rehearsals, decentring the authority of the author, and prioritised lighting, music and movement as much as performance and plot. This contrast with the dramaturgy of commercial theatre, combined with Littlewood's origins in theatre that sought a lower-class audience, reinforced the sense that Theatre Workshop offered something more authentic, contemporary, and class-conscious than the mainstream drama. The idea that Theatre Workshop was making drama for the masses, rather than narrow or elite audiences, was bolstered by critical opinion. Discussing successful transfers by Theatre Workshop to the West End, Tynan constructed a specific demographic for their plays: 'I saw in the audience young people in flimsy dresses and open-necked shirts whose equivalents, ten years ago, would have been in a cinema, if they were indoors at all. What is more, they were cheering at the end'.<sup>81</sup> Many, including its own members, have questioned whether the company ever appealed specifically to a lower-class audience but, regardless of its actual reach, the impression remained pervasive and shaped the reception of Delaney's play.<sup>82</sup>

The importance of the play's perceived contemporaneity and social authenticity is particularly significant for considering the reception of its homosexual character, Geof. De Jongh describes *A Taste of Honey* as 'the first modern British play to depict a working-class homosexual', but claiming Geof as the first working-class homosexual character in mainstream drama involves narrowing the focus of what might be considered 'representation' and constructs a very London-centric narrative.<sup>83</sup> As Sinfield notes, Benedict Scott's *The Lambs of God* (1948) featured a homosexual character in a Glasgow slum.<sup>84</sup> The key difference, however, is that *A Taste of Honey* was produced in a social and theatrical context much more alert to the presence and significance of homosexuality in society. Because of this increased

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<sup>81</sup> Tynan, *A View of the English Stage 1944-1965*, p. 272.

<sup>82</sup> Harry H. Corbett, a member of the Theatre Workshop in the 1950s, states that: 'We never appealed to the working class. [There was never] a working-class audience in any way'. Goorney, *The Theatre Workshop Story*, p. 99.

<sup>83</sup> De Jongh, *Not in Front of the Audience: Homosexuality on Stage*, pp. 90-91.

<sup>84</sup> Sinfield, *Out on Stage*, p. 153.

scrutiny, Geof's presence assumes a great significance and his sexuality is mentioned in almost every review despite the fact that he never uses the word 'homosexual' to describe himself. The ambiguity of language around Geof's character maneuvers carefully around stage censorship, but even these insinuations are sufficient in a social context attuned to identifying the presence of homosexuality. Towards the end of the play, Jo tells Geof: 'I used to think you were such an interesting, immoral character before I knew you.'<sup>85</sup> The emphasis on Jo's response to Geof's sexuality is a consequence of changes to theatrical censorship, which allowed more direct depictions of homosexuality provided that they dealt 'seriously with the subject' and which prevented homosexual representation if 'their inclusion [was] unnecessary to the action or theme of the play'.<sup>86</sup> The strictures of these conditions are evident in Delaney's play, in which Geof's 'coming out' is dragged reluctantly, and tentatively, from him, and primarily to satisfy Jo's rabid curiosity. Jo demands the certainty of confession: 'Come on, the truth. Who did she find you with? Your girl friend? It wasn't a man, was it?' (p. 47). She makes his staying in her flat conditional on his revealing his sexual identity: 'I want to know what you do. I want to know why you do it. Tell me or get out' (p. 48). As in *Look Back in Anger*, the potential for homosexual representation is shaped by its impact on heterosexual characters. It is worth noting, however, that Geof reiterates his distaste for Jo's fascination: 'I can't stand people who laugh at other people. They'd get a bigger laugh if they laughed at themselves' (p. 48). There is a tendency for critics to miss that Jo's prying is not necessarily validated by Delaney and that Geof's presence on the stage means that he can, and does, answer back.

The hesitant manner in which Geof expresses his sexuality on stage is often perceived as a lack of political commitment on Delaney's behalf, but his ambivalence is instead reflective of both the play's theatrical context and the character's own insecurities. The fact that Geof never states his sexual identity explicitly, and even forces himself on Jo, has caused most critics to assume a homophobic undertone. John Kirk states that Geof is defined by a 'curious asexuality' while Rebellato describes him as 'a very strange homosexual' and notes that he has no ties to a

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<sup>85</sup> Shelagh Delaney, *A Taste of Honey* (London: Methuen, 2018) p.72. All further references are to this edition and provided parenthetically in the body of the text.

<sup>86</sup> Johnston, *The Lord Chamberlain's Blue Pencil*, p. 172.

broader queer community.<sup>87</sup> Such interpretations neglect the ongoing restrictions of censorship, but more importantly they fail to consider that Geof might be struggling to express his sexuality in a social context which offers him few templates or role models for his behaviour. Littlewood claimed that it was hard to make Geof 'believable', but does not explain why: 'Were the characters believable? The young people, yes, they could be, with work. Geof would be the most difficult. Miss Delaney didn't appear to understand him'.<sup>88</sup> Littlewood's uncertainty about Geof's believability may have been prompted by his difference from other stage representations of homosexuality. Geof's reticent personality, and his general lack of theatricality usually associated with homosexual representation, leads Rebellato to argue that the 'only New Wave queers allowed on stage are like Geoffrey Ingham, shorn of their subversiveness performativity - their *queerness*'.<sup>89</sup> While aligning queerness with performativity was often an effective way to convey it on stage, such a reading risks aligning homosexuality purely with a self-consciously theatrical persona. Geof is undoubtedly 'queer' - it is a continually articulated difference – but the idea that he is less so for not adhering to a Cowardesque 'dandy' persona validates a class-specific stereotype as the most authentic means of homosexual representation and lends the perspective of a lower-class character an air of inauthenticity. Geof is, however, clearly uncomfortable in his sexuality. Such a depiction of his tentative understanding of his own desires, which are often contradictory and ambiguous, is as likely to be an attempt to depict the adolescent struggle with sexuality as part of the play's broader engagement with post-war youth.

The play pits characters against one another in terms of age and generation, suggesting that it shapes their attitudes towards life and that these allegiances are more powerful than those related to sexuality, class and even familial ties. Jo describes herself and Geof as a 'couple of degenerates', aligning the homosexual and the teenage mother as social outcasts (p. 52). In *Look Back in Anger*, homosexuals are seen as possible allies to Jimmy because of their shared opposition to established social convention, but their effeminacy, and his perception of their role within the cultural establishment that he is attacking, undermines a

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<sup>87</sup> Kirk, *Twentieth-century Writing and the British Working Class*, p. 65; Rebellato, *1956 and All That*, p. 217.

<sup>88</sup> Littlewood, *Joan's Book: Littlewood's Peculiar History As She Tells It*, p. 517.

<sup>89</sup> Rebellato, *1956 and All That*, p. 218 [original emphasis].

subversive potential. In *A Taste of Honey*, Geof is linked to Jo through commonalities of age and background. As Sinfield argues, 'the important thing is not so much whether the young people are gay or straight as whether they can retain their sensitivity amid the cynicism that prevails in their milieux'.<sup>90</sup> Jo and Geof espouse their individuality alongside an acknowledgement of their youth in a manner that aligns the two:

Geof: We're unique!  
 Jo: Young.  
 Geof: Unrivalled!  
 Jo: Smashing!  
 Geof: We're bloody marvellous! (pp. 50-51)

Rebellato describes the exchange as 'a profoundly apolitical sequence, which re-enacts the emergence of individual sexual identities, and their severance from communities of political struggle'.<sup>91</sup> While avoiding any overt political commitment, the scene does reiterate the significance of youth and modernity to the characters' sense of their own identity, emphasising generational difference as one of the most potent social indices within the play and one which emphatically shapes character response to homosexuality.

Delaney presents the older characters in the play as most explicitly homophobic, marking it as a clear distinction within the lower-class milieu presented. Helen's boyfriend Peter describes Geof as a 'fruitcake' and states that he 'can't stand 'em at any price' (p. 68). Helen is particularly vitriolic, describing Geof as a 'pansified little freak' and continually criticising his relationship with Jo (p. 63). Helen's position as the most cruel and insensitive character in her attitude towards Geof is closely tied to her role as the character most representative of an older working-class culture. Helen's nostalgia for her job as a barmaid provides an idealised version of a communal working-class experience: 'I thought it was wonderful....You know, playing the piano and all that; a real get-together at weekends. Everybody standing up and giving a song' (p. 12). Helen's invoking of community feeling is undermined by her selfish pursuit of material comforts, abandoning Jo for her new husband's suburban home, and telling her: 'It's a waste of time interfering with other people, don't you think so?' (p. 13). Helen's hypocrisy, combined with Peter's lechery, constructs an

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<sup>90</sup> Sinfield, *Out on Stage*, p. 218.

<sup>91</sup> Rebellato, *1956 and All That*, p. 217.

image of the older generation as an obstacle for the younger generation to overcome.<sup>92</sup> The conclusion of the play, in which Helen successfully ousts Geof from Jo's house, is the triumph of an older and intolerant working-class community over the potential for change represented by the younger characters. The final scene of *A Taste of Honey* reiterates that there is no role for Geof within the social setting of the play. He is forced to leave without Jo's knowledge and the earlier sense of youthful escape from the conventions of the adult world is foreclosed. The play presents Geof as a lower-class homosexual character in a manner that had been largely absent from the mainstream stage, but it also dramatises his lack of acceptance within a broader lower-class milieu.

*A Taste of Honey* was perceived as contemporary and modern to the extent that its depictions of social experience were implicitly validated as authentic. This pattern had begun, as Susan Brook notes, with the Angry Young Men, and the tendency to interpret their texts as 'the authentic experience of the working class or lower-middle class, and as a form of class resistance'.<sup>93</sup> Although Brook emphasises the validation of masculinity in the Angry texts, Delaney's play demonstrates that this sense of societal veracity was quickly extended to other forms of drama perceived to be engaging with contemporary Britain. Her self-conscious attempt to align homosexual representation with modernity and youth was developed and heightened by the reputation of the Theatre Workshop and then transmuted into a form of social realism by a critical context determined to see the play as an almost artless reflection of its historical moment. This emphasis on the contemporaneity and the authenticity of *A Taste of Honey* imbues the play with a misplaced sociological accuracy, including its depiction of an established and traditional working-class rejecting the young queer man as an anomalous intrusion. In her determination to focus on the young, and the sense of novelty encouraged by the entire production, Delaney presents Geof as something new emerging against an older, working-class culture and divorces him from broader class and queer histories.

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<sup>92</sup> Although Peter is only thirty, Jo articulates her clear sense of their age difference when she tells him: 'Your generation has some very peculiar ideas, that's all I can say' (p. 33).

<sup>93</sup> Brook, 'Engendering Rebellion: The Angry Young Man, Class and Masculinity', p. 23.

Coward Gets the Last Word: *A Song at Twilight*

The beginning of this chapter argued for the significance and influence of Noël Coward in defining the parameters of homosexual representation on the British stage throughout the early twentieth century. Across the post-war decades, Coward assumed a role as a figurehead for both an outdated style of depicting social class on-stage and as a purveyor of a discreet, closeted homosexuality expressed through allusion, innuendo and theatrical performance. The overlap between these two elements of his dramaturgy – social elitism and coded homosexuality – caused a continual slippage in the responses to Coward’s drama, in which it was not always clear whether one, or both, of these elements was the object of critique. He thus remains a central figure in post-war drama, inadvertently guiding innovation and dramaturgical change despite the fact that his newer plays were not as critically successful. Coward had initially used the ambiguity of the dandy figure to discreetly signal his sexuality and benefited from a social context in which such references were often too submerged to attract widespread criticism or attention. This dynamic had shifted considerably in the post-war era – as a result of dramaturgical developments, social change and political developments.

Coward established an increasingly reactionary tone in his work following the conclusion of the Second World War which cemented his association with political conservatism. His revue *Sigh No More* (1945) began before Atlee’s Labour Government had come to power, but the song ‘The Burchells of Battersea Rise’ presented socialism as a ‘bait’ which was swallowed by the ignorant masses.<sup>94</sup> His play *Peace in Our Time* (1947), which imagined an alternative Second World War in which Britain had been occupied, has been perceived by critics as evincing fascist

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<sup>94</sup> Hoare, *Noël Coward: A Biography*, p. 363.

tendencies: 'It even seems to imply that wartime defeat would have been a damned good thing and prevented the erosion of our basic conservative values: better a brief period of Nazi rule, Coward implies, than a descent into post-war socialism'.<sup>95</sup>

*Relative Values* (1951) concludes with Creswell, a butler, raising a toast to 'the final inglorious disintegration of the most unlikely dream that ever troubled the foolish heart of man – Social Equality!'.<sup>96</sup> While interpretations of this speech as a serious endorsement by Coward ignore his proclivity for tongue-in-cheek humour, *Relative Values* as a whole might easily indicate that Coward had become a spokesperson for traditional class hierarchies.

Coward's association with a form of theatrical conservatism was partly constructed by writers and journalists who were keen to differentiate between older and newer forms of drama, but Coward also contributed to this perceived divide. Robert Brustein was one of many critics to establish a distinction between the 'new wave' and Coward, writing in 1965: 'Osborne, Pinter, Wesker, Jellicoe, Arden, Delaney, Owen and the rest of the "new realists" are continuing to turn out a substantial number of plays [...] and there is no doubt that these plays are still much fresher and more energetic than the work of those who previously dominated the English stage - Coward, Rattigan and Fry, for example'.<sup>97</sup> This vague distinction, which relied on the entirely subjective criteria of defining 'fresh' and 'energetic', was confirmed by Coward's own responses. As well as describing *A Taste of Honey* as 'a squalid little piece about squalid and unattractive people', he wrote columns in the

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<sup>95</sup> Billington, *State of the Nation*, p. 37.

<sup>96</sup> Noël Coward, *Relative Values*, in *Noël Coward Collected Plays: Five* (London: Methuen, 1999), pp. 1-113 (p. 113).

<sup>97</sup> Robert Brustein, 'The New English Stage', in *Modern British Dramatists: A Collection of Critical Essays*, ed. John Russell Brown (New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1968), pp.164-170 (p. 164).

*Sunday Times* that bemoaned the dominance of ‘salt-of-the-earth types’ on stage, described drama as an easier form to act than comedy and critiqued overt political statements by playwrights.<sup>98</sup> Kenneth Tynan pointedly highlighted this trajectory from bohemian to reactionary: ‘He began, like many other satirists (Evelyn Waugh, for instance), by rebelling against conformity, and ended up making his peace with it, even becoming its outspoken advocate’.<sup>99</sup> Coward thus became the representative of a theatrical culture opposed to younger, newer playwrights. In a theatrical culture increasingly inclined to take speech as the ‘truth’ of the speaker, the tongue-in-cheek elements of Coward’s persona were invariably perceived as reflections of his real views.

Alongside his growing association with both a social and theatrical conservatism, Coward’s approach to the staging of homosexuality also looked increasingly out of place in a broader societal context expecting direct representation. The extent to which Coward was ever truly hiding his sexuality is debatable, but, as we have seen, post-war society – with its greater investment in discussing homosexuality as an illness, social problem or threat to national security – had a more precise vocabulary for defining sexual ambiguity. Coward himself alluded to this changed social context in coded language when he was asked to write an introduction to *The Penguin Complete Saki* (1967), appropriately using the opportunity to indulge in waspish nostalgia. He suggests that homosexuality produces a specialised culture that requires elitism in order to flourish, but which is in decline in the modern world: ‘World democracy provides thin soil for the growing of green carnations, but the green carnations, long since withered, exuded in their brief

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<sup>98</sup> Hoare, *Noël Coward: A Biography*, p. 451, pp. 446-7.

<sup>99</sup> Tynan, *A View of the English Stage 1944-1965*, p. 135.

day a special fragrance, which although it may have made the majority sneeze brought much pleasure to a civilised minority'.<sup>100</sup> He also knowingly refers to the 'much-maligned' 1920s, when 'Noel Cowards flourished like green bay trees in the frenzied atmosphere of cocktail parties, treasure hunts, Hawes and Curtis dressing gowns, long cigarette holders and enthusiastically publicised decadence'.<sup>101</sup> The 'green bay tree', of course, links Coward back to the theatrical aesthetic of *Dulcimer* in the play of the same name and reiterates the Wildean dandy stereotype as an important form of homosexual expression that had been compromised with the advent of 'world democracy' in post-war Britain. It was thus within a considerably different context in which Coward came to write *A Song at Twilight* (1966) than when he had taken the theatrical world by storm over four decades before.

The play's direct discussion of homosexuality is a departure from Coward's earlier style and provides an opportunity to examine the consequences of a changed social context on theatrical depictions of same-sex desire. Through his protagonist, Sir Hugo Latymer, Coward traces, and critiques, the process of 'coming out' on stage. Coward's depiction of a closeted literary figure in the 'modern world' has resonance with his own situation. He played Sir Hugo in the original production, no doubt aware of the slippage that would occur in the audience's mind between the character and the actor playing him. Hugo is a novelist but still bears several uncanny similarities to Coward himself; Carlotta tells Hugo: 'I often wonder why you didn't write any more plays. Your dialogue was so pointed and witty'.<sup>102</sup> Hugo's

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<sup>100</sup> Quoted in Faye Hammill, *Sophistication: A Literary and Cultural History* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2010), p. 8.

<sup>101</sup> *Ibid.*, 8.

<sup>102</sup> Noël Coward, *Suite in Three Keys*, in *Noël Coward Collected Plays: Five* (London: Methuen, 1999), pp. 355-540 (p. 392). All further references are to this edition and are provided parenthetically in the body of the text.

costume is also reminiscent of Coward's style: 'He is wearing an emerald green velvet smoking jacket over dark trousers. He has a cream silk shirt, a black tie and his slippers are monogrammed in gold' (p. 376). Nicholas de Jongh describes this outfit as that of a 'vulgar, precious old queen' and suggests that 'there is no indication that Coward realises what these accoutrements denote [...] [t]here seems to be a gulf between his perception and ours'.<sup>103</sup> This interpretation credits Coward with very little self-awareness; it seems unlikely that he would not perceive that his signature style was being used by the character and thus linked to the representation of homosexuality – the monogrammed slippers, in particular, border on self-parody. Although Coward insisted that the character of Hugo Latymer was inspired by W. Somerset Maugham, it is unlikely that he was unprepared for comparisons between himself and Hugo. He knew that his homosexuality was being increasingly acknowledged by a wider public, joking that '[t]here are still a few old ladies in Worthing who don't know', but his refusal to acknowledge that Hugo's character might be autobiographical was part of a broader rejection of the strictures produced by direct forms of representing homosexuality on stage.<sup>104</sup>

The play begins with the usual knowing remarks and innuendos that audiences had long come to expect from Coward, establishes a familiar idiom from which it then sharply deviates. When Hugo's wife, Hilde, asks him whether he 'wants the whole of Switzerland to know' about his private affairs as a result of her gossiping friend, his response indicates a complacency: 'Switzerland must have a pretty shrewd idea of them by now anyway' (p. 363). Further hints about Hugo's private life are dropped by Carlotta: 'I had a son by my second husband. He's

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<sup>103</sup> De Jongh, *Not in Front of the Audience*, p. 126.

<sup>104</sup> Hoare, *Noël Coward: A Biography*, p. 509.

twenty-four now and very attractive. You'd love him' (p. 378). Similarly, Hugo's response to the 'startingly handsome' waiter, Felix, is highly suggestive, particularly when he admires the young man's physique: 'You look as though you should be a good swimmer yourself, with those shoulders' (p. 371). When Carlotta later alludes to Felix's shoulders, Hugo responds that he's 'never noticed them' (p. 392); he is deviating from the established 'truth' of his emotional response and the play emphasizes this duplicity. Hugo's nonchalance is undermined considerably when Carlotta provides a genuine means for revealing his sexuality publicly. It highlights the difference between a cultivated air of 'sexual ambiguity' and the threat of genuine exposure in a socially repressive social context. Latymer's attitude that people 'must already have a pretty shrewd idea' of his private life was a flippant remark by someone who never expected to be confronted with having to acknowledge their homosexuality and Coward was similarly uneasy; Philip Hoare recounts his fear of 'outing', even in the late 1960s.<sup>105</sup>

Hugo's homosexuality is dramatically revealed at the end of the first act when his ex-girlfriend Carlotta arrives with incriminating from a former male lover. From this point onwards, the play becomes a protracted discussion of Hugo's homosexuality and how it will impact the perception of himself and his career. The play discusses the topic openly in a manner reflecting the theatrical and social changes that had occurred since the beginning of Coward's career. 'Coming out', is

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<sup>105</sup> 'Coward was concerned that even now his public might be put off by his homosexuality. "I can't afford to offend their prejudice", he told [Sheridan] Morley, "nor do I really wish to disturb them this late in their lives; if I had a very young audience, I might think differently." Morley tried to convince Coward otherwise by reminding him that the respected critic T. C. Worsley had "come out" in his memoirs published in 1966. "There is one essential difference between me and Cuthbert Worsley", Noël remarked. "The British public at large would not care if Cuthbert Worsley had slept with mice.'" Hoare, *Noël Coward: A Biography*, p. 509.

not, however, an affirmative process, but rather involves the condemnation and judging of a figure who would have exposed his own illegal activities by declaring his sexuality in pre-decriminalisation Britain. Hugo uses the word 'homosexual' to describe himself, but it is immediately used by Carlotta to fix his sexuality in more precise terms. When Hugo claims he has had 'homosexual tendencies', Carlotta responds: 'Homosexual tendencies in the past! What nonsense! You've been a homosexual all your life, and you know it!' (p. 410). Hugo's claims to sexual ambiguity are refuted, by a heterosexual character, and replaced with a fixed identity which she insists has been present for his entire life. The ability to say the word 'homosexual' on the British stage does not provide a moment of self-acceptance for Hugo but traps him, forcing him into a role in which he will not only be judged for his sexuality, but for refusing to be sufficiently open about it across his lifetime. Hugo is prompted to confess his sexuality to the judgement of Carlotta and, when asked what she actually wants from him, she responds: 'A moment of truth, perhaps. A sudden dazzling flash of self-revelation. Even an act of contrition' (p. 419). This impetus to confession, which was also evident in Jo and Geof's conversation in *A Taste of Honey*, can no longer be claimed, however tenuously, as an attempt to understand homosexuality. It is a punishment and a humiliation acted against Hugo.

Where earlier Coward plays featured the performance of a coded homosexual, *A Song at Twilight* depicts its protagonist's performance of heterosexuality as inauthentic. Hugo is immediately established as a natural performer in the stage description: 'when upset over some triviality or worried about his health, he becomes suddenly enfeebled and deliberately ancient. This of course is a pose but it works like a charm on doctors and nurses or whoever happens to be looking after him at the moment' (p. 360). Within the play itself, Carlotta suggests

that Hugo is suffering 'the constant strain of having to live up to the self-created image he has implanted in the public mind' (p. 375). Ostentatious performance was presented as entertainment in earlier Coward plays, most notably in *Present Laughter*, but the revelation of Hugo's homosexuality equates performativity and duplicity. Whereas Garry's performances highlighted that there was no authentic, fixed self underneath the bravado, Hugo is characterised as someone who is deviating from his authentic identity.

Carlotta's suggestion that Hugo's duplicity shaped his career as an author parallels the criticisms that Coward had himself faced, suggesting that he used the play to examine issues pertaining to his own career. She tells Hugo that the evidence for his cowardice is 'every book you've ever written', suggesting that his sexuality should have been reflected in his professional life as well as his personal life. His unwillingness to refer to his sexuality directly in his written work becomes an indicator of quality and an index of honesty which become inextricably connected. Hugo states that his 'private inclinations are not the concern of [his] reading public', but Carlotta argues that he has been 'subtly' dishonest in his 'novels and stories' (p. 418). Carlotta describes Hugo's love letters to her as 'an illuminating example of your earlier work', suggesting they are works of fiction because they are defined by their technical skill but lack of emotional sincerity while the opposite was true for his letter to the deceased lover, Perry (p. 401). Later in the play, Hilde tells Hugo that '[i]t is your work that is important, not your reputation', but it becomes evident that the distinction has collapsed (p. 435). Coward also suggests that Hugo's homosexuality will inform and shape his enduring literary reputation when Carlotta tells him that a Harvard professor, Justin Chandler, is writing a biography of him and that he has described Hugo's memoirs as 'the most superlative example of sustained

camouflage that he had ever read' (p. 408). Hugo's sexuality becomes a matter for public, and academic, discussion that cannot be extricated from his career. Carlotta's ire even extends to Hugo's autobiography, because it claims that he has embarked upon several heterosexual affairs. Hoare suggests that Coward drew attention to Hugo's biographical fictions as a means of inviting favourable comparison with himself, but this manoeuvre was unlikely to elicit sympathy or praise in a theatrical context that had already decided that Coward was the epitome of emotional insincerity.<sup>106</sup>

Hugo's precarious sense of discretion highlights how many of the mannerisms, behaviours and personal styles adopted as a coded means of expressing same-sex desire were now taken as its most obvious signifiers. When Carlotta tells Hugo that he has not been fooling people as well as he had assumed, this revelation might equally have applied to Coward: 'Your ivory tower is not nearly so sacrosanct as you imagine it to be. You cannot be half so naïve as to imagine that a man of your sustained eminence could ever be entirely immune from the breath of scandal, however gingerly you may have trodden your secret paths' (p. 413). Sinfield discusses the extent to which, as society's designation and understanding of homosexuality changed around Coward, his own sexuality became more conspicuous:

The reason I had not anticipated Coward's hostility towards effeminacy is that, to my lower- middle-class, scholarship boy, Royal-Court, 1960s, Gay-Lib sensibility, Coward's persona in its entirety, and all his characters and everything to do with his kind of theatre, appeared tinged with effeminacy. It hardly occurred to me that, within the mid-century spectrum of queerness, Coward would regard himself as 'straight-acting'.<sup>107</sup>

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<sup>106</sup> 'It was a sin of which Coward was not guilty, and he was drawing attention to the fact'. Hoare, *Noël Coward: A Biography*, p. 495.

<sup>107</sup> Sinfield, *Out on Stage*, pp. 100-101.

The ambiguity of the Wildean dandy figure could no longer function as successfully in a social context in which homosexuality was frequently acknowledged, discussed and analysed.

Coward's critique of Carlotta's attitude towards homosexuality is implicit in the hypocrisies and contradictions of her argument and suggests his sympathy for Hugo's position. She explains that she judges Hugo for concealing his sexuality rather than for the fact of being homosexual: 'it would not have been a sneer at the fact, but at your lifelong repudiation of it' (p. 412). Her assertion that a changed social context has removed the stigma from homosexuality is undermined by the fact that, at the time of the play's premiere, it was still illegal. It also makes her invocation of modernity ring hollow, with chilling echoes of Wilde's spectacular downfall rather than the sense of historical distance that she aims for: 'We are living in the nineteen-sixties not the eighteen-nineties' (p. 412). Despite Hugo's attempts to refute her points, she has the powerful weight of medical and psychiatric discourse behind her. When he tries arguing that homosexuality is still a penal offence, Carlotta promptly responds that '[i]n the light of modern psychiatry and in the opinion of all sensible and unprejudiced people that law has become archaic and nonsensical' (p. 417). Hugo suggests that legal and medical discourses must be weighed against a more general public intolerance, stating that 'even when the actual law ceases to exist there will still be a stigma attached to "the love that dare not speak its name" in the minds of millions of people for generations to come' because it 'takes more than a few outspoken books and plays and speeches in Parliament to uproot moral prejudice from the Anglo-Saxon mind' (pp. 417-8). Quentin Crisp would articulate similar sentiments in *The Naked Civil Servant* (1968): 'The fundamental predicament of homosexuals is one that no amount of legislation can improve. Even the argument

that the repeal of the laws against private indecency will lessen opportunities for blackmail is founded on a misunderstanding. [...] To rob blackmail of its potency, it would be necessary to remove the homosexual's feeling of shame. This no power on earth can do'.<sup>108</sup> Hugo's responses to Carlotta's arguments expose the obtuseness underlining many of them, even if his protests are ultimately ineffectual because Carlotta employs contemporary medical discourses, as well as the ethos of 'new wave' drama, to support her.

Carlotta's insistence that Hugo has performed an act of cowardice by not revealing his homosexuality is also undermined by the implication that had he admitted it, he would have had to accept an identity characterised as both illegal and immoral. One of her responses to his objections serves as an example of the limited forms of sexual citizenship offered to homosexual men in the 1960s: 'Do you seriously believe that now, today, in the middle of the Twentieth century, the sales of your books would diminish if the reading public discovered that you were sexually abnormal?' (p. 418). Her statement employs the logic of sexual citizenship as defined by David T. Evans, in which the legal status of homosexual men was predicated on a form of acceptance that recognised their economic and consumer potential while still maintaining social stigma: 'Thus the conjunction of illegality with immorality was severed, and between their boundaries a social, economic and political space created for those newly legalised but still morally reprehensible'.<sup>109</sup> Carlotta suggests that Hugo's continuing wealth should be sufficient proof that the

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<sup>108</sup> Quentin Crisp, *The Naked Civil Servant* (London: HarperCollins, 1985), p. 213.

<sup>109</sup> David T. Evans, *Sexual Citizenship: The Material Construction of Sexualities* (London: Routledge, 1993), p. 53.

public does not care about his 'abnormality', while nonetheless forcing him to accept a demeaning and morally charged label.

The abrupt nature of the play's conclusion undermines much of the discussion that has preceded it and, following a protracted discussion of the contemporary politics of 'coming out', both Hugo and Coward return to the closet. Carlotta's blackmail is conveniently undermined by Hilde's friend Liesl – ironically another homosexual serving as Hugo's greatest ally in the narrative – who knew Perry and describes him as 'a creature of little merit; foolish, conceited, dishonest and self-indulgent' (p. 440). Carlotta returns the incriminating letters to Hugo and, as a compromise, is allowed to use her own correspondence with Hugo in her memoirs (which will also presumably reinforce his heterosexuality to her readership). The idea that, due to his lowly social status and lack of a reputation, Perry's claim to a relationship with Hugo is deemed unreliable and irrelevant means that Hugo's class privilege insulated him from negative publicity and public scrutiny. For Coward's critics, he was yet again using the theatre to avoid engaging with contemporary social reality, but by dramatising this process the play draws attention to the mechanics of privilege that permit the discretion that Hugo relies upon. The play's final moments see Hugo on-stage reading his letters to Perry and the stage instructions state that it 'is apparent from his expression that he is deeply moved' (p. 441). The audience is once again reminded of the underlying 'truth' of Hugo's homosexuality, which he will now be able to continue to deny. Although Hugo experiences this as a private moment, the irony is that that moment is subject to the public gaze of the theatre audience. Coward's victory is not that he has suppressed homosexuality on stage (which was barely concealed anyway) but that he avoided the heterosexual imperative to confess and consign himself to a lifetime of moral

judgements and societal interventions. This bittersweet victory, ironically, relies on the same privilege that originally enabled his invocation of the Wildean dandy; his wealth and cultural position reinforce the glass closet even as it draws attention to his homosexuality in the first place.

### **Conclusion**

The plays discussed here demonstrate that the long-established association between homosexuality and commercial theatre intersected in different ways with a growing post-war emphasis on social authenticity and direct expression in 'serious' drama. The association was bolstered through figures like Coward, whose sexual ambiguity was signaled partly through his invocation of the Wildean dandy figure and his ability to communicate the queer resonances of his persona with relative security in the frivolous and ephemeral world of West End comedies. *Present Laughter* is an example of this style at in a historical era which would shortly focus on homosexuality as a topic for serious discussion in post-war Britain. Rattigan reflects this growing concern with private desires and public morals in *Separate Tables*, and his investment in a class-specific theatrical audience shaped his approach to depicting sexual difference. Despite his significantly different approach, Rattigan would be repeatedly (and mistakenly) aligned with Coward as part of a homosexual aesthetic dominating, and polluting, mainstream drama. This attitude reached a certain culmination in Osborne's *Look Back in Anger*, which crafts an alternative 'serious' form of drama that claims theatricality, sensitivity and homosocial bonds as part of its distinctly heterosexual approach. The response to Osborne's play repeatedly, if nebulously, connected a homosexual aesthetic in theatre with a bourgeois social focus and lack of contemporary social authenticity. Delaney's *A Taste of Honey* developed this stance by focusing on issues of representation,

depicting a working-class homosexual character in apparent defiance of the evasive strategies characterising mainstream theatre. The emphasis on social authenticity conferred on the play by its association with the 'Angry' movement and the history and ethos of Joan Littlewood's Theatre Workshop, reiterated the veracity of its depiction of Geof's position as an emergent teenage queer with few ties to traditional working-class culture. *A Song at Twilight* (1966) demonstrates that Coward could not resist examining the historical and theatrical changes that had taken place during his career in order to critique the strictures and complexities of direct homosexual depiction. Much as the section title suggests, Coward very much gets the 'last word' in discussions of theatrical homosexuality because his persona has remained dominant as a means of indicating a queer style. While his class-specific invocation of the Wildean dandy has evolved into a more generalised 'camp' performance, the continual revivals of his plays ensure that this stereotype remains in circulation. In 1952, Tynan remarked that '[e]ven the youngest of us will know, in fifty years' time, exactly what we mean by 'a very Noël Coward sort of person', but his shadow has loomed much further and wider than Tynan's estimate.<sup>110</sup> Coward, born into a family with precarious finances, used the class-specific stereotypes of homosexuality established at the turn of the twentieth century to signal his own queerness, but it maintained and amplified a link between homosexuality, the theatre and class stereotypes that continues to resonate and, indeed, was reinforced by the sexual politics of the 'new wave' dramas that sought to challenge it.

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<sup>110</sup> Tynan, *A View of the English Stage 1944-1965*, p. 137.

## **British Film Histories of Same-Sex Desire – Escaping The *Victim* Complex**

### Introduction

What thread of strange emotion puts this brilliantly successful barrister on the wrong side of the law? What crime links him to this frightened boy on a building site? And why is he afraid? Why do some people help him, some people turn away in disgust? What sinister shadow from the past now falls between husband and wife? What secret held these men prisoners in a tangled web of tyranny and terror? What crime linked an aging hairdresser and a famous star of the theatre? They are all victims...victims of...what?

The trailer for the film *Victim* (1961), directed by Basil Dearden, asks a lot of questions and those sufficiently intrigued to purchase a ticket would have discovered that it answers them all with one word: homosexuality. By placing this topic at the very centre of its narrative, *Victim* has understandably come to dominate the landscape of post-war queer cinema during a time when most representations remained tentative, evasive or derogatory. The film's significance lies in its open and varied depictions of homosexuality, which are mapped out across the geographical and social terrains of London, and its critiques of the blackmailers who exploit ongoing shame and stigma rather than queer men themselves. When Dirk Bogarde, as Melvin Farr QC, confesses his desire for a former lover, the brief but loaded declaration of 'I wanted him!' is a defiant declaration of same-sex desire hitherto unseen on British film screens.<sup>1</sup> Its ongoing significance is indicated by the space afforded to it in Bourne's *Brief Encounters: Lesbians and Gays in British Cinema 1930-1970*, which devotes one appendix to the recollections of numerous gay men who saw it upon release in the cinema, and another to contemporaneous newspaper reviews of the film. Bourne himself argues that the film 'had an enormous impact on the lives of gay men who, for the first time, saw credible representations of themselves and their situations in a commercial British film'.<sup>2</sup> Even more muted critical responses acknowledge the film's importance; Peter. G. Baker, writing in the cinema magazine *Films and Filming* in 1961, stated that '*Victim*, for all its faults, is a landmark in British cinema', while Andy Medhurst, writing more recently, described it

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<sup>1</sup> *Victim*, dir. Basil Dearden (Rank Film Distributors, 1961).

<sup>2</sup> Bourne, *Brief Encounters: Lesbians and Gays in British Cinema 1930-1971*, p. 155.

as a 'watershed moment'.<sup>3</sup> The film, while undeniably important for increasing visibility of homosexuality in mass media, nonetheless reiterates a tendency which we have observed across numerous cultural forms in the post-war era; it prioritises specific class experiences and recurrently emphasises the potential valuable citizenship of otherwise conventional homosexual men.

The film's representation of homosexuality is shaped by its adherence to the generic and narrative strictures of the 'social problem' film: it encourages sympathetic understanding of the issue while nonetheless framing it as requiring a particular response. The social problem film emerged in the late 1940s, and combined dramatic content with a sense of sociological investigation; Marcia Landy argues that '[u]nlike the prewar genres – films of empire, comedies and melodramas – [such] films were eclectic in nature, fusing melodrama, docudrama, and social realism'.<sup>4</sup> Alan Burton notes that the team of producer Michael Relph and director Basil Dearden 'became more associated with this production trend than any other filmmakers', and prior to *Victim*, the two had tackled a range of post-war social problems – including the probation service in *I Believe in You* (1952), juvenile delinquency in *Violent Playground* (1958) and race relations in *Sapphire* (1960). *Victim* replicates the same pattern of these films in examining contemporary social issues through the idiom of mainstream and popular film genres. The script, co-written by Janet Green and John McCormick, uses the narrative structure and cinematic language of the conventional thriller by depicting Farr as an amateur detective attempting to locate the blackmailers who pushed his former lover Boy Barrett (Peter McEnery) to suicide. Paul Dehn, writing for the *Daily Herald* in 1961, acknowledged the film's intertwining of suspense and social commentary: 'The rumour that Janet Green had used homosexuality as a mere peg on which to hang a whodunit turns out to be unfounded. In fact she uses a rather rickety, ill-carpentered whodunit as a peg on which to hang her humane, observant and often very moving plea for tolerance towards the homosexual'.<sup>5</sup> The acknowledgement of controversial

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid., 257; Andy Medhurst, 'In search of nebulous nancies: Looking for queers in pre-gay British film', in *British Queer Cinema*, ed. Robin Griffiths (London: Routledge, 2006), pp. 21-34 (p. 23).

<sup>4</sup> Marcia Landy, *British Genres: Cinema and Society 1930-1960* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2014), p. 432.

<sup>5</sup> Paul Dehn, *Daily Herald*, 1 September 1961. Quoted in Bourne, *Brief Encounters: Lesbians and Gays in British Cinema 1930-1971*, p. 258.

issues permitted by the social problem narrative can, however, become a trap in which the designation of an issue as a 'problem' shapes the film's attitude towards it and establishes a narrative trajectory towards its eventual solution for the benefit of society at large. Hill argues that these films approach their contentious subject matter as 'a problem *for* society rather than of it' and identifies this pattern in the work of *Victim's* director: 'The logic of the Dearden social problem film is then towards an integration, or an assimilation, of troubling elements through an appeal to 'good sense' and reason'.<sup>6</sup> Hill's interpretation is not entirely reflective of the attitude in *Victim*; as the title suggests, the film presents homosexual men as the victims of a hostile society, but it does suggest that the ongoing oppression of homosexuality is fueling socially disruptive behaviours that would be alleviated by a greater tolerance. As such, *Victim* advocates for social change in order to prevent further social maladjustment caused by attitudes towards homosexuality. While this approach does not preclude a sympathetic attitude which the film clearly manifests, it does mean that its favourable depictions of some homosexual men are predicated on their depiction as valuable members of post-war society who, if the stigma were lifted, would otherwise be upholding, rather than challenging, the dominant social order.

Raymond Durnat suggests that the film 'set the seal of respectability on the devious sex movie', and it is precisely the idea of 'respectability', and its class connotations, that frames the film's sympathy for homosexual men.<sup>7</sup> This approach is not dissimilar to that of *The Wolfenden Report*, which likewise stressed that the plight of 'the decent self-disciplined citizen in particular' was being obscured by an emphasis on homosexual prostitution and other forms of criminal behaviour.<sup>8</sup> An interview with Michael Relph in a 1961 issue of *Films and Filming* suggested that a similar attitude informed his own approach: 'Contrary to suggesting homosexuals "exist only among a low-life criminal group", the film shows that homosexuality may be found in otherwise completely responsible citizens in every strata of society'.<sup>9</sup> *Victim* features a cross-section of homosexual characters from across the tangled class hierarchies of post-war Britain but it nonetheless prioritises the perspective of certain social

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<sup>6</sup> Hill, *Sex, Class and Realism*, p. 56, pp. 69-70.

<sup>7</sup> Raymond Durnat, *A Mirror for England: British Movies from Austerity to Affluence*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), p. 238.

<sup>8</sup> *The Wolfenden Report*, p. 118.

<sup>9</sup> Quoted in Bourne, *Brief Encounters: Lesbians and Gays in British Cinema 1930-1971*, p. 255.

experiences. The film suggests that a man like Farr – professional, educated, wealthy – is the ideal figure to argue for the dignity and respectability of homosexual men, precisely because he already embodies valued societal qualities. Henry (Charles Lloyd Pack), another victim of the blackmail ring, argues that Farr should function as an intermediary between homosexual and heterosexual worlds, and that his social standing plays an important part in fulfilling that role: ‘You’ve got a big position, they’d listen to you. You ought to be able to state our case.’ The film suggests that money is one of the few means to maintain some form of security in the face of blackmail; Farr is able to use his finances to reassure the nervous Phip (Nigel Stock) that he can help him: ‘You can’t afford to buy those letters [...] Trust my bank balance’. It is not only Phip, but the audience, who are encouraged to trust in Farr as a worthy representative of a respectable homosexuality, bolstered by his prestigious profession and wealth. The centrality of *Victim* in the canon of British queer cinema is a consequence of its valuation of a respectable homosexual citizenship through foregrounding specific class experiences in the narrative and an adherence to the socially conservative logic of the ‘social problem’ film. The overwhelming critical attention that it receives is justified by its significant cultural impact, but this predominant focus does risk obscuring alternative forms of homosexual representation. Andy Medhurst describes *Victim* as ‘the only acknowledged narrative possible’, hinting that there were alternative engagements with same-sex desire in mainstream cinema which were obscured by its long shadow.<sup>10</sup> *Victim*’s narrative emphasis on the socially responsible and otherwise conventional homosexual enshrined in the *Wolfenden Report* reiterated a specific class perspective but there were other, alternative, engagements with the relationship between homosexuality and class that deserve greater critical attention. Their analysis helps to situate *Victim* within a broader landscape of queer representation and an opportunity to situate its significance as a consequence of its class politics.

This chapter presents three sections which offer three distinct examples of homosexual representation in post-war British film that are alternative to those evident in *Victim*. Though each section outlines a separate argument, they are linked

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<sup>10</sup> Medhurst, ‘In search of nebulous nancies: Looking for queers in pre-gay British film’, p. 23.

by the overall purpose of highlighting the diversity of homosexual representation to be found in post-war British cinema. The first section examines three films in which intense homosocial relationships among men in contained or intimate social situations produce forms of same-sex desire. Each film focuses on the relationship between a 'normal' man and a coded homosexual friend which produces an ambiguous form of attraction that has been enabled by the surprisingly fragile hold of heterosexuality on those removed from or disillusioned with the strictures of normative societal conventions. The second section explores the 'British New Wave' films, which were received as contemporary and class-conscious depictions of post-war Britain because they were adaptations of texts that had been received in similar terms. The critical mythologizing of the 'Angry Young Men' movement emerged independently of the texts themselves and this development is evident in the film adaptations through a refigured emphasis on masculinity, authenticity and realism. The chapter concludes with an examination of camp as a performative mode that deliberately undermined the strictures of 'serious' representation and its class implications. By examining the career of Kenneth Williams, particularly in his roles across several *Carry On* films, this section proposes that his use of camp could humorously invoke the centrality of class to representations of homosexuality in both film and culture more broadly.

#### Dangerous Friendships: *Barabbas*, *Borstals* and *Bikers*

As we have seen in *Brideshead Revisited* (1945), the intense friendship between two youths could provide a romanticised ideal of homoerotic expression. Not all representations of such desires within same-sex environments were as idealized, however, especially when they were set amidst distinctly less glamorous locations and characters. *Brideshead* presents the homosocial environment of the public school as a space conducive to the proliferation of the romantic friendship between Charles and Sebastian, a relationship which, although fleeting, is a valued element in Charles's narrative. Within other sex-segregated settings, the slippage between homosociality and homoeroticism was presented as a dangerous deviation from heterosexuality. This section focuses on three films; *Now Barabbas* (1949), *Boys in Brown* (1949) and *The Leather Boys* (1964) in order to examine a dynamic which is not the 'romantic friendship' so much as the 'dangerous friendship', in which a queer character's close relationship with a man who is defined as 'normal' is depicted as a

source of potential contagion.<sup>11</sup> All suggest that same-sex desire can emerge from situations involving maladjustment, social disorder and breakdowns in the injunctions of conventional society; *Now Barabbas* is set in a prison, *Boys in Brown* in a borstal and *The Leather Boys* among disaffected teenage bikers. Most significantly, each film evinces an ambivalence about the emergent same-sex desire that it depicts and often, intentionally or not, endorses its value or necessity to the characters. The lack of affirmation or sympathy afforded to the topic of homosexuality in *Now Barabbas* and *Boys in Brown* might provide sufficient rationale for their exclusion from canons of queer cinema, but each film nonetheless provides a nuanced perspective on the issue. There is no mention of either film in Bourne's *Brief Encounters: Lesbians and Gays in British Cinema 1930-1971* or Robin Griffith's *British Queer Cinema* and, though *Boys in Brown* is briefly mentioned in Hill's *Sex, Class and Realism: British Cinema 1956-1963* and Robert Murphy's *Sixties British Cinema*, it is only as a 'social problem' film. It is arguable that these films are omitted both because their focus on same-sex desire differs from the most obvious templates (such as Wildean dandies and public schools) but also because they do not adhere to Wolfenden-influenced rhetoric of homosexual citizenship that made *Victim* such a landmark film.

The presence of same-sex desire in single-sex environments had not been the focus of the most popular or widely disseminated representations of homosexuality, primarily because it confused and undermined attempts to delineate a more precise sexual orientation. In the late nineteenth century, it was often acknowledged by emergent sexologists, framed as conditional, contextual and distinct from the manifestation of a specific sexual identity. In *Sexual Inversion* (1897), Havelock Ellis's argument that 'there is a tendency for homosexuality to arise in persons of usually normal tendency who are placed under conditions (as on board ship or in prison) where the exercise of normal sexuality is impossible' supports his distinction between 'a general undefined homosexuality,—a relationship of unspecified nature to persons of the same sex,—in addition to the more specific sexual inversion'.<sup>12</sup> J. A. Symonds, in *A Problem in Modern Ethics* (1893), proposes

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<sup>11</sup> *Now Barabbas*, dir. Gordon Parry (Warner Brothers, 1949); *Boys in Brown*, dir. Montgomery Tully (General Film Distributors, 1949); *The Leather Boys*, dir. Sidney J. Furie (British Lion-Columbia, 1964).

<sup>12</sup> Havelock Ellis, *Studies in the Psychology of Sex, Volume I* (London: William Heinemann, 1942), p. 83.

that many incidences of same-sex activity in prisons could be ascribed to the sexual frustration produced by the lack of women: 'When the school, the barrack, the prison, the ship has been abandoned, the male reverts to the female'.<sup>13</sup> For Symonds, who had a vested interest in justifying his own sexual desires, distinguishing same-sex desire in prison from a prescribed identity allowed him to present a homosexual orientation uncontaminated by criminality and degeneracy. This distinction was often maintained in the post-war era but, within a context more attuned to homosexuality as a social problem, the potential for contagion from within the isolated location to broader society was articulated with a pronounced anxiety. Westwood's *Society and the Homosexual* claimed that '[p]rison does not reform homosexuals; it breeds them', while K. Soddy, writing for *The Lancet* in 1954, employed similar language, arguing that prison was producing more homosexuality than it was preventing through its punitive laws: 'with all these conditions of life so strongly in favour of homosexuality, prison might almost have been designed as a forcing-ground for young developing homosexuals'.<sup>14</sup> *Now Barabbas* and *Boys in Brown* are nascent depictions of this anxiety about corruption and contagion, less invested in delineating the 'true' homosexual from acts of same-sex desire as focusing more generally on the institution itself as fostering dangerous intimacies among incarcerated young men.<sup>15</sup>

Both films present the spatial and temporal confines of their settings as an impediment to the normative trajectories of their protagonists, allowing for the emergence of queer desire when the routines and rhythms of heterosexuality are arrested. The opening shot of *Now Barabbas* visually enacts the isolation from the 'ordinary' world of heterosexual reproduction as the camera moves from a crowd of children laughing and playing until it meets the exterior brick wall of the prison. As the character Roberts (Ronald Howard) puts it, 'like another world'. *Boys in Brown* is similarly invested in highlighting the troubling confinement from convention that occurs following imprisonment. The film opens with several location shots showing

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<sup>13</sup> Symonds, *A Problem in Modern Ethics*, accessed online 30 September 2023 at: <https://www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/32588>.

<sup>14</sup> Westwood, *Society and the Homosexual*, p. 165; K. Soddy, 'Homosexuality', *The Lancet*, 264: 6837 (11 September 1954), 541-546 (p. 545).

<sup>15</sup> In *Barabbas*, the opening credits begin with a quotation from Oscar Wilde's 'The Ballad of Reading Gaol' which, although perhaps indicating the film's more general critique of elements of the prison industry, is also a means of establishing a thematic link with homosexuality.

London streets as Jackie Knowles (Richard Attenborough) attempts to flee the scene of a robbery for which he has been the getaway driver; the visually mundane world of ambling shoppers, double-decker buses and terraced homes provides a public and spacious panorama to contrast with the confined and segregated environment of the borstal. The borstal boys do not only endure isolation from the spaces of conventional society, but they are also hindered in their temporal development; the childlike uniform of shirts, ties and shorts prompts Alf 'Sparrow' Thompson (Michael Medwin) to bemoan: 'Me, a married man with two kids, back in rompers. What a country!'. Both films establish immediately that jail/borstal is a distinct spatial and temporal space, divorced from normative routines and conventions, and then examines how same-sex desire can circulate within this (literal) arrested development.

Both *Barabbas* and *Boys* feature heterosexual protagonists who find the isolation of imprisonment and the separation from a female partner difficult and both focus on the influence of an implicitly homosexual character who has the potential to corrupt them and derail their eventual return to conventional society. In *Now Barabbas*, the insidious threat that Paddy O'Brien (Richard Burton) poses is heightened through a comparison with a more stereotypical homosexual character, Evelyn Richards (Peter Doughty). Richards is an effete, softly-spoken ballet dancer, whose effeminacy and association with the arts is a recognisable stereotype; the film implies that he has been imprisoned for this sexuality.<sup>16</sup> The other prisoners express an awareness of Richards's sexual difference and, although Brown (Leslie Dwyer) tells him that 'the likes of you should be hanged', most characters enjoy a good-natured relationship with him. The institutional response from the Governor (Cedric Hardwicke) is also relatively impartial, although Richards is given 'a word of warning' to 'behave' in prison. The Governor suggests that familial dysfunction is responsible for Richards' societal maladjustment, presenting him as more of a victim than a threat: 'Parents divorced, mother ran away when father was abroad, left in the care of a friend, abandoned by latter and placed in an institution. Poor devil – what a start

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<sup>16</sup> The other flashbacks depict the crime that landed the individual character in prison so we can assume that Richards's scene – in which he watches a male and female pair of ballet dancers perform their routine before violently smashing the studio mirror – although not indicating a specific crime, does suggest his repressed homosexual desire erupting in a dangerous display.

in life!'. This attributing of homosexual tendencies to an unstable upbringing became increasingly common with the growing significance of sociological explanations for homosexuality; in *Society and the Homosexual*, Westwood argues that '[p]sychosexual disturbances are nearly always found to be the result of difficulties in the child-parent relationship in early childhood'.<sup>17</sup> Richards's orientation is easy to place within dominant stereotypes of emotional and artistic feminine men, ensuring that both the prison service (and the cinema audience) can keep a careful eye on him at all times, because he is depicted primarily as a victim of societal and familial dysfunction rather than as the source of any particular threat.

Paddy O'Brien, on the other hand, manifests a far more nebulous, and thus implicitly more threatening, form of homosexual desire. Unlike Richards, he is conventionally masculine. He is also married, and the film implies that his growing association with same-sex desire can be attributed to the specific changes wrought by the prison environment. His close relationship with Richards is indicated when he defends him against Brown's homophobic insult. Later, an argument between Medworth (Julian D'Albie) and O'Brien leads to Medworth going to the Governor and implying that there is a problem - that he cannot name explicitly - involving O'Brien and Richards. The two men are immediately summoned. The Governor adopts careful but pointed language when he addresses O'Brien about the friendship: 'I always looked on you as one who walked alone, I thought you didn't care for your English colleagues very much [...] So now you've taken yourself a friend'. As Richards has already been established as homosexual, this friendship is presented as suspicious and dangerous. The Governor's instruction that O'Brien 'stop being soft' is a warning against cultivating a dangerous attachment that he associates with effeminacy and the dangerous effects of the prison:

Governor: Now look here, O'Brien. I put you in charge of the mess because I thought you deserved a break. You have character and strength of mind.  
 O'Brien: Excuse me, Sir. Why worry then?  
 Governor: Because prison is not a normal place.

The Governor holds O'Brien in esteem, but this trust is not enough to inoculate him from the dangers of questionable intimacies with other prisoners, and he decides to have Richards transferred. The film suggests that the removal of the most explicit

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<sup>17</sup> Westwood, *Society and the Homosexual*, p. 157.

homosexual character does not remove the broader presence of same-sex desire within the prison, but rather that it is now more insidiously expressed in Paddy's character. The Governor's mistake was to look for queer forms of desire in the most obvious places.

This sense of a contagion, in which same-sex desire is transmitted among and between the prisoners, is reiterated in the film's conclusion. Roberts is incarcerated for stealing from his job as a bank clerk in order to purchase an expensive engagement ring for his girlfriend Kitty (Beatrice Campbell). Roberts' faith in Kitty's loyalty sustains him throughout the narrative, but the prison is both a physical and symbolic barrier between them. When she eventually visits him in the prison, Warden Jackson (William Hartnell) sits between them for the entirety of their meeting; his eyes carefully watch whoever is speaking and prevent them from physically touching. The prison system is an obstacle to the fulfilment of Roberts and Kitty's heterosexual desire and is a factor in Kitty's decision to leave him and marry someone else. Her marriage is happening the following day, highlighting in an almost comic manner that the demands and pressures of conventional heterosexuality will wait for no man or woman. It is only once Roberts has lost Kitty that he becomes susceptible to the influence of O'Brien. In the final scene, O'Brien watches a despondent Roberts across their cell, with a predatory gaze that contrasts with Roberts's oblivious vulnerability. O'Brien asks Roberts whether his time in prison is 'dragging', a word which has homosexual connotations within the film because O'Brien has previously used it to explain and justify his relationship with Richards.<sup>18</sup> Their final exchange undercuts their solidarity with a sense of menace:

O'Brien: (*Slapping Robert's back*) Oh, cheer up lad. It won't be long.  
 Roberts: Two ruddy years.  
 O'Brien: I've got that too. (*Holds out hand*) I've got that too.  
 (*Roberts takes his hand*)

O'Brien establishes a physical and emotional connection with Roberts which, because of its clear similarity to his relationship with Richards, is meant to suggest that Roberts might now succumb to homosexual inclinations due to his thwarted

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<sup>18</sup> Governor: So now you've gained yourself a friend?

Paddy: Yes, Sir.

Governor: Why so?

Paddy: Perhaps it's dragging, Sir.

engagement. It is not Richards, the effeminate stereotype, who poses the most insidious threat, but rather the ambiguous O'Brien, whose same-sex desire has been cultivated entirely within the prison.

*Boys in Brown* dramatizes a similar preoccupation with the idea of homosexual contagion in a same-sex environment through a character whose homosexuality is all the more dangerous for its ambiguity. Jackie Knowles is placed in the all-male environment alongside the effeminate, but sinister, Alfie Rawlins (Dirk Bogarde). Alfie's offer of friendship to Jackie - 'I could look after you' - is accompanied by an appraising look that suggests more than platonic companionship. This sense is borne out in Rawlins' characterisation as sly and secretive; he collects information about other characters while withholding information regarding his own background. He is often reticent, and his speech suggests the careful deployment of significant, and coded, meaning: 'I reckon you could get any one to do anything for you. *(Pause)* Anything you wanted. *(Pause)* Without working. *(Pause)* Much'. When Rawlins is questioned on his intentions in this conversation ('What are you getting at?'), his response of 'Nothing' indicates that the threat he poses is difficult to define because it hides behind inference and innuendo. The other characters are wary of Rawlins but, due to the enclosed atmosphere of the borstal, they are forced into a mutually hostile sociality:

Sparrow: That Alfie don't half give me the creeps.  
Bossy: Yeah. Do you think we can trust him?  
Sparrow: Nah, but he can't trust us neither.

The characters are uncertain as to how to take Alfie, but the film ensures that the audience is more aware of his dangerous potential. The film implicitly critiques the borstal for encouraging a more resigned attitude to potentially subversive forms of difference that can, without careful management, continue to proliferate.

The purpose of the Borstal was to reorient inmates toward responsible and socially conscious citizenship, but the film suggests that the all-male environment can disrupt and undermine the heterosexual trajectories of its young men and, like *Now Barabbas*, highlights the emphasis on women in maintaining a sufficiently sturdy link to the 'normal' world of heterosexual desire. Jackie's girlfriend Kitty (Barbara Murray) is a significant character despite her sparse appearances throughout the film. At the film's conclusion, the Governor (Jack Warner) tells her

she provides a key role in ensuring Jackie's rehabilitation into conventional society: 'When your Jackie comes out, he'll want a lot of help and that's where you come in. [...] If you can give him something to look forward to then that's more than half the battle'. Kitty must ensure that Jackie does not stray from the conventional social trajectory from which he has been temporarily removed; the Governor even breaks regulations to allow them briefly to embrace at the end of the film. The underlying, and presumably unintentional, implication is, however, that if only a brief isolation from Kitty and the conventional, heteronormative world that she represents, could be enough to corrupt Jackie, then perhaps it is neither as secure nor appealing as it should be.

By placing so much of the blame for the dangerous desires of the inmates on the institutions themselves, both *Now Barabbas* and *Boys in Brown* manifest a more ambiguous response to their implicitly homosexual characters at the conclusion of their narratives. The heavy-handed suggestion that O'Brien will now begin to pursue Roberts is presented as an inevitability that has been encouraged by the prison environment itself; the film shifts any sense of moral condemnation from the men themselves to the structure of the justice system. The film concludes with a relationship between two men that has evaded the surveillance of the authorities. Even if the audience are meant to view such a possibility as a damning indictment of prisons, they are not encouraged to judge the individual characters. *Boys in Brown* concludes with a similar ambiguity regarding Rawlins. He decides to take responsibility for the botched escape attempt, and his glances at Jackie before falsely confessing suggest that their friendship has provided the motivation. The others accuse Rawlins of confessing as an act of cowardice, knowing he will eventually implicate them, but the film does not provide any final clarification for his motive. He is also one of only three characters, including protagonist Jackie and his close friend Bill (Jimmy Hanley) to express remorse for the escape attempt, which, the film suggests, is an indicator of which boys have any hope of rehabilitation. Although it is clearly important that the 'normal' characters in the film reject the insidious advances of Rawlins in order to avoid contamination in this same-sex environment, Rawlins is not the villain of the film, which retains an intriguing ambivalence towards him as it concludes. As Alan Sinfield notes, '[e]ven a text which aspires to contain a subordinate perspective must first bring it into visibility;

even to misrepresent, one must present.’ Both *Now Barabbas* and *Boys in Brown* depict same-sex desire in these institutions as an implicitly natural consequence of these correctional homosocial environments.<sup>19</sup> As such, they deserve greater consideration in the current critical literature about postwar queer cinema.

Released fifteen years later, *The Leather Boys*, directed by Sidney J. Furie, expands upon the ‘dangerous friendship’ trope within a homosocial environment outlined in *Now Barabbas* and *Boys in Brown*, although this time outside the confines of the justice system and within the context of teenage biker culture. Whereas the prison and borstal inmates of the earlier films might be tempted by same-sex desire due to isolation from heterosexuality, *The Leather Boys* suggests that it can manifest itself as a result of the disillusionment produced by the stifling and limited options presented to working-class teenager Reggie (Colin Campbell) in post-war Britain. The film begins with depicting the speedy trajectory of the relationship between Reggie and his girlfriend Dot (Rita Tushingham); Dot is only fifteen years old when the film begins and Reggie’s arrival at her school with an engagement ring presents the imperative to marriage as both overlapping and penetrating adolescence in a manner that forecloses alternatives. The emphasis on Tushingham’s character, which is expanded considerably from her peripheral role in the source novel, highlights that the adaptation is far more invested in depicting, and critiquing, the relationship between a young, working-class couple in terms of their limited options and the dissatisfaction that underlies their rushed courtship. The wedding highlights their general naivete amid the strict rituals and almost oppressive jollity of the guests. They have to be prompted by relatives to perform specific rituals, such as the cutting of the cake, which demonstrates their uncertain reliance on convention. The film presents the wedding not as the celebration of an individual relationship, but as a prescribed event within a broader framework geared towards a normative family structure and child-rearing, particularly Uncle Arthur’s (Martin Matthews) toast that has him looking forward to ‘all their troubles being little ones.’ As well as outlining a conventional domestic trajectory, Uncle Arthur also jokingly warns Reggie off any errant paths when he tells him: ‘A beer makes you queer – you don’t want that on your wedding night!’. The phrase foreshadows the subsequent narrative of the film, as Reggie’s growing unhappiness leads him to admit a particular form of ‘queerness’

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<sup>19</sup> Sinfield, *The Wilde Century*, p.10.

into his life. The depression that descends on both Reggie and Dot once their marriage is consummated functions as a critique of the prescribed trajectory that has brought them there, one which is implicitly informed by their position as lower-class teenagers.

Reggie's friendship with Pete (Dudley Sutton), then, becomes a distraction from his unhappy marriage but, despite the gradual revelation of Pete's homosexuality, their relationship is not presented as inherently predatory or as a form of social contagion in the manner of *Now Barabbas* and *Boys in Brown*. Pete does not appear until twenty-eight minutes into the film, emerging just as Reggie's marriage is beginning to flounder, and their burgeoning friendship functions as a substitute for the intimacy that he had expected to find with Dot; they are physically and emotionally close, sharing both a bed and personal stories with one another. In *Now Barabbas* and *Boys in Brown*, such an intimacy indicated a dangerous straying from the prescribed path of conventional society and the film does initially suggest that Reggie's attachment to Pete is luring him away from both his marriage and the opportunity to engage in heterosexual courtship rituals more broadly. Reggie's decision to move out of his home with Dot, and to share a bedroom with Pete in his Gran's house, is motivated by his obvious homosocial desire for Pete's company. Pete also discourages Reggie from reconciling with Dot and jealously prevents him from flirtatious interactions with other young women. When they pick up two girls at the seaside, Pete is distant and rude to them; he eventually resorts to running away and convinces Reggie to do the same. These events do not, however, simplistically present Reggie as an oblivious victim of Pete's desires, but instead stress Reggie's enthusiasm for, and agency within, their relationship. Reggie's fondness for Pete is contrasted with his dislike of his family, who are portrayed as selfish or greedy, particularly in how they treat Reggie's beloved Gran (Gladys Henson). Pete does not patronise her like Reggie's family, nor berate her like Dot, but rather uses humour and gentle teasing in a manner that both she and Reggie value. In comparison to these earlier films, then, Reggie is not forced into an intimate relationship with Pete because of an 'unnatural' situation, but rather chooses such a path because he enjoys Pete's company, a stance that the film validates through Pete's characterisation.

Although the film suggests that this relationship cannot last, it is not because of an implicit imperative that Reggie return to Dot and heterosexual convention, but instead because the label of homosexuality involves associations that neither Pete nor Reggie wish to embrace. When Dot argues with Reggie in the garage while he is mending his bike, Pete shouts after her: 'Leave the men to the men's business' while placing a hand on Reggie's shoulder. Dot stops, turns and sneers: 'Men? You look like a couple of queers'. Reggie is particularly perturbed by the implication of her words, attempting to reassure himself while drawing attention to his own uncertainty: 'Don't take any notice of what Dot said. I tell you, she had me worried for a minute though'. Reggie's anxiety is evident in his fixation on the remark, and he attempts to clarify the platonic nature of their friendship: 'Look, Pete. You've been a real good friend to me. [...] I mean you're the best friend I ever had. It was ridiculous...weren't it?' Pete initially appears annoyed, sarcastically telling Reggie that he's 'going to get a refill for [his] lipstick' before the tension breaks and the men engage in a pillow fight. Pete is seen to be clearly uncomfortable with the connotations of effeminacy associated with homosexuality, which will manifest itself more explicitly later in the film, but this scene also reiterates that, in a social context far more aware of same-sex desire, Pete and Reggie's intimate friendship is susceptible to accusations of homosexuality that both men, for different reasons, are keen to resist. They are able to overcome the awkwardness with humour but it is a postponement, not a resolution, of having to face the ambiguity of their relationship.

*The Leather Boys* suggests that the ambiguous relationship cannot remain so loosely defined in a social context increasingly inclined to label same-sex intimacies as manifestations of a sexual orientation. Reggie and Pete begin to argue about the precise status of their bond, with Pete challenging Reggie's insistence that their cohabitation is a short-term escape from the pressures of his marriage. Reggie tells him that their living together 'ain't home...it's only temporary' leading to a heated exchange in which Pete attempts to demonstrate why their relationship is more beneficial to Reggie than his marriage with Dot: 'You said yourself you couldn't talk to Dot but you could talk to me. [...] I never give you argument or nothing. [...] I mean don't I look after you well enough?' In articulating how closely their relationship already mirrors that of a companionable heterosexual couple, Pete is encouraging a slippage that Reggie is determined to resist, most pointedly when he responds:

'You've been a great friend'. He ends the argument by shouting, "For crying out loud Pete, I need a woman, don't I!", an appropriately vague combination of statement and question. His exclamation reiterates that he does not want their relationship to compromise his heterosexuality and yet is far from confident regarding his own desires.

For Pete, acknowledging his homosexuality would taint him with an effeminacy that he wishes to avoid. Sutton acknowledged that he played Pete with a specific goal in mind regarding the representation of homosexual characters on film: 'I wanted to see a gay character who wasn't an art student or a hairdresser or something one would expect. I wanted to play a gay character who was much like any other man. He was just some guy in love, an average bloke'.<sup>20</sup> Sutton's comments establish an implicit correlation between 'average' and a desire to move beyond stereotypes regarding effeminacy. This approach is undermined somewhat by Sutton's performance, particularly Pete's unusual, and frequent, affecting of an American accent, which, according to Daniel Kremer, Sutton borrowed from homosexual men:

Sutton's improvised dialogue for Pete was based on a crew of merchant navy men he had known as a mechanic in the RAF. These navy men often took boats to Cape Town with "queens" below deck. They would tell Sutton stories speaking with "this bogus, high-speed pseudo-American accent." Seeing this characterization actualized, Furie enthusiastically gave Sutton free rein.<sup>21</sup>

The contradiction here is evident; Sutton wished to avoid his portrayal of Pete mirroring common stereotypes, but he nonetheless modelled elements of his performance on flamboyant homosexual men. The effect that this produces in the film is that Pete is noticeably more eccentric, and extroverted, than the more restrained Reggie, and Sutton's performance helps to make his character more noticeably queer as a result. A contemporary critic, Charles Seelye, suggested that Pete was 'a queer who is supposed to be enough of a regular guy to fool the hero, but still faggoty enough to let the audience in on the secret'.<sup>22</sup> The implication is that even if Pete wants to be 'an average bloke', he cannot be; his identity as a

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<sup>20</sup> Daniel Kremer, *Sidney J. Furie: Life and Films* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2015), p. 58.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 58.

<sup>22</sup> John Seelye, 'Film Reviews: *The Leather Boys*', *Film Quarterly*, 19:3 (April 1966), p.43.

homosexual, regardless of whether he is willing to acknowledge it, is an impediment to the continuation of their friendship.

The sense that Pete's sexuality is an inescapable obstacle which the two friends must confront is reiterated at the film's conclusion. Reggie encounters a group of effeminate homosexual men in the dockyard pub who use feminine endearments for one another and direct appraising glances towards him. His dislike of these men is evident but the revelation that they know Pete is the determining factor in the end of their friendship; now that Pete has been openly associated with homosexuality, their platonic friendship cannot be maintained without tainting Reggie by association. The men refer to Pete's biker outfit, commenting 'Look at this for drag', using a queer vocabulary to align themselves with him and suggest that his participation in the biker culture was a temporary and superficial departure from their milieu. Reggie leaves the pub, with Pete attempting to follow him before giving up; the two men stop and smile at one another before Reggie heads off alone as the film ends. This scene suggests an inevitability to the end of their relationship, now that Pete's association with homosexuality has been acknowledged. There is an implicit melancholy in Reggie's response, however, conveying a sense that the parting is against the wishes of the characters themselves and instead the consequence of societal pressures that require the acknowledgement of a homosexual identity with which neither man is comfortable. *The Leather Boys*, then, presents the relationship between a 'normal' man and a 'queer' friend in much more valued terms than the earlier representations, partly due to the more liberal climate in which it was produced. It does, however, reinforce that this relationship cannot continue once the association with homosexuality and effeminacy are made explicit. Reggie cannot be friends with Pete in this context: although the film suggests it is primarily because of the restrictive effects of the label, it nonetheless depicts a working-class man rejecting any association with same-sex desire at its conclusion.

These films of 'dangerous friendships' highlight that such relationships were often used to articulate anxieties related to the pressures of heterosexuality, the erotic potentials of intimate homosociality and the threat of contagion. *Now Barabbas* and *Boys in Brown* are focused on the insidious presence of same-sex desire within confined institutions and, although they present homosexuality as a problem, they are more critical of institutions than of individuals. *The Leather Boys* presents the

relationship between Reggie and Pete as affectionate and mutually beneficial, but the film's narrative dramatizes its eventual decline as the label of 'homosexuality' fits uncomfortably within their working-class social milieu. All three films are, however, united in their focus on same-sex desire as the result of failures and omissions within the normative heterosexual trajectories of society which creates the space for forms of same-sex intimacy that might tempt 'normal' men towards homosexuality. In *Queer Phenomenology*, Sara Ahmed argues that '[t]he very idea that bodies "have" a natural orientation is exposed as fantasy in the necessity of the enforcement of that orientation, or its maintenance as a social requirement for intelligible subjectivity'.<sup>23</sup> The films discussed offer critiques, intended or otherwise, of the supposed 'naturalness' of a heterosexual orientation, depicting it instead as something which can be reoriented, with little encouragement, towards more queer forms of desire. Their depiction of same-sex desire is, then, removed from a narrative of growing visibility and social acceptance of homosexuality as contained in the *Victim* narrative, but they nonetheless highlight that there were other, more coded and ambiguous, forms of same-sex desire, circulating in older British films, that were less interested in outlining an identity to defend and more concerned with tracing an inclination that might appear anywhere across the social system and in situations that had nothing to do with wit, wealth or artistic culture.

#### Adapting Anger and Realising Realism: The 'New Wave' and its Source Texts

Where *Now Barabbas*, *Boys in Brown* and *The Leather Boys* are relatively forgotten films that engage with working-class characters, contemporary society, and social issues, the British 'New Wave' films examined in this section occupy a prominent position within critical appraisals of self-consciously modern, socially progressive British post-war film. Raymond Durnat claimed that the release of Jack Clayton's *Room at the Top* (1959) 'marks the breakthrough of a new cinema' and Peter Hutchins argues that the subsequent films associated with the label were characterised by 'shockingly new subject matter'.<sup>24</sup> The novelty associated with these films was often linked to their contemporary focus on working-class

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<sup>23</sup> Sara Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology: Orientations, Objects, Others* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2006), p. 85.

<sup>24</sup> Durnat, *A Mirror for England: British Movies from Austerity to Affluence*, p. 1; Peter Hutchins, 'Beyond the New Wave: Realism in British Cinema, 1959-63', *The British Cinema Book*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed., ed. Robert Murphy (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), pp. 304-312 (p. 304).

experiences in post-war Britain; Isabel Quigly, discussing another 'New Wave' film, Karel Reisz's *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning* (1960), described it as 'the first British feature film in which today's working-class world has appeared...people today with today's attitudes and outlook and today's money'.<sup>25</sup> This section examines three films associated with the 'British New Wave', *Room at the Top* (1959), *Look Back in Anger* (1959) and *A Taste of Honey* (1961), all of which were adapted from novels or plays that, as we have seen, refer to homosexuality and homosexual characters in varying tones.<sup>26</sup> The films, however, engage much less consistently with that element than their source texts, and thus implicitly contribute to the continuing marginalization of homosexuality within a self-declaredly progressive, class-conscious cultural context. When they do refer to homosexuality, they do so more often than not in terms that reinforce established clichés and prejudices.

The sense of modernity and authenticity associated with the 'New Wave' was conferred partly through its adapting of texts associated with the 'Angry Young Men' movement and their use of key creative figures linked to it. Colin MacCabe argues that the cinema promotes a form of adaptation 'in which the relation to the source text is part of the appeal and the attraction of the film', and the 'New Wave' adaptations exploited this symbiotic relationship to their advantage in both attracting a pre-existing audience and exploiting the cultural cachet of the source texts.<sup>27</sup> Stuart Laing suggests that this connection was particularly important for these films in establishing their credibility and relevance:

British cinema played a key part in the transmission of the new literary movement of the late fifties. Precisely at the same time when cinema as a mass entertainment was being superseded, the British film industry capitalized on the 'social realism' of post-1956 drama and novels to produce a sequence of films that combined box-office success and (so it was regarded) serious social comment.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Durnat, *A Mirror for England: British Movies from Austerity to Affluence*, p. 1; Quoted in Laing, *Representations of Working-Class Life 1957-1964*, p.123.

<sup>26</sup> *Room at the Top*, dir. Jack Clayton (British Lion Films, 1959); *Look Back in Anger*, dir. Tony Richardson (Warner Brothers, 1959); *A Taste of Honey*, dir. Tony Richardson (British Lion Films, 1961).

<sup>27</sup> Colin MacCabe, 'Introduction: Bazinian Adaptation, *The Butcher Boy* as Example', in *True to the Spirit: Film Adaptation and the Question of Fidelity*, eds. Colin MacCabe, Kathleen Murray and Rick Warner (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), pp. 3-25 (p. 5).

<sup>28</sup> Stuart Laing, 'The Production of Literature', in *Society and Literature 1945-1970*, ed. Alan Sinfield (New York: Holmes & Meier, 1983), pp. 121-171 (pp.158-9.)

As Laing notes, these adaptations claimed a connection back to the source texts as a means of validating their own depictions of contemporary social experience and to be received with as similarly significant cultural representations. Tony Richardson, director of both *Look Back with Anger* and *A Taste of Honey*, made this connection explicit in a 1959 issue of *Films and Filming*: 'It is absolutely vital to get into British films the same sort of impact and sense of life that what you can loosely call the Angry Young Man cult has had in the theatre and literary worlds'.<sup>29</sup> *Look Back in Anger* and *A Taste for Honey* were both made by Woodfall films, a production company set up by Osborne, director Tony Richardson, and producer Harry Saltzman, which was closely connected to the theatrical world that had played a key role in producing the 'Angry' phenomenon and reinforced a strong link between source and adaptation. This process of adaptation did not, however, simply transmit the existing themes from the source materials, but often significantly reshaped them.

By analysing two 'Angry' adaptations, *Room at the Top*, directed by Jack Clayton, and *Look Back in Anger*, directed by Tony Richardson, it is possible to trace the significance of adaptation in foregrounding the masculine, heterosexual and lower-class perspective that the 'Angry Young Men', as a movement, were assumed to embody. As we have already seen, the 'Angry' label was always vaguely applied, with the texts collected under its definition often failing to cohere under a consistent style, form or narrative focus. The perception of the 'Angry Young Men' movement was, however, more powerful than any individual text, enthusiastically bolstered by critics, journalists and, often, writers themselves. The adaptations of these two 'Angry' texts were arguably responding as much to the construction of the label and the values it was assumed to contain as they were to the source texts. These considerations reshaped their engagement with homosexuality because the adaptive process involved removing references to the subject in a manner that cannot be accounted for entirely by the censorship of the time. While expansive representation was not permitted, both the novel *Room at the Top* and the play *Look Back in Anger* feature references that would have been brief and derogatory enough to avoid censure. They were instead uniformly excised, partly because 'Angry' writing had

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<sup>29</sup> 'The Man Behind the Angry Young Man', *Films and Filming*, February 1959, p. 9. In Hill, *Sex, Class and Realism: British Cinema 1956-1963*, p. 40.

become predominantly associated with a masculine, heterosexual and lower-class perspective that could not be undermined by an association with homosexuality.

The extent to which the 'Anger' adaptations were responding to the ideas associated with the label, rather than the texts themselves, is indicated by the setting of the film *Room at the Top* in the 1950s, whereas the novel is much more clearly set in the late 1940s. The film is vaguer about its historical timeframe in order to be reflective of the 'Angry' movement's perceived critique of its immediate context rather than exploring an earlier historical moment. Isabel Quigly, writing for *The Spectator*, described it as 'a British film that talks about life here today - not during the war, not in the jungle or in the desert, not in some unimaginable script-writers' suburbia or in a stately home', but, in the book, the events of the War are painfully recent for several characters.<sup>30</sup> This emphasis on contemporaneity as independent of a formative past was intended by the filmmakers. In her commentary on the film's DVD release, Josephine Botting notes that the original script specifies that, when Joe Lampton (Laurence Harvey) arrives in Warnley, there are sandwich boards outside the train station which mention both Princess Elizabeth's 21st birthday and the economic policies of Stafford Cripps. This initial impetus to acknowledge the source text's 1947 setting is absent in the completed film and Botting notes that the 1950s fashions on display likewise suggest a shift in historical context. Adjusting the narrative in this manner aligned *Room at the Top* with the perceived concerns of the modern 'Angry' movement and the ideas about class, gender and sexuality associated with it are manifest in additional adaptive decisions.

As we saw in the novel chapter, texts collected under the 'Angry' label were often presumed to offer a lower-class and masculine opposition to a middle-class effeminacy dominating literary culture, regardless of how accurately this conception matched the intentions and backgrounds of the authors. They were also imbued with an air of authenticity in their depictions of post-war society and this tendency was heightened by the social realist aesthetic of the film adaptations. The films' aesthetic investment in social realism was often taken to indicate a sociological accuracy but, as Marcia Landy argues, the delineations of the 'real' are selective: '[w]hat is not said, who does not speak, and who is spoken for are indices to the partial and

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<sup>30</sup> Laing, *Representations of Working-Class Life 1957-1964*, p. 117.

ideological nature of representations of the real'.<sup>31</sup> The one scene in *Room at the Top* that engages with homosexuality, in which Joe meets a 'pansy' in a pub and pretends to flirt with him, is excised from the film adaptation, reiterating the exclusive heterosexual and masculine perspective associated with the 'Angry' label. The omission of the 'pansy' from the adaptation removes him from Joe's social context and validates an exclusive focus on heterosexuality as part of the 'real' social milieu that it claims to depict.

The influence of 'Anger' on the film is also evident in its approach to the complexities of Joe's class identity. In the novel, Joe's participation in the Warnley Amateur Dramatics Society is the beginning of his assimilation into the town's middle class, but the film presents it as a space that exposes his class difference. In the novel, Joe mispronounces 'brazier' as 'brassiere' during a rehearsal, to raucous and humiliating laughter from the members. In the film, the scene affords him an opportunity aggressively to assert his working-class identity against the middle-class, theatrical clique. When Alice (Simone Signoret) describes his mistake as 'a wonderful thought [of] erotic vice among the working class', Joe angrily shouts: 'Let me tell you, I am working class. [...] Working class and proud of it!'. This passionate articulation of class identity expressed is much closer to the tone associated with the 'Angry Young Men' movement and a significant departure from Joe's sulky response in the novel.<sup>32</sup> The film of *Room at the Top* was produced in a context in which theatre had been identified as a site of the bourgeois effeminacy that the 'Angry' writers were challenging and, therefore, it provides a means for Joe angrily to proclaim his class identity in a tone reminiscent of Osborne's Jimmy Porter.

Osborne's play *Look Back in Anger* may have inadvertently launched a new literary movement, but its adaptation demonstrated the influence of the critical mythos of the 'Angry Young Men' in its approach to homosexuality, evincing a simplistic homophobic attitude that is significantly more reductive than the attitudes in the source text. The film, written by Nigel Kneale with additional dialogue from Osborne, sees the ideas associated with the 'Angry' narrative dominating the adaptation, removing Jimmy's valuation of same-sex desire as a subversive social

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<sup>31</sup> Landy, *British Genres: Cinema and Society 1930-1960*, p. 467.

<sup>32</sup> 'I am working-class,' I said sulkily. 'And you needn't explain your little quip. I know all about the Chevalier. I read a book once.' Braine, *Room at the Top*, p. 49.

force, and reorienting the direction of his homophobia towards stage drama instead. As we have seen, the play *Look Back in Anger* demonstrates a complex, and often contradictory, attitude towards homosexuality; while Osborne is keen to attack a staid theatrical aesthetic that he suggests is heavily influenced by the homosexuality of its leading figures, he nonetheless counters it with Jimmy's occasional admissions of admiration of homosexual men. Jimmy's valuation of homosexuality as a form of societal subversion is facilitated through discussions of Alison's friend Webster. The decision to remove these references in the adaptation and to forego depicting Webster's character despite the staging of other 'unseen' characters from the play (e.g. Mrs. Redfern and Ma Tanner) eliminates much of the homophobic content of Jimmy's rants, but it also removes his valuation of same-sex desire. Some of Jimmy's sneering jibes regarding the effeminacy of literary culture are transferred from the play (his line about 'picking flowers with Auntie Wordsworth' remains intact), but the omission of Webster means that homosexuality is restricted to being assessed as a theatrical phenomenon rather a social fact.

Removing Webster's character also means that the film's most explicit references to homosexuality are closely tied to a pejorative association with the theatre. The play of *Look Back in Anger* critiqued a dominant dramaturgy for its emotional repression, effeminacy and lack of engagement with contemporary society. It also established itself as an alternative to such dramas. The film adaptation, on the other hand, presents theatre as entirely feminised, ineffectual and queer. Through the character of Helena (Claire Bloom), an actress whose profession is only mentioned fleetingly in the source text, the film can visually stage an attack on conventional theatre that the play, confined as it was to one room, did not attempt. Helena, who, like Alison (Mary Ure), represents the insidious complacency of middle-class femininity – is performing in a production that bears all the hallmark of a 'well-made play' that the film presents as comically tedious in comparison to the animation of Jimmy's (Richard Burton) ranting. Jimmy's reference to the playwright, a character not depicted in the play, claims that he has no experience of a woman's bedroom, 'even his mother's, when she found out the truth about him'. This coded reference to homosexuality is a means of mocking and emasculating the theatre further. Jimmy's disruptive visit to the play's rehearsal exploits stereotypes about the links between homosexuality and theatre; the play has an effete director and, as if to underscore

the queerness of the space, Jimmy kisses Cliff (Gary Raymond) on the hand as they play-act a mock-romantic scene in feminine voices. Although the play of *Look Back in Anger* mounted a similar attack on theatrical effeminacy, it also featured Jimmy's praise of Webster and could offer itself as an alternative form of (masculine, heterosexual) drama. The film adaptation has neither element, meaning that it instead presents a broadly derisory attitude both towards homosexual men and to the theatre in general.

This tendency to disparage the theatre, even in films which had their origins on stage, was indicative of the growing tendency for films which had emerged from the 'Anger' narrative to perceive theatricality as a negative trait for cinema and the growing emphasis on the 'authenticity' of contemporary social experience. Stephen Lacey outlines a number of reasons for this rejection of overt theatricality, including that it 'suggests an over-reliance on the "word"', connotes 'a style of acting that seems scaled towards the open spaces of a theatre auditorium rather than the enforced intimacy of the camera' and 'suggests an "artificiality" in performance'.<sup>33</sup> As Woodfall continued to adapt films, the emphasis on social realism dominated, even when the source texts had employed an entirely different aesthetic. In his 1960 adaptation of Osborne's play *The Entertainer* (1957), Tony Richardson excised the music-hall elements in favour of a realist aesthetic. Interestingly, when Woodfall came to adapt a much older text, Henry Fielding's *Tom Jones* (1749), the self-referential and non-naturalistic elements were retained. It seems that, when post-war Britain was being depicted, the social realist aesthetic provided a means of authentication of its depictions of contemporary social reality.

We have so far examined texts that had been closely associated with the 'Angry' label, but there were others that had also been perceived as significant in their representation of previously marginalised social experiences and characters. The term 'Angry Young Men' was too narrow to contain these more varied texts and terms like 'kitchen sink realism', 'working-class realism' or, indeed, 'New Wave' replaced it. There were often close links between these texts and the original 'Angry' works and authors, however, which reinforced their sense of representative

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<sup>33</sup> Stephen Lacey, 'Too theatrical by half? *The Admirable Crichton* and *Look Back in Anger*', in *British Cinema of the 1950s: A Celebration*, eds. Ian Mackillop and Neil Sinyard (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003), pp. 151-167 (pp. 159-60).

authenticity. This connection was particularly evident in the case of *A Taste of Honey*; Delaney had herself been described as an 'Angry Young Woman', the film's director Tony Richardson had directed *Look Back in Anger* on stage and screen and the film was a production by Woodfall, Richardson's company with John Osborne. Delaney's play had been produced by Littlewood's Theatre Workshop but they played no role in the adaptation beyond Murray Melvin reprising his role as Geof and, as a result, the film's aesthetic shifts considerably from Littlewood's emphasis on non-naturalism to the realist aesthetic that was defining Woodfall's depiction of contemporary society.

The dramaturgical elements which self-consciously acknowledged the play's theatricality, such as Helen's asides to the audience and the dancing of characters to the on-stage jazz band, were removed in the adaptation and, rather than locate equivalent cinematic self-reflexivity, the film opted for a realistic aesthetic that was associated with a more veracious form of representation. It was the first British film to be shot entirely on location, moving away from the single-set stage production and ensuring a visual authenticity; the opening credits, which show landmarks from Salford, reinforce this commitment to capturing its historical moment. The film's adherence to a realist aesthetic is a product of Tony Richardson's involvement. As Lacey notes, 'in the reviews it is Tony Richardson's *Look Back in Anger*, *The Entertainer* and *A Taste of Honey*, not Osborne's or Delaneys', and this reflects both the way such films 'are made as well as the way that they are distributed and promoted'.<sup>34</sup> Richardson professed an interest in realism because of a belief in its sociological accuracy; a press hand-out for *A Taste of Honey* stated that Richardson found film sets 'artificial' and embodying 'artistic impotence' while telling *Film Quarterly* in 1960 that '[f]or the sort of realistic films I want to make, by improvising one's way out of the impossibilities of real conditions you get something on screen that is more true, somehow, than something contrived on a set'.<sup>35</sup> The truth that was being sought was, however, not the unmediated capturing of existing social reality, but an organisation of it in order to make specific interpretative statements. As such,

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<sup>34</sup> Lacey, *British Realist Theatre: The New Wave in Its Context 1956-1965*, p. 167.

<sup>35</sup> Tony Richardson, 'An Interview in Los Angeles', *Film Quarterly*, Summer 1960, p. 13. Quoted in Robert Murphy, *Sixties British Cinema* (London: British Film Institute, 1992), p. 21.

Richardson is not so much interested in 'social realism' but the mode of 'poetic realism'.<sup>36</sup>

The film, unlike the play, seeks to cultivate a specific interpretation of characters and events in order to express their symbolic resonance and make statements about post-war society. The play resists articulating a specific message. As Arthur K. Oberg noted with mild annoyance: 'As the performer-characters in *A Taste of Honey* mock expressive language, they succeed less in preparing an audience for whatever emotion or symbolic, poetic speech might occur than in working against a conscious, literary style'.<sup>37</sup> Lacey is more emphatic, arguing that, within the play, 'there is no obvious authorial "point of view" on display' and that Delaney does 'not exploit the metonymic function of the characters, action or set, but rather the issues are visible in the texture of the personal relationships themselves'.<sup>38</sup> The film, on the other hand, develops a more explicitly poetic language; Richardson indicated his approach to the play when he directed *A Taste of Honey* on Broadway and remarked: 'Joan Littlewood ruined Shelagh Delaney's beautiful play. It's not a play. It's a poem set to jazz'.<sup>39</sup> Richardson's identification of poetic undertones to the text means that Richardson's version of *A Taste of Honey* refigures certain scenes and characters into the service of an underlying interpretation which was not as explicit in Littlewood's version of the play.

This tendency of Richardson's is particularly evident in the film version's more paternalistic attitude towards class than the original play attempted, specifically by making Jo an exception to a working class otherwise defined by an acceptance of mediocrity and banality. This shift from a more balanced focus on Helen and Jo – which Delaney said had been her intention with the stage version – is signaled from the beginning of the film which, unlike the play's opening of mother and daughter

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<sup>36</sup> As Hill puts it: 'While it is in the nature of "realism" to profess a privileged relationship to the external world, its "reality" is always conventional, a discursive construction rather than an unmediated reflection'. Hill, *Sex, Class and Realism*, p. 127.

<sup>37</sup> Arthur K. Oberg, 'A Taste of Honey and the Popular Play', *Wisconsin Studies in Contemporary Literature*, 17:2 (Summer 1966), 160-67 (p. 165).

<sup>38</sup> Stacey, *British Realist Theatre: The New Wave in its Context 1956-1965*, p. 93.

<sup>39</sup> Quoted in Todd, *Tastes of Honey: The Making of Shelagh Delaney and a Cultural Revolution*, p. 135.

moving into a new flat, sees Jo (Rita Tushingham) at school with her peers.<sup>40</sup> While she is depicted as having friends there, one girl comments that Jo ‘doesn’t get out much’ and, indeed, these girls are not glimpsed again. Instead, the film devotes considerable time to Jo as a solitary figure in the industrial landscape. Her constant arguments with her mother, and her isolation from any other friends or family for most of the film, isolates Jo from her general milieu in a way that is highlighted with particular emphasis in the funfair scene. Richardson presents the less sympathetic characters, particularly Helen (Dora Bryan) and Peter (Robert Stephens) as reveling in the freak shows and junk food, while Jo looks uncomfortable. We are meant to find the funfair crass and lowbrow; the film resonates with Fellow ‘New Wave’ director Lindsay Anderson’s documentary ‘O Dreamland’ (1953), which presented an amusement park in Margate as nightmarish. The clear directorial perspective presents a mass participation in grotesque vulgarity, with inanely laughing mannequins, distorted reflections in funfair mirrors and a freak show in which a raspy-voiced woman mispronounces French words while showcasing her collection. Jo is presented as detached from this collective experience. The significantly expanded social scope of the adaptation allows Richardson to position Jo as an anomaly within mass culture, impervious to the vulgarity which entertains those around her, whereas in the play she is primarily only defined against Helen and Peter through their generational difference.

The film is thus much more focused on Jo than the play and the other characters are presented primarily in relation to her narrative. Geof thus becomes kindred spirit who validates Jo’s sense of difference through his own distinct otherness; he also improves her life in material and aesthetic terms. The film contains a montage depicting all the changes that Geof implements in Jo’s flat; he puts curtains up, places shades over naked lightbulbs and paints both the walls and a portrait of Jo. At the end, Helen returns and ousts Geof from the flat. In the play, Jo is oblivious that Geof has been exiled, and the action is presented as that of the unfeeling Helen. In the film, however, Jo is aware of Geof’s absence and appears to accept his departure as an inevitability. The local children, who have functioned as a

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<sup>40</sup> ‘When I started this play, I had only two people in it - the mother and daughter,’ Shelagh later said. “Then I realized there had to be other characters so that these two could reveal themselves more fully. It built up on its own.” But Jo and Helen remained her focus’. Todd, *Tastes of Honey: The Making of Shelagh Delaney and a Cultural Revolution*, p. 83.

recurrent motif throughout the film, represent Jo's impending motherhood as Geof watches from the darkness. A child passes a sparkler to Jo which she lights, a symbolic enactment of hope for the future that Geof has helped to ignite, but that cannot include him.

*Room at the Top*, *Look Back in Anger* and *A Taste of Honey* each refigure their source text's depiction of homosexuality. In *Room at the Top* and *Look Back in Anger*, which position themselves as representing a contemporary Britain within a realistic aesthetic, the absence of homosexuality suggests its irrelevance for their depiction of lower-class, masculine and heterosexual protagonists. *A Taste of Honey*, in contrast, places its protagonist as an outsider within a vulgar, commercialised working-class culture; only Geof, the artistic homosexual, can temporarily provide some comfort. Ultimately, however, the film dramatizes the inevitable marginalization of the homosexual from a central position within working-class narratives. These films commanded a larger audience than their source texts and may have shaped ideas about the original texts and their authors. There is not always a linear trajectory from novel/play to film and, as Linda Hutcheon argues: 'our interest piqued, we may actually read or see that so-called original after we have experienced the adaptation, thereby challenging the authority of any notion of priority. Multiple versions exist laterally, not vertically'.<sup>41</sup> Indeed, Brian MacFarlane argues that an 'adaptation that has "worked" for a viewer may well be one that has, at least for the time of viewing, displaced the original from one's mind' and that 'it is possible that one's later reading of even a novel one has known well can be crucially influenced by the film text'.<sup>42</sup> These adaptations assisted in consolidating ideas about the emergent 'New Wave' by reiterating the marginalisation of homosexuality within their emphasis on supposedly authentic depictions of working-class cultures in post-war Britain.

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<sup>41</sup> Linda Hutcheon, *A Theory of Adaptation*, 2nd. ed. (Oxford: Routledge, 2016), p. 16.

<sup>42</sup> Brian MacFarlane, 'Reading Film and Literature', in *The Cambridge Companion to Literature On Screen*, eds. Deborah Cartmell and Imelda Whelehan (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), pp. 15-28 (p. 27).

'O! The Attractiveness of Obscure Rudeness': Camp, Class and Kenneth Williams in the *Carry on* Films

If there is one element that ties together the varied films studied so far in this chapter, it is the implication that homosexuality is nothing to laugh about. It is treated either as an important social issue that requires tolerance and understanding, an insidious threat against the conventions of heteronormative society, or a means of delineating a superficial effeminacy from the authenticity of lower-class protagonists. Homosexuality is taken seriously in each of these texts, but the terms of the 'serious' in these self-consciously significant forms of representation often rely on presenting it as a threat, a problem or a cruel misfortune. When homosexual characters do appear, they are often miserable, alienated or oppressed, and the most optimistic solution presented is a limited tolerance for those who are discreet and otherwise respectable. Within this dominant schema of tortured individuals and emotional repression, there was also, however, a form of cinematic representation that was expressive and flamboyant and that refused serious representation in favour of something more elusive: Camp. As Susan Sontag argues in her influential essay *Notes on Camp* (1966), 'the whole point of Camp is to dethrone the serious'.<sup>43</sup> The increasing invocation of camp in several post-war films can be perceived as an alternative to the forms of 'serious' homosexual representation that was defined by oppression, tragedy and limited forms of tolerance.

In 1961, Kenneth Williams wrote in his diary 'O! The attractiveness of obscure rudeness!' and this sentiment provides a fitting title for this section precisely because the potential of camp to be simultaneously obscure and rude has proved so advantageous as a form of homosexual representation.<sup>44</sup> Camp involves being 'rude' by showing a lack of respect for manners and conventions and through suggestive allusions or excessive modes of expression, but in a manner that is sufficiently equivocal as to ensure that the precise intention of the attitude is difficult to determine. Christopher Stevens highlights that this ambiguity was a key element of the camp performance: 'Frequently it was gay, but that might be part of the pretence too - and in Britain before the 1967 Sexual Offences Act, this double meaning

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<sup>43</sup> Susan Sontag, 'Notes on Camp', *Camp: Queer Aesthetics and the Performing Subject - A Reader*, ed. Fabio Cleto (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1999), pp. 53-66 (p. 62).

<sup>44</sup> Kenneth Williams, *The Kenneth Williams Diaries*, ed. Russell Davies (London: HarperCollins, 1994), p. 171.

protected everybody. The comic could indulge in filthy innuendo, and the audience could applaud without condoning sexual deviance'.<sup>45</sup> Stevens highlights the indeterminacy at the heart of camp that has allowed it to be claimed as both subversive and conservative; it could signal homosexuality, thus bringing it into public discourse, while neutralising its subversive potential with laughter.

It is precisely the impossibility of taking camp seriously that makes it a useful object of analysis to contrast with other cinematic forms of homosexual representation, as it playfully evades the invocations towards identification that such narratives often required. Camp has historically divided opinions. It has been viewed as a defiant form of queer expression that subverts gender roles; Richard Dyer, for example, describes it as 'a way of being human, witty and vital, without conforming to the drabness and rigidity of the hetero male role'.<sup>46</sup> It has also been seen to re-inscribe the rigidity of those gender roles; Andrew Britton, for example, argues that camp 'is only recognisable as a deviation from an implied norm, and without the norm it would cease to exist'.<sup>47</sup> Camp has, however, always exploited this uncertainty as to its intentions in order to navigate a historically hostile and oppressive social context. Though critics like Moe Meyer view the uncoupling of camp and queerness as a form of homophobia, it is clear that, for a specific historical period, camp could indeed be invoked without directly referencing homosexuality.<sup>48</sup> Philip Core's example summarises this duality effectively: 'CAMP is laughing at *The Importance of Being Earnest* without knowing why. CAMP is laughing at *The Importance of Being Earnest* and knowing why' (italics and capital letters in original).<sup>49</sup> Camp then, had a clear, if vague, connection to homosexuality which could be exploited to offer a form of representation outside the strictures of the 'serious'.

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<sup>45</sup> Christopher Stevens, *Born Brilliant: The Life of Kenneth Williams* (John Murray: London, 2010), p. 146.

<sup>46</sup> Richard Dyer, *The Culture of Queers* (London: Routledge, 2002), p.49.

<sup>47</sup> Andrew Britton, 'For Interpretation: Notes Against Camp', *Camp: Queer Aesthetics and the Performing Subject - A Reader*, pp. 136-142 (p. 138).

<sup>48</sup> '[T]he un-queer do not have access to the discourse of Camp, only to derivatives constructed through the act of appropriation'. Moe Meyer, 'Introduction: Reclaiming the discourse of Camp', *The Politics and Poetics of Camp*, ed. Moe Meyer (London: Routledge, 1994), pp. 1-22 (p. 1).

<sup>49</sup> Philip Core, 'Camp: The Lie that Tells the Truth', *Camp: Queer Aesthetics and the Performing Subject - A Reader*, pp. 80-86 (p. 81).

While the term 'camp' is a church so broad it can encompass vastly different styles and approaches, there is one persistent strand that deserves a greater focus: namely, its indebtedness to the class-specific figure of the dandy. Although camp is often discussed in terms of its subversion of gender norms, it also involves invoking certain ideas about taste, attitude and behaviours that are linked to class. As Andrew Ross argues, '[t]he pseudo-aristocratic patrilineage of camp can hardly be overstated'.<sup>50</sup> When Jack Babuscio identifies '[f]our features . . . basic to camp: irony, aestheticism, theatricality, and humour,' he essentially provides a list of Oscar Wilde's most famous attributes.<sup>51</sup> The historical associations between camp and the invocation of a specific class stereotype, particularly a figure with homosexual connotations, meant that it could often be used as a contrast to the perceived values of working-class culture. Medhurst notes that in the George Formby film *Boots Boots* (1934), the idea of the camp queen figure is used comedically for this precise purpose; he flounces into the scene with an ostentatious flower in his buttonhole before being ejected by Formby. Medhurst notes that the camp figure's 'clothing and accent mark him out (especially playing against such a proletarian star as Formby in a film as poverty-stricken as *Boots Boots*) as rich', and argues that this difference contributes towards an othering that facilitates humour: 'Effeminate, rich and Southern – three "others" for the price of one, removed from Formby and the film's audience and a ripe target for their laughter by virtue of gender, class and regional difference'.<sup>52</sup> Camping might, then, be used to signal a gendered/sexual otherness that was reinforced by class difference, removing the camp figure from a working-class context from comic effect.

Camp, however, is invested in the idea of conscious performance and artifice, and there was no guarantee that those who were affecting a dandified persona actually identified with the social classes from which the stereotype had emerged. Sinfield, in *The Wilde Century*, acknowledges that camp 'includes an allusion to leisure-class manners, deriving from the Wildean dandy' but highlights that this invocation is a deliberately theatrical 'impersonation (that is supposed to deceive no

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<sup>50</sup> Andrew Ross, 'Uses of Camp', in *Camp: Queer Aesthetics and the Performing Subject - A Reader*, pp. 308-329 (p. 316).

<sup>51</sup> Jack Babuscio, 'The Cinema of Camp, (AKA Camp and the Gay Sensibility)', *Camp: Queer Aesthetics and the Performing Subject - A Reader*, pp. 117-135 (p. 119).

<sup>52</sup> Medhurst, *A National Joke*, pp. 88-89.

one) of the effeminate leisure-class dandy'.<sup>53</sup> This caveat emphasizes that camp is about *performing* a class-specific identity, and it could offer a means to perform a style associated with homosexuality, regardless of class origin. As Philip Core suggests, camp 'may have pontooned this gap between the working man and educated or merely upper class homosexuals'.<sup>54</sup> The important question remains, however, as to whether this deliberately performative style was helping to undermine the centrality of class-specific experiences to homosexual representation or whether it was reinforcing them.

It is here that the figure of Kenneth Williams, he of the obscure rudeness, provides a particularly useful case study for examining the complex relationship between camp and class, particularly through his roles in the *Carry On* film series. Williams's form of camp performance involved contrasting different modes and styles while frequently invoking class. Babuscio describes camp as 'a method whereby one can multiply personalities, play various parts, assume a variety of roles - both for fun as well as out of real need,' and Williams's persona and career demonstrate this camp flexibility as a key component of his style.<sup>55</sup> This section will begin with an examination of Williams's career prior to the *Carry On* films before examining how his style developed in the film series and his deliberate use of class as he carried on camping.

When approaching camp as the antithesis of the serious, it is worth considering Williams's own private musings on homosexuality in popular culture. While, in general, his diaries record contradictory and/or hypocritical viewpoints on a range of social issues, Williams is nonetheless consistent in his dislike of a continual association between homosexuality and tragedy in popular culture. In 1955, he expressed dissatisfaction with the gloomy ending to the homosexual drama *South*: 'Of course he commits suicide. Really, this is the kind of thing that seems inevitable in all the homosexual writing. They're always killing themselves. Totally misleading & distorted picture of life, for there are a great number of happy homosexuals - at least as happy as heterosexuals. I'm sick of this "persecuted queer" stuff'.<sup>56</sup> He also

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<sup>53</sup> Sinfield, *The Wilde Century*, p. 156.

<sup>54</sup> Core, 'Camp: The Lie that Tells the Truth', p. 85.

<sup>55</sup> Jack Babuscio, 'The Cinema of Camp, (AKA Camp and the Gay Sensibility)', p. 121.

<sup>56</sup> Williams, *The Kenneth Williams Diaries*, p. 112.

compared *Victim* unfavourably to Relph and Dearden's examination of post-war race relations in *Sapphire* (1960): both were 'superficial and never knocking the real issues'.<sup>57</sup> Sontag argues that '[c]amp and tragedy are antitheses', and Williams's investment in his camp persona can be read as a rejection of serious depictions of homosexuality defined by an emphasis on oppression or limited forms of tolerance.

Williams's visibility as a homosexual was obscured by the ambiguity produced by camp, but there were several means by which it was covertly acknowledged. In his diaries, he describes the reviews for *Pieces of Eight* (1959) as 'mixed - just the same as Lettuce - the same old hints at queerness & affectation'.<sup>58</sup> Williams's reticence in defining his sexuality was a necessary manoeuvre pre-decriminalisation, but he did choose homosexual roles, particularly as one half of the pair Julian and Sandy, alongside Hugh Paddick, in the radio comedy series *Round the Horne*. The flamboyant pair, who spoke in the gay slang Polari, were 'so popular that protests arrived in sackloads if they were ever left out of the show'.<sup>59</sup> Margaret Anderson highlights that these sketches were pretty blatant for the time; 'the characters were presented unequivocally as gay, introducing to 1960s audiences the comic complexities of gay slang, some of which - words such as "naff" or "butch" - has filtered beyond the gay subculture into mainstream language'.<sup>14</sup> It is also worth considering the influence of Noël Coward when examining the homosexual connotations that accrued around Williams's performances. Williams claimed in 1961 that he had 'admired, respected and looked up to' Coward for years and, upon hearing of Coward's death in 1973, he wrote that 'Coward was my inspiration and the standard for the style of acting which I used as a criterion - the method of enunciation, breath control, acting technique, timing, everything I based on him'.<sup>60</sup> Considering Coward's style as a determining force on Williams's persona is useful in understanding how he articulated an ambiguous homosexuality, using the similar invocation of a class-specific stereotype with queer connotations.

Unlike Coward, however, Williams did not reside permanently in a pseudo-aristocratic persona. Indeed, Williams's camping deliberately invoked this class-

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<sup>57</sup> Ibid., 175.

<sup>58</sup> Williams, *The Kenneth Williams Diaries*, p. 155.

<sup>59</sup> Stevens, *Born Brilliant*, p. 207.

<sup>60</sup> Williams, *The Kenneth Williams Diaries*, p. 172, p. 446.

specific figure only to undermine it with a sudden slippage into his original Cockney accent.<sup>61</sup> As Medhurst observes: '[c]ertain ways of speaking indicate particular points in the social hierarchy'.<sup>62</sup> Those who refuse to fix their speaking to a specific voice thus subvert this hierarchy, making them difficult to locate in the social order. Williams's persona used a class-specific homosexual stereotype, only to reiterate its performativity through humorous contrast. This ambiguity served him well; he was posh (but not), queer (but not) and controversial (but not), all at once. Russell Davies suggests that Williams's 'voice suggested unreconciled duality, swooping as it did, often within a single phrase, from a sort of professional woofle, patronising and urbane, to an acidulous, jeering Cockney', but the seemingly contradictory elements of these voices were bridged by Williams's performances, merging them all across class boundaries.<sup>63</sup> One example of Williams's use of accent to affect a camp performance is in *Carry on Doctor* (1968), when his character, Doctor Tinkle, is being seduced by Nurse May (Barbara Windsor). It is at this moment that Tinkle's accent also begins to change:

Tinkle: So it was you in the sluice room – I was hoping it was hallucination.  
 Sandra: Lucy who?  
 Tinkle: (*Broad cockney voice*) Lucy Nation – you remember 'er, the girl – (*resuming earlier voice*) what am I talking about?<sup>64</sup>

Williams's persona involves continually reminding the audience that neither of his accents is 'genuine' because either one would fix him to a form of representation that camp allows him to evade. As Anderson notes, 'Williams' persona skips with alarming rapidity between one contrast and another - here between "male" and "female" tones, but also between confident authority and incompetence, rhetoric and colloquialism, upper- and working-class speech patterns'.<sup>15</sup> This analysis sees these various alterations as part of the overall strategy of camp to undermine perceived binaries and hierarchies. Christopher Stevens' biography of Williams, *Born Brilliant*, contains an anecdote from Trevor Baxter: 'There were always stories of him going

<sup>61</sup> So convincing was Williams's immersion in the persona that, when he auditioned for the film version of *The Beggar's Opera* (1953), Laurence Olivier and Peter Brook did not believe in his Cockney accent and eventually dubbed his voice. Kenneth Williams, *Just Williams: An Autobiography* (Fontana/Collins: Glasgow, 1987), p. 65.

<sup>62</sup> Medhurst, *A National Joke*, p. 16.

<sup>63</sup> Russell Davies, 'Introduction', *The Kenneth Williams Diaries*, pp. xi-xxix (p. xi).

<sup>64</sup> *Carry on Doctor*, dir. Gerald Thomas (The Rank Organisation, 1968).

around Piccadilly Circus in an open-topped motor car, calling out, “Arrest me, officer, I’m a homosexual.” But that was all right because he wasn’t actually doing it’.<sup>65</sup> During his performances, Williams regularly places his tongue in his cheek, physically enacting his own comedic style.

He evinced a far more complex ‘camp’ persona than his colleague Charles Hawtrey and, through a brief contrast of the two figures, it is possible to demonstrate how Williams used class identity much more to comic effect. Hawtrey, with very few exceptions, plays an effeminate clown figure in the *Carry On* films, employing effete mannerisms and gestures, a distinctly feminine voice and a willowy figure as part of his comedic ensemble. In *Carry on Constable*, he comes closest to explicitly playing a homosexual stereotype. He literally minces into the station with a bouquet of flowers in one hand and a caged bird in the other, and utters the lines:

Sorry I’m late, Sargeant, but I just couldn’t leave home without bringing something bright and gay for the poor indisposed Constables. So, it was off to my greenhouse, with a little snip here, a little snip there, snip snip, and here we are – with my love. Ooh, what have I said? With my very best floral greetings.<sup>66</sup>

Hawtrey’s stylised manner of speaking, his flamboyant ‘ooh’ and, perhaps most tellingly, his interest in all things ‘bright and gay’, present him as a coded homosexual figure. The influence of class in Hawtrey’s persona is indicated by his elongated vowels in his catchphrase ‘Ooh hello’, invoking the idea of the upper-class dandy aesthete, even if more in spirit than in characterisation. While Hawtrey is identical in almost every film, Williams developed his camp style across them.

Williams’s roles in the *Carry On* films demonstrate the gradual incorporation of various class elements of his personas into the camp performances with which he became most associated. In the first few films, he plays a snooty and aloof intellectual, usually removed from the high-spirited homosociality happening elsewhere. While it is certainly possible to make a queer interpretation of his disdain for the masculine banter of his colleagues, even though the second film, *Carry on Nurse* (1959) sees his character given a brief, and unconvincing, romantic plotline, it is much better viewed as the first in a series of layers that Williams would increasingly build into his characterisations across the films.<sup>67</sup> In *Carry on Constable*

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<sup>65</sup> Stevens, *Born Brilliant*, p. 152.

<sup>66</sup> *Carry on Constable*, dir. Gerald Thomas (Anglo-Amalgamated, 1960).

<sup>67</sup> *Carry on Nurse*, dir. Gerald Thomas (Anglo-Amalgamated, 1960).

(1960), Hawtrey and Williams end up in drag when they go undercover as middle-aged women to investigate shoplifting in a department store, allowing Williams to engage in some effeminate mannerisms while maintaining the dignity of his character for comic effect. The next film in the series, *Carry on Regardless* (1960) sees him play the androgynously named Francis Courtenay who, while still a pretentious intellectual (he speaks several languages, including gobbledygook) is a notably more silly persona than those in the earlier films and who demonstrates more exaggerated and effeminate mannerisms.<sup>68</sup> In the film, Francis is an employee of 'Helping Hands', an agency that accepts bizarre requests for work. Francis is sent to mediate between a bickering husband and wife; the wife keeps reverting to her native German. Francis's attempts to translate involve him becoming increasingly invested in performing her response. His attempts at simmering sensuality when she tells her husband, 'I'm a deeply passionate and sensitive woman [...] For a whole week you've shown no signs of love towards me!' gesture towards a more camp persona. The comic effects of effeminacy are highlighted again when a modelling job becomes available, and Francis preens and poses for the firm's secretary (Esma Cannon) in an attempt to get it. In *Carry On Spying* (1964), the ninth installment, Williams adopted a significantly different tack which demonstrated his versatility as a comic actor and, most importantly, an accent far removed from his usual mode of speaking.<sup>69</sup> As inept spy Desmond Simkins, Williams uses a nasal, Cockney voice that he had cultivated during his time on *Hancock's Half Hour*, but creates a much sillier character. Across these films then, and building on characterisations he had cultivated elsewhere, Williams eventually produced a camp persona that was simultaneously snooty and silly, cultured and irreverent, upper- and lower-class.

From *Carry on Spying* onwards, Williams performed a similar character in every *Carry On* film, usually a smarmy, and vaguely upper-class type who would launch into Cockney occasionally as a comic contrast. This oscillation further helped to emphasise Williams's own camp; as Sontag argues, '[w]herever there is development of character, Camp is reduced'.<sup>12</sup> The magazine *Plays and Players*, for example, stated that Kenneth Williams 'could not play anyone but himself' and, while this blanket statement ignores his range, it does highlight that the persona informed

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<sup>68</sup> *Carry on Regardless*, dir. Gerald Thomas (Anglo-Amalgamated, 1961).

<sup>69</sup> *Carry On Spying*, dir. Gerald Thomas (Warner-Pathé Distributors, 1964).

his performances.<sup>13</sup> The catchphrases that he used in numerous *Carry Ons* - like "No, don't be like that" and "Now stop messing about" - had originated earlier in his career in *Hancock's Half Hour*. Each film involved the perception, not of an individual character, but of a constellation of various performances which Williams had accrued across his career.

There has, often understandably, been a backlash to the version of homosexual representation offered by the *Carry On* films, defined as they are by unspoken allusions and a comic tone. Many of these negative responses, however, overlook the agency and creativity of the performers and ignore their subversive potential. Anderson suggests that Williams is an example of 'the gay fool' character who 'replays the riskier elements of the comedy so as to push them outside the framework of identification for the male, heterosexual, working-class audience'.<sup>70</sup> Anderson argues that these performances produce a distancing effect: 'The message now becomes: "Look, these men are so unlike you - they don't even have a definite sex, sexuality or class - they can't possibly be what it is really like. This is just a joke and the joke is about others, not you."<sup>71</sup> Such a reading ignores Williams's own deliberate invocation of a working-class persona in his performance and seems to impose a heterogenous identity on the film's working-class audiences as heterosexual male. This view is reductive; as Medhurst observes, responses to camp performances are never uniform: 'The queen is a laugh magnet, although different audiences laugh for very different reasons, ranging from the laughter of the homophobes who are delighted to see their prejudices confirmed, to the laughter of fellow homosexuals, so schooled in and attuned to the codes of camp that they miss none of the in-jokes that glisten flirtatiously through the pursed lips and the trilled arpeggios of the comedy queen's innuendo-riddled banter'.<sup>72</sup> The representations of homosexuality in the *Carry On* films were obviously limited, but, as we have seen, so were the more 'serious' depictions. If the price of 'serious' representation meant reducing flamboyancy and subversion in order to appeal to the presumed prejudices

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<sup>70</sup> Margaret Anderson, "Stop Messing About!" The Gay Fool of the *Carry On* Films', *Journal of Popular British Cinema*, 1 (1998), pp. 37-47 (pp. 42-43).

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 43.

<sup>72</sup> Medhurst, *A National Joke*, p. 87.

of a heterosexual audience, then comedy provided the opportunity for more expressive freedom.

It is arguable that the distinctly 'lowbrow' status of the *Carry On* film series permitted this camp escape from the strictures of the serious. The film series is, second to James Bond, Britain's longest-running film franchise and was hugely popular with audiences for most of its run. Across thirty films, two homosexual performers (Kenneth Williams and Charles Hawtrey) feature in almost every film – in fact there is only one from the original run, *Carry On England* (1976), in which neither appears. These films thus centred a distinct camp sensibility through the use of innuendo, parody and exaggerated comedic performances, but they are unlikely to be centred in histories of British queer cinema. This omission is partly because the films cannot be taken 'seriously' in any conventional sense; they are cheaply made, comically broad and were churned out in almost assembly line fashion. The films are ignored in most critical accounts of British film because, as Marion Jordan argues, their low production values, indifference to criticism and lack of claim to artistry 'has meant that they have not in general been seen as British film history, selective (as all histories are) of those things that it regards as important'.<sup>73</sup> The lowly cultural status of the *Carry On* films thus provided a freedom from the conditions expected of important and serious representations of homosexuality. More barbed critical responses tend to ignore the fact that the camp that men like Williams and Hawtrey wished to express was only permitted in the context of mainstream comedy – it was certainly not desired in films like *Victim*, where it would have undermined an emphasis on the assimilationist potential of the homosexual citizen. The films' ability to present a playfully ambiguous form of homosexual representation did indeed diminish as they entered an era in which homosexuality was more openly acknowledged. When more overt homosexual characters are portrayed in later, post-decriminalisation, films, they are clingy and jealous, like Robin Tweet (John Clive) in *Carry on Abroad* (1972) or caricatures like Cecil Gaybody (Jimmy Logan) in *Carry on Girls* (1973). The camp that the *Carry On* films depicted was thus most ambiguously expressed during a particular historical context of the first decades of post-war Britain and within the relative freedom of lowbrow comedy.

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<sup>73</sup> Marion Jordan, 'Carry On....Follow that Stereotype', *British Cinema History*, eds. James Curran and Vincent Porter (Weidenfeld and Nicolson: London, 1983), pp. 312-327 (p. 312).

Whether camping was more conservative than it was liberating remains an unanswerable question because the whole point of it was to oscillate between the two, but this discussion of Kenneth Williams, and his role in the *Carry On* films, demonstrates that such indeterminacy does not lead to a conferment of neutrality, but rather eager appropriation by those wishing to claim it as one or the other. Williams found this out for himself in 1977 when he attended a meeting for the Campaign for Homosexual Equality and received a frosty reception. In his diaries, he claims he was accused of 'stereotyping limp queens' and 'giving the public an erroneous image' before being told: 'It's people like you that get queers spat on!'.<sup>74</sup> This comment is reflective of the changing social context, particularly as understood through the perspective of gay liberation. Writing in 1976, Richard Dyer argued that camp was a double-edged sword: 'it does give us (some of us) an identity, it does undercut sex roles and the dominant world-view, it is fun; but it can also trap us if we are not careful in the endless pursuit of enjoyment at any price, in a rejection of seriousness and depth of feeling'.<sup>75</sup> Williams's free-wheeling, class-crossing camp persona helped to reiterate that the dandy figure could be used by anyone as a performance, rather than an embodiment, of homosexuality. On the other hand, it reiterated the centrality of class-specific identities to homosexual identity, even when they were being parodied or appropriated by lower-class men.

### Conclusion

As we have seen throughout this chapter, homosexual engagement in post-war British cinema extends far beyond *Victim*, but what particularly distinguishes this landmark film from dangerous friendships, the British New Wave and the camp *Carry On* films is their different class focus. *Victim* depicts homosexuality openly because acknowledgement is the best means of both assuaging its socially disruptive consequences and to argue for the valuable citizenship of certain homosexual men. The 'dangerous' friendship films, on the other hand, focus on same-sex desire as the result of intense homosocial bonding and the breakdown of the imperatives of heteronormativity, moving away from the idealised, and middle-class, homosexual citizen and towards more tentative expressions of same-sex desire. There is an

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<sup>74</sup> Williams, *The Kenneth Williams Diaries*, p. 545.

<sup>75</sup> Dyer, 'It's Being so Camp as Keeps us Going', *Camp: Queer Aesthetics and the Performing Subject - A Reader*, pp. 110-116 (p. 116).

emphasis on contagion and corruption in *Now Barabbas* and *Boys in Brown* that is absent in the later *The Leather Boys*, which expresses a sadness about the parting of the two friends, but all three films nonetheless examine same-sex desire among men who are reticent, or reluctant, about associating with a stereotype that is beyond their social context. The 'New Wave' films, in their commitment to a realist aesthetic and class-conscious representation of contemporary Britain, manifested alternative responses to homosexuality than the novels and plays from which they were adapted. *Room at the Top* and *Look Back in Anger* identify the theatre as the site of an effeminate inauthenticity against which a more vital lower-class voice must rebel. In *A Taste of Honey*, the homosexual character is reduced to enabling the protagonist's individual growth. Finally, the strand of camp humour, manifest particularly in Kenneth Williams's performances in the *Carry On* films, provided a space for deliberately non-serious, and thus more liberating, forms of queer expression. Ultimately, it also reinforced the centrality of a familiar class-based stereotype. British post-war cinema contained multiple engagements with homosexuality, of which these are but a few examples, but they do reiterate the centrality of class to both the most dominant, and the more obscure, depictions.

### **Conclusion: The Beginning**

This thesis has been one piece in a much larger puzzle; namely, the historical relationship between class and sexuality in cultural representation. The discourses which presented homosexuality through specific class experiences began long before the conclusion of the Second World War and they have continued evolving long after the Sexual Offences Act 1967, but the scope of this project permitted an investigation within specific historical, national and formal parameters. By selecting a sample of texts across various novels, plays and films, it has been possible to combine close-reading, comparative analysis and an awareness of formal conventions to offer interpretations that are comprehensive, detailed and nuanced. Situating these textual analyses with both a broader historical context and metacultural narratives contextualises their individual representations and the frameworks which shape their production, reception and perceived value.

The methodological approach of this thesis, which can broadly be termed cultural criticism, focuses on acknowledging the complexities and contradictions of a specific historical moment, eschewing the tendency to affix a singular interpretation on chosen texts and instead elucidates complex and contradictory responses. Arthur Asa Berger defines cultural criticism as a 'multidisciplinary, interdisciplinary, pandisciplinary, or metadisciplinary undertaking' which can involve 'literary and aesthetic theory and criticism, philosophical thought, media analysis, popular cultural criticism, interpretive theories and disciplines (semiotics, psychoanalytic theory, Marxist theory, sociological and anthropological theory, and so on), communication studies, mass media research, and various other means of making sense of contemporary (and not so contemporary) culture and society'.<sup>1</sup> By adopting a similar analytic approach, it has been possible to explore each of these texts as producing various and competing formal, aesthetic, social and ideological meanings that interact with one another and with its broader cultural context. Sinfield argues that 'no text, literary or otherwise, can contain within its ideological project all of the potential significance that it must release in pursuance of that project', and this thesis has attempted to acknowledge texts as both the products of individual or collective

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<sup>1</sup> Arthur Asa Berger, *Cultural Criticism: A Primer of Key Concepts* (London: SAGE, 1995), pp.2-3.

creativity and as the result of wider societal and cultural debates that inform how their representations are shaped and received.<sup>2</sup>

Representations of homosexuality in the post-war era demonstrate this complexity in their approach to class; as we have seen, texts rarely evince a singular interpretation which can be labelled as 'progressive' or 'conservative' because they do not promote an individual stance. Instead, they often offer a range of different attitudes and opinions expressed through various narrative voices and characters, producing contradiction rather than consolidation. Incorporating this complexity as part of the analysis is not a gesture of resignation, but rather an acknowledgement of the intricate mechanics of cultural representation and a desire not to ignore them in favour of proving a narrow hypothesis.

This thesis began by positing that representations of male homosexuality and class identity had been historically entwined since the late Victorian era due to a series of varied, but often linked, discourses. High-profile scandals of the 1880s and 1890s saw numerous aristocratic men publicly exposed as engaging in same-sex activity, while the working-class sex-workers involved vanished back into obscurity. The homosocial intimacies of boarding school and universities, likewise the province of specific social classes, were also perceived as incubators for same-sex desire and noted by emergent sexologists. At the same time, homosexual academics and intellectuals were attempting to validate and justify their identities using historical and literary depictions of same-sex desires in Ancient Greece. Wilde's infamous downfall combined both of these discursive strands; he was a wealthy aesthete with aristocratic connections, but also attempted to use Plato to justify the 'love that dare not speak its name' during the trial. The idea of culture, then, whether referring to creative productions or a shared way of life, was essential in shaping the dominant class representations of homosexuality that circulated.

The post-war era, in which changing ideas about both class and culture proliferated alongside key events in the history of male homosexuality, provided a particularly fruitful context in which to position this study, although it is but one example from what I identify as a broader cultural tendency. The conclusion of this project is its

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<sup>2</sup> Sinfield, *The Wilde Century*, pp.9-10.

beginning in the sense that there are numerous directions in which this research could expand, which are outlined below.

Examining a selection of novels, plays and films from decades in which homosexuality was frequently discussed in the media, the law courts and sociological studies offered an opportunity to examine how these changes were examined, consciously and unconsciously, in a range of texts from the period. Alongside the growing significance of homosexuality in public discourses were social changes like the welfare-state, the idea of working-class affluence, the emergence of new literary movements and growing challenges to cultural elitism from within academia. This confluence of social and cultural shifts alongside developments in the discussion and public recognition of homosexuality provided an expedient research context in order to explore their impact on a range of texts and forms.

It is precisely in choosing a diverse variety of texts that this project has made an original contribution to its field. While, as the introduction acknowledged, other critical accounts of the era have focused on class and sexuality in broader historical terms, this specific literary and cultural approach across various artforms offers a more expansive and comprehensive exploration than has previously been attempted in the field. Comparing seemingly disparate texts for the purpose of elucidating a shared response to this cultural moment also provides several useful functions for a broader literary understanding of the era. As well as helping to demonstrate analogous themes and narratives which point to consistent preoccupations within culture generally, the primary texts were also chosen in order to undermine both the dominant literature of the era and the canons that have accrued around specific identities. One of the reasons that specific class representations of homosexuality became so pervasive, even when there were alternative representations circulating, was because of the privileged access required for various cultural apparatuses. As Richard Dyer notes in *The Culture of Queers*, '[a]lthough part of the idea of queers was they all tend to be artistic, the culture of queers too was, in fact, the product of a handful'.<sup>3</sup> The link between homosexuality and artistic culture, limited as it was to specific social demographics, was, Dyer argues, 'probably the dominant understanding of sexuality between men in the period'.<sup>4</sup> This thesis provides an

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<sup>3</sup> Dyer, *The Culture of Queers*, pp.10-11.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 11.

opportunity to both historicise these ideas and to offer alternatives to their limited scope of class representation and, perhaps most importantly, to highlight when alternatives emerged, but were not appreciated in their own historical moment because they did not fit stereotypical conventions of homosexual representation.

The novel chapter demonstrated this tendency by comparing both established and obscure texts; all contained vastly different attitudes towards class and homosexuality in post-war Britain but shared a focus on the continuing significance of culture in representations of homosexuality and class identity. In *Brideshead Revisited*, Waugh defended class elitism with an appeal to cultural value, but entwined representations of same-sex desire within the threatened culture heritage produced by wartime changes. The romantic friendships and dandy aesthetes populating Charles's Oxford milieu provided him with profound emotional and aesthetic experience that, Waugh suggests, were products of the exclusivity of his context. While these adolescent experimentations were always meant to be brief, Waugh suggested that the entire way of life that produces such experiences was threatened by wartime social levelling. Rather than face the future, both Charles and Waugh retreated into the past, preserving this vulnerable social order by committing it to cultural representation. *The Heart in Exile*, on the other hand, presents homosexuality as embedded within contemporary, post-war London. Garland's novel also self-consciously distanced itself from the elitism associated with certain forms of homosexual representation by adopting the conventions of popular and accessible novel genres. The detective novel provided protagonist, and idealized homosexual citizen, Tony, with an intriguing mystery to solve, but he was left with plenty of unanswered questions left at the text's conclusion. The ongoing significance of class difference to homosexual relationships, identities and desires was one of the most perplexing, with characters continuing to eroticise or take advantage of class difference while acknowledging the impact post-war of social change. The novel concludes by invoking the narrative conventions of another popular genre, the romance, but as Tony and his housekeeper Terry begin their romantic partnership, Garland suggests that class is more important to their relationship than either is willing to acknowledge.

The ongoing relevance of the connection between sexuality, class and culture was not always presented in implicitly valued terms, as it is in *Brideshead* and *The Heart*

*in Exile*; the construction of an emergent literary movement often relied on attacking the perceived effeminacy of the cultural establishment in a manner that became confusingly entwined with a form of lower-class rebellion against elitism. This dynamic often opposed lower-class heterosexual men with a literary culture defined by privilege, effeminacy and, implicitly, homosexuality. The idea that the 'Angry Young Men' enabled a new era of working-class representation is undermined by the fact that depictions produced in their wake presented the scope of working-class representation in specifically gendered, racialized and sexual terms. Andrew Salkey's *Escape to an Autumn Pavement*, in its exploration of race, class and sexuality, highlights the inadequacies of these dominant modes of class representations as it attempts to depict protagonist Johnnie Sobert's intersectional identity. Gillian Freeman's *The Leather Boys* suggests a narrative indebtedness to the 'Angry' movement due to its focus on disaffected, lower-class young men, but it also depicts the burgeoning romantic relationship between two working-class teenagers. While Freeman's representation is a considerable departure from depictions of homosexuality focused on specific class or cultural experiences, the novel does trace the difficulties with which the boys articulate their homosexual desire for one another while attempting to maintain their masculine and lower-class identities. In all of these texts then, various ideas of culture often frame homosexual representation, delineating precisely how it is expressed, to what extent, and often limiting it.

Many of the cultural developments and upheavals shaping dominant literary trends were also taking place in the theatre, which underwent a 'revolution' that was significantly informed by issues pertaining to both homosexuality and class. The theatre's historical association with homosexuality was exploited by Noël Coward, who could use the frivolity and superficiality associated with the theatrical space to present a coded queerness through conflation of his dialogue, persona and performances. Terence Rattigan pursued a different approach in *Separate Tables*, staging a public discussion of sexual difference to argue for tolerance and understanding, albeit one framed by a specific class perspective. Despite their differences, the works of Coward and Rattigan would often be conflated by emergent writers as examples of old-fashioned and inauthentic depictions of post-war contemporary reality in a manner that could often be linked to their shared

homosexuality. John Osborne's *Look Back in Anger* is partly an attack on a style of theatre that is presented as implicitly informed by a homosexual aesthetic, with Osborne's Porter offering an aggressive form of masculine rebellion in his pursuit of an alternative emotional honesty. Osborne's attitude to homosexuality is, however, more complex than many critics have been willing to acknowledge; Jimmy's vocal support for homosexual men is but one example of a tension between distance and discussion that frames the play's approach to same-sex desire. Shelagh Delaney's *A Taste of Honey* features the character of Geof, who, although notable for being a lower-class homosexual character, and thus offering a perceived break with dominant stereotypes, is embraced by the younger Jo but rejected by the older working-class characters. The emphasis placed on the 'modernity' and 'authenticity' of both Delaney and her play presents Geof as a new and unwelcome presence for older working-class characters and implies a sociological accuracy to his rejection by them. The final text in this chapter, Coward's *A Song at Twilight*, highlighted that significant social and cultural change had impacted Coward's reputation within the theatre and that he attempted to examine these changes in the narrative of Hugo Latymer, an aging author about to be publicly outed as homosexual towards the end of his life. The play demonstrates Coward's critique of the theatrical trend that often pushed for 'honesty' regarding homosexuality in an oppressive and hostile social context and evinces a defiance against it. As the chapter conclusion highlights, Coward has had the 'last word' in many ways by embodying a class-inflected homosexual persona that has continued to resonate across the decades.

The film chapter began by arguing that the dominance of *Victim*, groundbreaking though it was for the open and direct discussion of homosexuality, nonetheless reiterated a focus on respectable, middle-class protagonists in mainstream homosexual representation and instead proposed that there were other strands of homosexual representation during the immediate post-war era that deserved closer critical attention. It identified a recurrent trope of 'dangerous friendships' in films rarely considered as homosexual representation because their settings and characters often failed to match the most established stereotypes. *Now Barabbas* and *Boys in Brown* both present same-sex desire as a form of social contagion within all-male environments that threatens the 'normal' protagonist, but in doing so, they also highlight the precarity of heteronormativity. *The Leather Boys* is a

later manifestation of a similar tendency, albeit one produced within the context of a teenage friendship, but which suggests that same-sex desire is tempting precisely because the horizons of a working-class heterosexual marriage are so narrow and restrictive. These films are often about lower-class men rejecting a homosexual identity because of its perceived incompatibility for them, but they also indicate that the general critical tendency to locate same-sex desire in films that present a more distinct homosexual orientation risks ignoring those representations which engage with more complex, and intersectional, wranglings with identity, class and desire. The adaptations of the 'Angry Young Men' texts highlight that the scant references to homosexuality in the source texts were often excised and that these texts, responding to the presumed values of the 'Angry' label, instead filtered their homophobia through a critique of effeminate theatrical culture, particularly in *Room at the Top* and *Look Back in Anger*. *A Taste of Honey* was reworked into an example of poetic realism which reflected the interests of director and co-writer Tony Richardson in presenting Jo as an exception to the vulgarity of mass-culture and Geof as the artistic homosexual offering her cultural enrichment. The final section of this chapter demonstrated that camp offered a historical means for working-class homosexual men to signal their sexuality through invocation of a class-specific stereotype. Focusing particularly on the career of Kenneth Williams in the *Carry On* films, it examined how Williams's own persona deliberately contrasted class stereotypes to highlight the inauthenticity of his performances. Richard Dyer and Derek Cohen argue that '[g]ays seeking their roots are bound to use elite cultures as part of their so-called heritage, and the lack of working-class culture in this heritage reinforces the tendency to upwards mobility among gay men', but Williams parodied such overt claims.<sup>5</sup> Camp, because it is fundamentally frivolous, did not sit well with a culture inclined to take homosexuality 'seriously', but it offered an alternative from the strictures of earnest representation.

The thesis demonstrates the importance of examining this historical period both for the cultural responses it produced at the time and for the ongoing influence of class in representations of homosexuality. This thesis concludes by offering some avenues

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<sup>5</sup> Richard Dyer and Derek Cohen, 'The Politics of Gay Culture', in *The Culture of Queers*, pp. 15-30 (p. 17).

for further research in order to expand this project and apply its findings to other eras and artforms.

### Future Directions

While this thesis has attempted to offer a cross-genre analysis, there were inevitable exclusions that could be included in an extended project. In particular, the influence of television on representations of both class and sexuality in post-war Britain would benefit from further analysis. The first few decades of the post-war era saw television become a staple in the vast majority of British homes.<sup>6</sup> Although tracing the history of homosexuality on television can be difficult, partly because, as Sebastian Buckle notes, 'many television productions were either broadcast live, or else their recordings were wiped and reused without any consideration for historical posterity', there are nonetheless some remaining examples that might offer some useful opportunities to explore the role that the medium of television played in disseminating representations of homosexuality and their relationship to class.<sup>7</sup> The ambiguous cultural position of television sometimes meant that its representations were not taken as 'seriously' as other forms in their discussion of homosexuality; in a review of televisual documentary *This Week* which focused on lesbianism in 1965, the *Daily Mirror* proclaimed that '[t]elevision can never examine such a problem with the same depth of reasoning power of a serious book'.<sup>8</sup> Stephen Bourne suggests that the closest thing to homosexual representation available on television until its first mention in 1953 was the frequent filmed versions of Patrick Hamilton's *Rope*, which was produced five times between 1939 and 1957, although the protagonists 'were not explicitly gay and, if any viewer was aware of their sexuality, the couple conformed to the popular image of gay men as immoral and unnatural'.<sup>9</sup> In some ways, television might have helped to reinforce and disseminate class-specific homosexual stereotypes available elsewhere. In 1961, an adaptation of *The Picture*

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<sup>6</sup> 'Throughout the fifties the number of sets increased by just over a million each year, until by 1964 there were 13 million sets in use and virtually total coverage had been achieved'. Stuart Laing, 'The Production of Literature', in (*Society and Literature 1945-1970*, ed. Alan Sinfield (New York: Holmes & Meier, 1983), pp. 121-171 (p. 155).

<sup>7</sup> Sebastian Buckle, *Homosexuality on the Small Screen: Television and Gay Identity in Britain* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2018), p. 10.

<sup>8</sup> Buckle, *Homosexuality on the Small Screen*, p.25.

<sup>9</sup> Stephen Bourne, *Playing Gay in the Golden Age of British TV* (Cheltenham: The History Press, 2019), p. 31.

of *Dorian Gray* was broadcast (since lost) and Wilde was also depicted in a docudrama about famous court cases.<sup>10</sup> The adaptation of Julian Green's play *South* in 1960 is one of the few surviving examples, depicting the tortured desire of an American Civil War soldier, Jan, for his comrade. As Buckle notes, the drama, historical setting aside, demonstrates a similar investment to Dearden's *Victim* (1961) in presenting a homosexual in terms which emphasizes his valuable qualities while encouraging a pity for his situation.<sup>11</sup> Television's early reliance on theatre for much of its drama might have reiterated the sense that, when homosexuality was broached, it was often through stories that had originated in that medium. As Stephen Bourne notes in *Playing Gay in the Golden Age of British TV* (2019), most of television's engagements with homosexuality was factual and informative; he traces the first instance of the word 'homosexual' to Robert Boothby's discussion of it in a programme called *In the News* and it was to be the topic of a few prurient, but ostensibly objective, documentaries until decriminalization. Television thus offers a fertile area for examining the precise relationship between class and homosexuality, emerging from a cultural medium with a distinct institutional structure, means of access and idea of audience to compare with the novel, stage drama and film.

The influence of class and culture on other queer identities would also provide necessary and valuable forms of analysis that might contribute to the overall purpose of this project. The historical role of lesbian, bisexual, trans or other queer identities in this process would enrich the field considerably and were not included here primarily due to issues of space and ensuring that different gendered contexts were acknowledged. Radclyffe Hall's *The Well of Loneliness* (1928), for example, also replicates the class-specific tropes outlined in the introduction. Hall's protagonist Stephen is wealthy and exhibits same sex-desire for a family servant when growing up. Although focusing on female 'inversion' - a term used in early sexology to conceptualize homosexuality as the reversal of normative gender identities- it still provides a useful example of how closely entwined representations of same-sex

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<sup>10</sup> Bourne, *Playing Gay in the Golden Age of British TV*, p. 50.

<sup>11</sup> 'Coming as it did just two years before the cinematic release of *Victim* - a now iconic film credited with changing public opinion on the subject of homosexuality - there is much in common with the two productions. Historical setting aside, both presented respectable, honourable men drawn into situations because of their sexuality, and both were tormented by it'. Buckle, *Homosexuality on the Small Screen: Television and Gay Identity in Britain*, p. 13.

desire and literary representations had become. As an adult, Stephen discovers that her Father's study contained sexological texts by Krafft-Ebing that he used to understand his 'invert' daughter and which she then reads as part of her process of self-identification.<sup>12</sup> Stephen's 'discovery' of herself is predicated on access to literature and the education to understand it. *The Well of Loneliness* embedded the link between same-sex desire and literature within its own narrative but, as a famous example of such literature itself, also contributed to that correlation. Hall's novel was published to condemnation and controversy, ensuring that a narrative of queer desire from within a privileged context received nationwide attention. The importance of examining the significance of class across various queer identities is particularly important because, as recent cultural representation has demonstrated, stereotypical ideas about class, culture and homosexuality continue to dominate in popular culture.

### **Pride and Prejudice**

Ongoing assumptions about the relationship between homosexuality and class continue to frame responses to cultural representations. The film *Pride* (2014), directed by Matthew Warchus, produced a critical response which continually reiterated a sense that the central premise, in which a group of Gay and Lesbian activists offered financial support to Welsh mining communities during the 1984-5 strike, was humorously dichotomous.<sup>13</sup> The *Guardian*'s Peter Bradshaw described it as a 'poignant account of an unlikely alliance', Geoffrey Macnab, writing for the *Independent*, termed it as 'culture-clash comedy', while *New York Times* reviewer Stephen Holden claimed that 'laughs are harvested from the collision of macho working-class miners in South Wales and young Londoners, mostly male, who gather at a gay bookstore'.<sup>14</sup> These reviews share in common a view that

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<sup>12</sup> Radclyffe Hall, *The Well of Loneliness* (London: Vintage, 2015), p. 267.

<sup>13</sup> *Pride*, dir. Matthew Warchus (20<sup>th</sup> Century Fox, 2014).

<sup>14</sup> Peter Bradshaw, 'Pride review – when gay activists struck a deal with miners', *The Guardian*, 11 Sep 2014. <<https://www.theguardian.com/film/2014/sep/11/pride-film-review-miners-strike-gay-people-1984>> [Accessed 24 September 2023]; Geoffrey Macnab, 'Pride, film review: Two tribes and plenty of nostalgia in this feelgood hit', *Independent*, 12 September 2014. <<https://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/films/reviews/pride-film-review-two-tribes-and-plenty-of-nostalgia-in-this-feelgood-hit-9727720.html>> [Accessed 24 September 2023]; Stephen Holden, 'A Cause Unites Unlikely Partners in South Wales',

homosexuality and the working-class culture of the mining village represent different cultures that the film merges in a heart-warming act of political solidarity. In so doing, such reviews ignore both the narrative of the film (in which it is revealed that Cliff, Bill Nighy's character, is gay and that Hefina, played by Imelda Staunton, has known for decades) and assist in reiterating limiting ideas of class and sexuality. Projects like this thesis have sought to demonstrate that class has always been an important element in British representations of homosexuality, with an often-evident bias towards specific class experiences and/or stereotypes, but that, particularly in post-war Britain, this focus was increasingly challenged by alternative engagements with class. The discourse surrounding *Pride* highlights that cultural representations of homosexuality continue to be framed by assumptions that limit our broader understanding of the complex and diverse history of queer representation. Reiterating the historical variety of these representations through this project acknowledges the past and looks forward to more diverse representations in the future.

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*New York Times*, 25 September 2014. < <https://www.nytimes.com/2014/09/26/movies/pride-shows-the-alliance-of-a-gay-group-and-mineworkers.html> > [Accessed 24 September 2023].

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